Scott Jacques

Drug Dealing: Amsterdam's Red Light District

Scott Jacques[1] Wim Bernasco[2]

[1]Georgia State University, [2]Netherlands Institute for the Study of Crime & Law Enforcement

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Introduction

Amsterdam has many lively spots, including Leidseplein, Rembrandtplein, and an area that locals call *de Wallen.* Foreigners know it as *the* Red Light District. The sex trade gives this area its name but it is also a hot spot to procure drugs, having been called everything from a "drug paradise" to "Mecca" (Grapendaal, Leuw, and Nelen, 1995: 82). This chapter uses crime script analysis to address three questions: (1) What are the general actions involved in drug dealing? (2) How does street dealing in Amsterdam's Red Light District unfold? (3) What opportunities does this afford prevention oriented formal control?

In what follows, we first situate the offense by providing background on drug policy and law enforcement practice in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. Then the orienting perspectives – opportunity theory, rational choice, and crime script analysis – are reviewed (Cohen and Felson, 1979; Cornish, 1994). This is followed by a description of our method, namely a mixed-method study of active drug dealers. That information is used to determine and describe which steps are involved in each drug sale. The chapter concludes by suggesting preventative intervention points in that process.

Formal Control of Drug Trade in Amsterdam

In the Netherlands the guiding legal framework for drug-related issues is the Opium Act of 1976 (Leuw, 1991). It divides drugs into two categories differentiated by their health risk to users. Substances with "unacceptable health risk" are placed in Category I and referred to as "hard drugs." This category includes cocaine, amphetamines, heroin, ecstasy, and LSD. Within Category II are "soft drugs" deemed to be significantly less harmful; this includes cannabis (marijuana and hash) and psychedelic mushrooms. In essence, the Dutch government decided that the health risks of soft drugs are acceptable but those of hard drugs are not. There is medical evidence to support this decision; in the recent past, there are approximately 100 deaths per year in the Netherlands related to hard drug use but almost none tied to soft drug use (Trimbos Institute, 2009).

Regardless of whether a drug is categorized as hard or soft it is illegal to possess, sell, transport, or produce it (Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2008).[i] "The penalties for drug-related offences [i.e., sanctions] and the priority given to those offences in law enforcement policy [i.e. detection] depend on the nature of the offence and on the type of drug involved" (Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2008: 6; also see Leuw, 1991). In other words, law enforcement priorities correspond with the risk per category (Netherlands Ministry of Health, Welfare, and Sport, 2003). "The sale of any quantity of hard drugs has [the] high[est] priority in investigative and prosecution policies and will receive harsh penalties" (Netherlands Ministry of Health, Welfare, and Sport, 2003: 17), whereas the "[s]ale and possession of cannabis for personal use are much lower priorities" (Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2008: 10).[ii]

There are several government agencies that manage Dutch and, by extension, Amsterdam's drug policy and law enforcement practice. Because the drug "problem" is primarily seen as a health issue rather than in

moralistic terms (Verdurmen, Ketelaars, and van Laar, 2004 : 5), policy is coordinated by the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport. The Ministry of Justice – especially the Public Prosecutor – handles matters related to law enforcement. Local matters are managed by the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations. Within municipalities, policy and law enforcement practices are determined – to a degree – by the so-called "three way consultations" between the mayor, field officer (i.e., Public Prosecutor), and chief of police (Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2008). Thus, a large degree of the official stance on drugs in the Netherlands is determined at the national level, but municipalities – such as the city of Amsterdam – have powers of their own.

The measures taken by police to detect and thereby prevent or sanction hard drug-related activities have evolved over the years. As relates to the street scene in the Red Light District, prior research reports policing techniques such as ever-present patrolling, secret observations posts, and undercover officers.[iii] Preventive ordinances related to the drug trade have restricted the assembling of individuals, possession of knives, and access to public area (Grapendaal, Leuw, and Nelen, 1995; Leuw, 1991; van Gemert and Verbraeck, 1994). The modern era of policing highlights an array of cameras that are always on the lookout.

