Table C

Summary Data

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Variables key:

- Time (minutes), Admissions Office Orientation (AOO), Career Counseling Programs (CCP), Academic Advising Programs (AAP), Financial Aid Programs (FAP), Financial Aid Office (FAO), and Childcare Options (CCO).
- A: Evenings only; B: Weekends only; C: Both evenings and weekends; D: No hours on either evenings or weekends; and E: No childcare available (under CCO only).

What Influences Some Black Males to Sell Drugs During Their Adolescence?

Tatiana Starr Daniels  
Dr. Jennifer Murphy, Faculty Mentor

Abstract

This research study examined participants’ individual interpretations of the processes, experiences, and contexts of selling drugs in adolescence. The research exposed common themes emerging from the participants’ own words. Individuals discussed exposure and ease of access to the drug market, how and at what age they began selling drugs, their reliance on the activity, and motives for remaining in the life. This study will contribute to existing research by informing programs and policies focused on community and youth development and diminishing and preventing the drug trade.

Black males selling drugs in their adolescence is intertwined with many other social problems, such as poverty (Leviton, Schindler, and Orleans 1994; MacLeod 1995; Okundaye 1999; Parker, Stults, and Rice 2005), violence (Black and Hausman 2008; McLennan et al. 2008; Stanton and Galbraith 1994), parental drug use (Little and Steinberg 2006), single parent/absent father homes (Okundaye, Cornelius, and Manning 2001), high school dropout rates, and disproportionate rates of black males in overpopulated jails and prisons (Garrison 2011; Livingston and Nahimana 2006; Provine 2011). As Moore (1995) points out:

[...]

Therefore, perspectives that involve blaming young black males for selling drugs will only perpetuate marginalization because they fail to address the root of the issue. Instead, youth that sell drugs should be considered a serious social problem that requires informed research and collective action to understand it. By doing so, researchers can expand their understanding of what can be done to eliminate such contextual factors that influence the behavior. Moreover, once this information is obtained, it can then inform future research that is needed in the areas of designing and running productive and efficient adult and youth drug treatment programs focused on preventing and recovering from the selling of drugs. Unfortunately, these programs practically do not exist (Centers and Weist 1997). In general, minimal research exists on the topic of black males that sell...
drugs in their adolescence. Personal accounts from the perpetrators themselves are also minimal. Thus, there will never be a good understanding of this social problem if we do not attempt to learn from the dealers themselves. We need to find out what they believe to be causing them to participate in the selling of drugs. Currently, existing research highlights common demographic characteristics shared by black males, such as residing in urban inner city areas, where economic hardship, meager wage opportunities, and few resources exist (Black and Ricardo 1994; Freisthler et al. 2005; Dickson-Gomez 2010; Little and Steinberg 2006; McLennan et al. 2008; Okundaye, Cornelius, and Manning 2001; Ricardo 1994; Stanton and Galbraith 1994; Valdez and Kaplan 2007; Whitehead, Peterson, and Kalijee 1994). While the typical characteristics of youth who sell drugs provide useful information, specificity on the obstacles youth face when deciding to engage in the activity is still needed. This is why more qualitative research is necessary to provide more insight on this topic.

By conducting qualitative interviews from a grounded theory approach, the interviews were guided by open-ended questions that allowed an examination of the processes, the experiences, and the dealers’ own interpretations of the contexts surrounding selling drugs in their adolescence. The data that emerged from the interviews aided in answering the research question: Why do some black males begin selling drugs in their adolescence? Answering this question effectively can ultimately uplift the black community, because black males who sell drugs are not the only people who are affected by their behavior. Their families, friends, and communities must also face the consequences of their behavior. One of the consequences is that these people have to endure a community plagued with drugs, death, and violence. We as researchers have the ability and opportunity to obtain necessary information from those that are closely affected by this problem. In doing so, we move one step closer to diminishing the social problem of black males selling drugs in their adolescence.

This research fits into the existing literature on the “careers” of deviant individuals. This study identifies the context of how some individuals begin to engage in illegal behavior (in this case selling drugs). Currently, there is a lack of research on this topic, likely due to the difficulty of accessing drug-selling individuals who are willing to discuss their experiences. It is the researcher’s objective to use this valuable information to create and inform youth and drug treatment and community development programs for underprivileged communities focused on using and selling drugs.