Scripts, Rationality, & Opportunity

To help us create a script of street dealing in Amsterdam's Red Light District, this chapter uses the rational choice and opportunity perspectives. This latter perspective holds that if the necessary conditions for a behavior are not present in a given situation at a specific place and time, then it is impossible for that behavior to occur then and there (see Cohen and Felson, 1979; Cohen, Kluegel, and Land, 1981: Gottfredson and Hirschi, 2003). Applied to crime, opportunity theorists try to identify the necessary conditions for offenses. Practitioners may use that knowledge to manipulate environmental conditions to reduce crime.

A comrade of opportunity theory is the rational choice perspective. It has three main features (Clarke & Cornish, 1985). One is an emphasis on agency and choice. The rational choice perspective on criminal behavior assumes that criminal behavior is goal oriented. Our analysis of offender decision making will emphasize both the negative consequences and positive incentives of selling drugs. Second is a focus on offense-specific analyses. This follows from the principle that different offences involve different types of decisions and different types of incentives. We focus on a specific kind of drug dealing, street-level, in a specific urban environment, Amsterdam's Red Light District. Last, this perspective distinguishes between criminal involvement (processes of criminal initiation, continuance and desistance) and criminal events (processes of choice that relate to immediate circumstances and situations). We make this distinction too and will focus solely on the criminal event. We address the question: What necessary and facilitating steps are involved in making a drug sale?

Script analysis is particularly well-suited to this kind of question, which focuses on the unfolding of events (Cornish, 1994). Rather than see any given offense as a single action, script analysis describes and explains the

array of goal-oriented sub-actions that occur before, during, and even after a crime. "[S]cripts generally are event sequences extended over time, and the relationships have a distinctly causal flavor, that is, early events in the sequence produce or at least 'enable' the occurrence of later events" (Nisbett and Ross, 1980: 34).

Scripts may be thought of as hierarchically differentiated and organized according to their level of abstraction (Cornish, 1994). *General scripts* are meant to describe the sequence of a specific offense (e.g., burglary or robbery) across all contexts (e.g., in lower- and upper-class areas or rural and urban communities). *Track scripts* provide greater detail about the steps for a specific offense in a given context. For instance, there may be a general script for drug dealing that is academically useful but practically speaking inept because it hardly describes which concrete actions happen in any market. It may be warranted, therefore, to develop a track script for a specific market.

Script analysis has practical utility for reducing crime. "The unfolding of a crime involves a variety of sequential dependencies within and between elements of the action. Crimes are pushed along or impeded by situational contingencies…. Each, several, or all of these may have to be present if the action is to be carried forward at that time" (Clarke, 1994: 156). By determining the steps involved in an offense, script analysis suggests multiple intervention points for crime prevention measures.

The Present Study: Data & Methods

Previous work in crime script analysis has examined drug manufacturing in clandestine laboratories (Chiu, Leclerc, and Townsley, 2011), cigarette smuggling (von Lampe 2010), and sexual crimes (Beauregard et al., 2007; Beauregard, Rossmo & Proulx, 2007; Leclerc, Wortley & Smallbone, 2011). The task for the present paper is to uncover a general script of drug dealing and a track script for street dealing in Amsterdam's Red Light District. The script is written, so to speak, by drawing on data obtained from a study involving quantitatively-oriented interviews with 50 drug dealers and qualitatively-oriented independent observations of the scene. Below we describe the data and explain how it was collected and analyzed.

As will be discussed in the findings section, street dealers in this part of town are known to solicit potential customers, such as tourists, through various methods. At the time of the study, one method is saying such things as "coke," "heroin," and/or "ecstasy" as people walked by (also see Grapendaal, Leuw, and Nelen, 1995; van Gemert and Verbraeck, 1994). Another technique is to use eye contact or head-nods to suggest the possibility of trade. Accordingly, we initially sought to recruit dealers for our study by making use of their soliciting techniques. This process would begin when the lead author entered the Red Light District. He walked the streets and stood in dealing 'hot spots.' On occasion a dealer would initiate contact by attracting his attention in the ways described above. Then he would inform the dealer of the research project and ask for their participation. If the dealer agreed to be interviewed, they would immediately go to a nearby public place to conduct the interview. Participants recruited through purposive sampling were asked to refer other dealers for

the study. Of the 50 dealers we interviewed, 19 were recruited by purposive sampling and 31 were recruited via snowball sampling. All participants were remunerated €50 for their cooperation.