**Literature Review**

There is a lack of existing research on the topic of black males that sell drugs in their adolescence. Existing studies also fail to identify the age in which these youth generally began selling and the specific drug(s) that they initially sold (Black and Ricardo 1994; Freisthler et al. 2005; Dickson-Gomez 2010; Leviton, Schindler, and Orleans 1994; Little and Steinberg 2006; Okundaye 1999; Okundaye, Cornelius, and Manning 2001; Parker and Maggard 2009; Parker, Stults, and Rice 2005; Ricardo 1994; Sandberg 2008; Stanton and Galbraith 1994; Valdez and Kaplan 2007; Whitehead, Peterson, and Kalijee 1994). It would be beneficial to research these aspects of adolescent selling as it would tell us the age that black youth are at risk of entering into the drug market and the type of drug they are likely to start selling.

**Economics**

Most of the studies on youth selling drugs identify their participants as being economically disadvantaged or living in poverty, and they found that participants dealing drugs in their adolescence considered it as a means to seek economic gain in order to supplement meager wage opportunities or resources (Black and Ricardo 1994; Freisthler et al. 2005; Dickson-Gomez 2010; Leviton, Schindler, and Orleans 1994; Little and Steinberg 2006; Okundaye 1999; Okundaye, Cornelius, and Manning 2001; Parker and Maggard 2009; Parker, Stults, and Rice 2005; Ricardo 1994; Sandberg 2008; Stanton and Galbraith 1994; Valdez and Kaplan 2007; Whitehead, Peterson, and Kalijee 1994). This general finding supports the notion that youth who are involved in selling drugs perceive their involvement in the activity as a means for economic survival.

When the crack epidemic first hit the black community in the 1980s, MacLeod (1995) had already identified this same general finding. MacLeod (1995) took a qualitative approach by conducting ethnographic fieldwork and immersing himself in two groups of juveniles at an inner-city high school. He followed “the brothers” and “the hallway hangers” for a year. In the first edition, the researcher made an attempt to understand the two groups from the inside; MacLeod (1995) “discovered social issues about the nature of poverty, opportunity, and achievement in the U.S.” (xi). When he followed up 8 years after the first study, MacLeod revealed in detail what happened to the students (through narratives from the subjects themselves). He identified drug dealing as an alternative to low wage jobs and the lack of other opportunities, as well as mistreatment in the workplace. After underscoring multiple experiences from different subjects of discrimination and being underpaid in the workplace, his readers have a clear understanding of the subjects’ motivations to enter the drug market. A strength in this study is the personal narratives because they not only support the claim that subjects dealt drugs as an economic alternative, but they also reveal valuable contextual information surrounding the process of selling drugs. For instance, consider the narrative from MacLeod’s interviewee Jinks:

I was runnin’ with this guy. I was sellin’ for him. I had five pounds of pot.
I had it in three different houses. I would go with him to pick up a kilo of
cocaine. Go with him, break it up on the scale into ounces. I was making money. It was a quick cash flow.

Researcher: During that time, how much would you bring in on a good week?

Jinks: On a good week a couple of thousand dollars, easily. (1995, 172)

In this quote, the process of dealing from the perspective of the dealer as well as the perceived profit and the ease involved in attaining that profit is revealed. The detail in this narrative is a strength in this study.

Sandberg (2008) also used a qualitative approach, conducting ethnographic fieldwork and interviews with minorities that provide explicit support evidence (narratives/life stories) for his claim of economic motivation for selling cannabis. Though the research was conducted in Norway and it is not focused on adolescent dealers, this study relates because it focuses on minorities and drug selling. Moreover, its methodology is strong because it captures what was occurring in the subjects’ lives surrounding their involvement in the drug trade. For instance, a narrative from a Somali refugee that was denied asylum in Oslo, Norway depicts the financial hardship he experienced prior to entering the drug market. After being denied, he spoke of sleeping at bus stops and eventually residing in a homeless assistance program where he first entered the drug market (Sandberg 2008). Therefore, even in countries other than the United States, financial hardship is still a prevalent factor in individual decisions to engage in selling drugs. As a youth’s income is often dependent on the socio-economic status of the parent, it is logical that we next identify what existing research claims about parental/familial influence in adolescent dealing.

Parental/Familial Influence

Past research has also found an association between parental or familial influence and drug dealing (Black and Ricardo 1994; Hsing 1996; Little and Steinberg 2006; Okundaye, Cornelius, and Manning 2001; Ricardo 1994; Stanton and Galbraith 1994; Valdez and Kaplan 2007; Whitehead, Peterson, and Kalijke 1994). Stanton and Galbraith (1994) identified this same general finding in a quantitative study. However, this study is limited in its methodology as the sample was selected from four different surveys (administered in two different years). Okundaye, Cornelius, and Manning (2001), on the other hand, showed how familial involvement related to the onset of drug selling. He was able to identify familial characteristics of youth who were and were not involved in the selling of drugs. For instance, he found that involved youth expressed weaker familial relationships than uninvolved youth. He also found that involved youth expressed stronger sentiments of anger when discussing their mother or father in the interview. Ultimately, there is an abundance of research that identifies an influence of parents and family on youth’s decision to sell drugs.

Peer Influence

Peer influence is another significant factor associated with drug dealing in adolescence (Little and Steinberg 2006; Ricardo 1994; Stanton and Galbraith 1994; Whitehead, Peterson, and Kalijee 1994). Stanton and Galbraith (1994) reviewed the results of various school and community-based studies, and they concluded that youth perceived pressures from their family and peers to become involved in the drug market. Little and Steinberg (2006), also supported this general finding. However, their sample selection of only serious juvenile offenders is not representative of youth in the general population. Ultimately, existing research has identified peer influence as just as significant of a factor in adolescent drug dealing as parental or familial influence.

Guns

Carrying or accessing guns was also identified in existing research as being correlated to drug dealing in adolescence. Though the objectives of these studies were different, a significant association was found between drug dealing and carrying or accessing guns (Black and Hausman 2008; Lizotte et al. 2000; McLennan et al. 2008). For instance, McLennan et al. (2008) found that involvement in drug trafficking was significantly related to easier access to guns. While their research was in San Paolo, Brazil, other researchers have found a similar relationship in the United States. For example, Black and Hausman found that “protection during drug dealing” was a pertinent factor that tempted inner-city youth to carry a gun (2008, 592). Therefore, studies are highlighting the social influence and the possible risk factors that need to be addressed to diminish the social problem of drug selling in adolescence.

Methods

This study was conducted as part of the McNair Scholars Program. It examined the processes, experiences, and the individual male’s own interpretations of the context surrounding selling drugs in his adolescence (at least two years prior to the interview). The interviews took place via telephone. Any participants that were uncomfortable with this option were excluded from the study to ensure the safety of every participant and the researcher. The participant read the interview question before answering. The researcher wrote down the interviewee’s response to each interview question after verbally confirming an accurate repetition of their response. No identifying information was ever requested or written. Immediately following the interview, the researcher returned home, read, and re-typed the written record of the interview verbatim. Once each interview was re-typed, the hand-written copies were destroyed.
This research design is qualitative and used a “grounded theory” approach to data analysis after each interview to code for themes. That is, this researcher did not have preconceived hypotheses before conducting the study. Instead, this researcher looked for common themes in the interviews themselves and let all findings emerge from the participants’ own words. The interviews usually lasted approximately ten to twenty minutes. This researcher conducted interviews that were guided by the attached interview questions (see Appendix).

Ten black males, aged between 18 and 40, were interviewed about their careers as past drug sellers. The participants were past sellers of illicit drugs for at least 2 years while they were under the age of 18. Also, to be classified as a past seller, and included in the sample, the participant could not have sold illicit drugs for at least two years prior to the interview. All participants were required to read the consent form prior to participating in this study.

The participants for this study were recruited from multiple locations, such as churches, mosques, community development programs, and homeless shelters that help people find work or get off the streets. The researcher found a contact that worked or volunteered at each of the above organizations; this person recommended possible interviewees. The researcher stated verbatim:

I am a CSU student looking to recruit participants for my study. I am looking to conduct phone interviews with adults from this community who sold drugs in their childhood, which also has to be at least two years ago. I am hoping to identify possible factors that are related to the activity, so youth and community development organizations can be created and implemented effectively in the future. For my safety and my subjects, it is important that we do not know one another personally. This is why I am coming to you as a contact for this organization. So, should you know of any adults that sold drugs as a child and it was at least two years ago, can you please give them my number and one of these consent forms and interview questions? Please advise them to read them, and if they wish to help to please call me at this number.

To ensure the privacy and safety of everyone, none of the participants were related to the researcher, and the sample that was included in the study lived in a different city than the one where this researcher resides.

The researcher considered everyone typical research participants who needed to be fully informed of the research protocol and what possible risks were involved. Before scheduling the interviews, the researcher discussed the project in great depth with the possible participants over the phone. The research objectives and the purpose of the study were also explained. Participants were also made aware of the extent to which their confidentiality was being ensured. Prior to the interview, the researcher confirmed that they had read a copy of the consent form and interview questions from the contact that referred them to the researcher initially. Implied consent was given as they were not required to sign or return the consent form to the researcher. No incentive or compensation to participate was offered. No conflict of interest arose for the researcher. All participants weighed the costs and benefits of participating and confirmed that they understood that no persons were profiting in any way from the research.

Results

Typical Characteristics

The average age that participants started selling drugs was thirteen, and the majority of them started selling crack cocaine. These two typical characteristics provide existing research with an approximate age that black youth are at risk of entering the drug market, and the type of drug that they may be in danger of starting to sell. These factors will help programs and policies target specific age groups prior to their at risk age. Also, by knowing that crack cocaine is the drug that these teens usually started selling, research can be conducted to understand why and how crack cocaine is the initial drug sold when teens in the black community enter the drug market.

Motivations to Start

This qualitative study and grounded theory approach produced an overwhelming amount of evidence for these participants’ motives to start and continue selling drugs in their adolescence. Table 1 provides a synthesized overview of the evidence based on themes that highlight one or more factors in bullet form below each theme in bold. In regards to motivations to start selling drugs, participants revealed who and what they were exposed to in their childhood and its influence on their decision to engage in the market.

| Table 1 |
| Motives to Start Selling Drugs |

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<th>Exposure</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ease of Access to Market</td>
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<td>Normality of Exposure</td>
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<td>Exposure to Parental/Familial Drug use</td>
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<td>Exposure to Familial/Peer Selling</td>
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<td>Exposure to people who had more than participant (Likely due to selling)</td>
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<tr>
<th>Money</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Survival</td>
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<td>No necessities needed, respondent just wanted more money and things it could buy</td>
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Resources and Siblings
Exposure
Exposure refers to whom and what the respondent saw that influenced his decision to start selling drugs. There are various factors related to the theme of exposure, including ease of access to market, exposure to familial and peer selling, normality of exposure, and parental and familial drug use.

Ease of access to market
The ease of access to market refers to how accessible the drug market was to the participant based on his exposure to it as a child.

Researcher: How did you get involved with drug selling?
TM: It was my idea. I knew someone with it, but I was taking it. I wasn’t purchasing it. It was really like hands on, so I knew who in my family had it. So all I had to do was take it without them knowin’. They wasn’t with me. They were on their own. They just didn’t know I was taking it.

Another subject also reveals how easy it was for him to access the market with this comment:
MH: The money was good and hard to let pass by you. Some days I would leave school, I didn’t have to go nowhere. The drugs was happenin’ on the street I stayed on.

Discovering that an easily accessible drug market is influential in youth’s decision to start selling is useful information that can inform programs and policies. For instance, with this information preventative measures to minimize exposure to the drug market through afterschool programs, summer programs, and weekend camps, could be a viable avenue in deterring youth from exposure to the illegal activity of drug selling.

Normality of exposure and parental/familial drug use
Normality of exposure refers to how common and/or frequent it was for the participant to be around drug transactions as a child. This normality and frequency of exposure also had an influence on the participants’ decision to start selling. Moreover, participants also identified parental/familial drug use as influential in their decision to sell.

Researcher: Why do you think you began selling drugs?
TL: My mom was on drugs, so I was the man of the house at a very young age.

Researcher: How did you get involved with selling drugs?
TL: Just been around it everyday.

FB: that’s one of the reasons I started selling drugs because I really didn’t want them goin’ out there in the streets dealin’ with people selling drugs. I felt like I’d rather go get it for them, and then that’s how I started.

In regards to the normality of exposure to the drug market, this information can benefit programs and policies in the same way as they will benefit from knowing about the ease of access to the market—by taking preventative measures and attempting to reduce the amount of exposure with extracurricular activities and incentives. Regarding parental drug use, these narratives explicitly state their parents’ drug use as influential in their decision to start selling. Based on this finding, further research on the adverse effects of parental drug use on child behavior is recommended in order to discover the best way to aid drug using parents and their children. This may help some children who feel compelled to start selling because of their parents’ drug use.

Familial and peer selling
Another factor related to the participants’ decision to start selling drugs was if their family members or friends sold drugs.

Researcher: How did you get involved with drug selling?
MH: Everyone was doin’ it, friends, family, it was the thing to do at the time.

Researcher: Why do you feel you began selling?
PN: Everybody else was doing it, ya know.

These narratives provide support for the necessity of a program of positive role models and/or mentors to help balance or minimize the negative influences of family members and/or friends who engage in the drug market.

Exposure to others with more than participant
Participants stated that being exposed to others with more resources or valuables than they had as children also was influential in their decision to sell.

Researcher: What was going on when you decided to start?
HD: I started when I was like thirteen or fourteen. My mom was on drugs. I ran with my mom when she was on drugs crackhouse to crackhouse. I wasn’t in school. I was with my mom when she was going through her little binges and everything. So, I picked up mostly all her bad habits, far as like selling drugs and hangin’ with people that sold drugs.

In regards to the exposure to others with more than participant, this information can benefit programs and policies in the same way as they will benefit from knowing about the ease of access to the market—by taking preventative measures and attempting to reduce the amount of exposure with extracurricular activities and incentives. Regarding exposure to others with more than participant, these narratives explicitly state their exposure to others with more resources or valuables than they had as children as influential in their decision to start selling.
AD: I just wanted what everybody else had.
Researcher: Like what?
AD: Videogames, mopeds, etc.

These narratives illustrate the participants’ desire for what they saw others with, and its influence on their decision to start selling. Here, we see how people that the participants were exposed to can play a very influential role in their decision to engage in the deviant activity of drug selling.

**Money**
Respondents explicitly stated that money was a motive to start selling. There were various motives identified by participants as to why they wanted or needed to attain money through dealing—survival and a desire for more valuables.

**Survival**
Survival refers to resources that the money from selling provided (i.e. food, housing, clothes, transportation) and its influence on the participant to start selling.

Researcher: Why did you begin selling?
FB: To have a roof over my head, and I did it so I could pretty much survive.
Researcher: I just want to clarify was it something that enticed you to sell?
HD: It wasn’t something I wanted to do. It was something I had to do to survive.

These quotes illustrate the participants’ perception of engaging in the activity as a means of continuing to provide resources/necessities for themselves.

**Resources and siblings**
Participants spoke of their responsibilities to provide resources such as transportation, food, and clothes for themselves and/or siblings as a motive to start selling drugs.

BD: I had to make sure my sister and I had money for lunch, school clothes and transportation.
TL: I was the man of the house at a very young age, so I had to take care of my brothers and sisters at a real young age.

These quotes highlight how responsible these individuals were in their teenage years as they decided to take on the job of providing resources for their siblings. Discovering the maturity level of these individuals at age thirteen implies that they may be responsible and mature enough for conventional means of earning income through employment.

**More valuable, no necessities needed**
Participants identified their desire for more than their parents provided to them. Many participants stated that they sold drugs because they just wanted more material goods; they did not actually need many of the goods that they bought with their earnings.

Researcher: So it was not necessarily things that you needed at that age it was more of things you wanted?
MN & TM: Yup (for both participants)
MN: I started because I was trying to keep up with the Joneses. (Here he implies that he was trying to have nice things in order to keep up with the latest trends and fashion.)
TM: I wanted to be like people. They had the money, cars, and clothes.

In contrast to those who started selling as a means of survival, these participants reveal that not all motivations to start selling are to supply necessities. Future research on programs that provide stipends for youth and its effect on preventing them from entering the drug market is suggested.

**Motives to Continue**
In regards to motivations to continue selling, participants revealed money/power of finance, addiction, and emotional fulfillment as reasons they did not want to leave the drug business.

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<tr>
<td>Motives to Continue Selling Drugs</td>
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<td>Lifestyle/Power of finance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Resources/Survival</td>
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<tr>
<td>Addiction</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Emotional Fulfillment</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Expressing feelings of content</td>
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**Money/Power of Finance**
Respondents explicitly stated money was a motive to continue selling. This theme still refers to survival and desire for more, however, the power of finance emerged as a motive to continue. More simply, the young dealers professed a sense of power attainment after entering the drug market. They realized that
with the money they profited from their selling came power to afford valuables and necessities at their leisure.

Researcher: Anybody ever tell you to get out?
TJ: I had people who care about me advising me to leave the drug business alone. But I enjoyed the power of finance.
Researcher: Did you ever want to get out?
HD: Yeah, I got to a point where I wanted to stop. But when you get to makin’ all that money and there’s no rules, you content with it. You fine, ya know, you can do anything that you want to do, you can go eat what you want to eat, you can buy what you want to buy. That’s the...the game. Ya know, you can afford stuff that you couldn’t afford then.

Programs geared at providing financial rewards for participation, or the age of employment being lowered is suggested, as this may prevent individuals from feeling the need to continue selling.

Addiction
Addiction refers to some participants’ own belief that they did not remove themselves from the drug market (even if they wanted to) because of some inward compulsion to sell drugs. This often was related to the excitement and material benefits of selling drugs. Still, the participants generally did not come to this realization until adulthood.

Researcher: Do you feel you were ever addicted in your childhood?
HD: Yes. I even sold to an undercover one time and I knew he was. But I so much wanted the money that I didn’t care.
FB & TM: I was addicted to the lifestyle.

Based on these findings, future research on identifying characteristics that signify addiction to selling is recommended. Rather than merely punishing drug sellers, the criminal justice system may need to explore alternatives to incarceration like counseling and job training.

Emotional Fulfillment
Emotional fulfillment refers to statements from the subjects in which feelings of happiness and pleasure are expressed as a result of selling drugs.

Researcher: Would you say that you ever felt addicted?
PN: No. I was enjoyin life.
Researcher: Did you ever want to stop, but felt like you couldn’t?
MH: I wanted to stop, but at that time that’s all I knew. The whole family was into it. Money brought happiness, clothes, and friends. It was a good feelin’ people brought on you. No money you see who your true friends are, so that kinda kept me in it.

Researcher: Why do you feel that you were not addicted?
AD: I enjoyed my lifestyle. I didn’t think I would ever stop. I was livin’ life.
PN: Because, I could have quitted if I wanted to. I just didn’t want to. I enjoyed the money. Plus all the extra stuff that came along with it. All the fun and I was just enjoying myself. I was enjoyin’ life.

Based on these findings, future research on the overall happiness of involved and uninvolved black youth at the ages they are most vulnerable to entering the market is suggested. Such research may provide support for the finding in this current study of an emotional void being filled as a result of selling drugs.

Discussion

Anomie and Strain Theory
My original research question was why are some black males selling drugs during their adolescence? Information regarding participants’ motives to start and continue selling drugs emerged as well as insight on possibly viewing drug selling as an addictive behavior after partaking in the activity long enough. Pertinent information that is minimal in existing research, but was identified in this study, was the age they started selling drugs, personal narratives, recollections, and perspectives from the dealers themselves. In this current study, the motivations for starting and continuing to sell drugs in adolescent years included economic gain (in terms of money and materials), resources, exposure to parental/familial drug use, exposure to peer and familial selling, exposure to valuables that others had unlike themselves, addiction, and emotional fulfillment. These generalizations provide support for Merton’s strain theory. Merton (1938) asserts that there is a cultural overemphasis on all people attaining the American Dream, yet our society does not avail all resources and opportunities that are necessary for everyone to attain the cultural goals conventionally (or legally). Consider in this study the narratives of participants being influenced to sell drugs because of their exposure to others with money and valuables (as a result of selling). Their experiences exemplify an overemphasis on cultural goals. Money, whether for survival or more material objects, was identified as one of the most obvious motives for starting or continuing to sell drugs. This implies that a general consensus exists on the societal value of material wealth. Therefore, because selling drugs is a criminal behavior, and money was a motivation to start and to continue selling drugs, this finding supports the same notion outlined by Merton (1938), in which deviance results from an overemphasis on the American Dream (wealth and happiness). Moreover, when participants also mentioned
that they did not have the available means to attain such wealth from parents, it underscores the discrepancy that Merton (1938) mentions between aspirations of attaining wealth and not having the “legitimate” means available to achieve it. Ultimately, the findings in this study contribute to existing research on this topic by supporting notions outlined in Merton’s Anomie and Strain theory. This study provides specific experiences on the opportunities or resources that individuals lacked when desiring to attain the American dream in their adolescent years. This information can be valuable to community and youth development programs as they can provide a direct resource (e.g., employment, school, training, and internships) necessary to attain money that will ultimately afford individuals what they need and desire if they work hard enough.

**Parental Drug Use**

Parental drug use also emerged as an influential component in some participants’ decisions to start selling drugs. This finding supports research by McKeganey, Barnard, and McIntosh (2002), in which they interviewed drug-using parents and found that the children of these parents on drugs were exposed to “drug use and drug dealing, and they were at risk of...criminal behavior” (233). The current study supports their finding as participants revealed experiences of exposure to their parents’ drug use, exposure to peer and familial dealing, and its influence on their decision to start selling—which implies criminal behavior referenced by McKeganey, Barnard, and McIntosh (2002).

McKeganey, Barnard, and McIntosh (2002) suggest radical developments in providing services to parents on drugs and their children. The mentioning of drug-using parents by participants in the present study provides specific details on how or why their parents’ drug use influenced their decision to engage in the criminal behavior of drug selling. This information is valuable as it will help inform such programs in which there is need for a “greater flow of information between services, many more family oriented drug services and [a need for] safe havens that can be easily accessed by vulnerable children” (McKeganey, Barnard, and McIntosh 2002, 244). Future research that focuses on identifying effective solutions to deterring youth from adolescent drug selling shared by past perpetrators themselves may also be an informative avenue for effective outcomes as they provided insightful information already on their motivations to start and continue selling drugs. They might have just as much valuable information on motivations to refrain from or stopping involvement in the drug market.

Strengths in this study include the utilization of a retrospective from adult males reflecting on their childhood and the age that participants started. An additional strength of the study was the use of open-ended questions that allowed for participants to answer with whatever information they felt was pertinent to the topic. However, this study is limited in that the sample size is only 10 participants, a rather small sample size. In addition, there will always be error in self-reporting because one’s memory is not always accurate.

**Conclusion**

That many black males sell drugs in their adolescence is a social problem that is related to many other social problems faced by black males in America, including poverty, disproportionate incarceration and conviction rates, and single parent/absent father homes. The attempt to answer the research question aids in uplifting the black community as it is not only the dealers themselves who are affected by their involvement in the drug market. Existing research provides typical demographics for these individuals such as their low socioeconomic status and the tendency of the individuals to reside in low-income or urban inner-city communities in which few economic or employment opportunities exist. However, qualitative studies, including knowledge from the perpetrators themselves, are also minimal in the body of existing research on this topic. In the current study, the information discovered from the interviews provided insight for common motivations for starting and continuing to sell drugs in adolescent years. This information contributes to areas where qualitative research is minimal. Moreover, suggestions for future research in which the perpetrators themselves provide insight on motivations to start, continue, stop, or refrain from entering the drug market are recommended. Lastly, the finding on parental drug use and its influence on participants’ decision to start selling warrants future research that addresses the issues and conjures up solutions for drug-using parents and their children as suggested by McKeganey, Barnard, and McIntosh (2002).
References


Appendix

Interview Questions

To help protect your confidentiality on the recorded interview, I will not directly ask you some of these questions. I will ask you to read a specific question to yourself and respond (I will give you the number of the question). I may then ask follow-up questions to clarify your answer.

1. How old are you now?
2. Tell me about your life at the point when you decided to start selling drugs? What was going on?

[Possible probes: Were you currently working? Were you in school? How old were you? How much time in your daily life would be taken up with selling?]

3. Why do you think you began selling drugs?
4. How did you get involved with drug-selling?

[Possible probes: Were family members/friends involved? Did you work on your own or with others?]

5. Did you ever want to stop selling drugs but felt like you couldn’t for one reason or another?

[Possible probes: Enjoy the lifestyle? Ever felt like you were “addicted” to selling drugs? Anybody ever tell you to get out?]

6. Did you ever stop selling drugs for a period of time? Why?
7. Was there a lot of drug activity in your home or neighborhood when you were growing up?

2. Please indicate the frequency you listen to music while studying.