Although in the absence of a sample frame we cannot be certain about how representative the sample is for the population of hard drug street dealers in Amsterdam's Red Light District, we briefly describe the main characteristics of this group of 50 dealers. Except for two women all interviewed dealers were male (96%). They were 38.7 years on average. Only 2 of them (4%) were married. The majority of the dealers (72%) were born outside the Netherlands. Many of the dealers were school dropouts, as 55% had not completed their secondary education. About one third (32%) was employed and thus had another source of income in addition to drug dealing. Many of the drug dealers were users too: 70% used cannabis daily and 30% used cocaine daily themselves.

The interviews with dealers consisted of fixed-choice survey-type items. The fixed-choice items collected information on participant's characteristics, business, victimization, use of social control, dealing history and style. To obtain detailed information on the tangible aspects of drugs dealing, the dealers were asked a number of specific questions in their last drugs sale. The items discussed included whether they were dealing alone or with somebody else, where and when the customers were solicited and where and when the transaction took place, the characteristics of the customers, the communication with the customers, and the quantities of drugs and money that were exchanged.

As with any data collected through self-report, our participants may have resorted to lying for various reasons. They may, for instance, have been concerned about the risks involved in telling a stranger about their criminal activities. To maximize the validity of our interview data, we employed the following strategies: the lead author – who is American and thus unlikely to be wrongly perceived as undercover police officer by dealers – made clear to participants his goals and interests in conducting an interview; participants were promised confidentially; they were told that it is better to refrain from answering a question than to distort the answer; and, comments initially judged strange or baseless were probed further to reveal and, if possible, resolve inconsistencies. Despite these steps, however, it is possible that some of the participants stretched the truth.

In addition, independent observations of how drug dealers operate were made by the lead author from September 2008 through June 2010. These observations were made informally (i.e., without a systematic observation checklist or at specified times and places) between eight o'clock in the morning and midnight. The kind of information recorded during observations includes where solicitations and sales occurred, the methods of doing so, aspects of formal control (e.g., where and how police patrolled in the area) and its effect on dealing. Because all of the observations were unobtrusive and occurred in public space as well as in plain sight (i.e., not from a hidden position), no persons – such as dealers, customers, police, or others – were informed that they were being observed.

The Script of Street Dealing in the Red Light District

Five key steps can be distinguished in the general script of drug dealing. Two of the actions are logically required for a drug sale to occur; these *necessary steps* are (1) agreeing on trade terms and (2) making an exchange. There are three other actions that are not required but nonetheless very common due to serving some function; we term these *facilitating steps*. This category includes (A) searching for a customer, (B) soliciting, and (C) agreeing on and going to the trade locale. Necessary steps apply to all trades, but facilitating steps do not.

Although script analyses typically lay out a fixed order of actions involved in committing a crime, our analysis suggests this might be slightly more complex for drug dealing in general. The characteristics of drug markets – including who is involved, where it is, and the legal climate – can affect the action sequence. For example, when dealers have regular clients who know how to contact them, dealers may be able to largely skip searching for potential trade partners (step A) and soliciting them (step B). In such cases a customer can call the dealer to arrange a place and time to trade (step C), or could temporally truncate the facilitating steps by going to a dealing location (e.g., a crack-house) and asking for a trade. Figure 1 is a graphic illustration of the script of drug dealing, and demonstrates the possible variations in the number of steps and their order of execution.

--FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE--

These many possibilities show it is difficult to pin down the sequence of drug dealing's general script because this offense requires coordination with other criminals – namely customers. Indeed, the general script of drug *buying* reflects that for selling: customers may have to search for and solicit dealers, agree on and go to trade places, come to terms with what is owed and when, and make the exchange. Unlike other offenses that only require a criminal's unilateral action (e.g., assault or burglary), drug trade involves bilateral action – give and take (see Jacques and Wright, 2008a); therefore, it is particularly tricky to sequentially script its general steps. [iv]

Such difficulties are partially circumvented by moving from a general to track level analysis. Rather than provide a description intended to cover all contexts, track scripts narrow the focus in order to provide greater specification with regard to what, how, and why actions unfold. In what follows, we present a "best fit script" of street dealing in the Red Light District. This model describes the ways in which street dealers typically accomplish each step, including the sequence.

Facilitating Steps

A facilitating step is an action that is functionally important for an ultimate goal to occur. Drug sales do not necessarily involve finding and soliciting customers, or arranging and travelling to a place to do the deal. Without such facilitating actions, however, drug sales would be far less common or altogether nonexistent. At the most basic level, drug sales have three facilitating steps: searching for a customer; soliciting the customer;

agreeing on a place to make the sale and going there. Street dealers in the Red Light District have a script characterized by walking and/or standing to find a customer, who is solicited with a whisper, glance, or nod, and they jointly agree to do a small scale exchange in the immediate or a nearby place that is travelled to on foot.

A. Search for a Customer

Before a dealer and customer can arrange the terms of agreement and make an exchange they must locate each other through *search methods*: ways of finding a specified item. In the drug world, the principal methods are retrieving potential trade partners' contact information (i.e., phone number or email address) and, sometimes related to this, going to places where such persons might be present. There are two key decisions involved in searching for a customer: "Who do I look for?" and "How do I look?"

The answer to each question depends on the other. It is easy and common to search for friends by calling their phone number, but that can be more difficult and unusual with strangers. Thus a dealer who sells to friends will likely have a different method of finding customers than a seller to strangers. Unlike dealers who have friends as customers or fixed selling locations (e.g., in a bar), dealers selling to unknown, nomadic, or electronically disconnected customers are especially reliant on tracking down their clientele through more traditional methods.

Dealers should be expected to use the search method they find most rational, given their range of opportunities. In theory this search method will be one that provides a satisfactory or ideal rate of (1) "path crosses" but (2) not substantially increase the risk of victimization or detection by police. A path cross refers to the intersection of a dealer and seller in "communication channel" where it is *possible* to signal. The rate of path crosses will increase as does the method's ability to identify who they are and where they congregate. The process of searching for customers must be balanced against concerns for adversaries (see Jacques and Reynald, 2011). For example, some styles of finding customers, such as standing around in known hot spots, are likely to result in path crosses but also prone to detection by police. Dealers do face negative consequences if they over-estimate the pool of potential customers. It may result in lost time, formal punishment, or victimization. This suggests accuracy in predicting customers' characteristics increases the ability to sell and reduces the likelihood of incurring harms.

For street dealers in the Red Light District, success or failure in searching for customers depends on three decisions: Who to look for? Where to find them? How to not attract police attention? First, we can expect dealers to search for persons with whom they have had previous success in making a sale. For the dealers in our sample, and based on their accounts of their last deal, the typical customer was alone (74%), a stranger (56 %), between 30 and 49 years old (70%), white (78%), and male (100%). To the degree this finding characterizes the "average" drug buyer in the Red Light District, we should expect dealers to focus their searches on such persons. For example, they are probably unlikely to pay much attention to females (at least

for the purpose of selling) and will ignore very old or very young persons. This discrimination process is rational by saving energy and increasing efficiency.

There are two more attributes that characterize buyers in the Red Light District: addicts (for whom drug use is a necessary aspect of daily routines) and "drug tourists" (who come from abroad and for whom drugs use is occasional and recreational only):

> The phenomenon of foreigners coming to the Netherlands to use or purchase drugs is known as 'drugs tourism'. Nuisance caused by drug tourists is especially evident in Dutch border cities and in large cities…. Cannabis tourists create nuisance at coffee shops; hard drug tourism often goes hand in hand with aggressive recruitment methods (drug runners). This results in unacceptable nuisance in residential areas and city centres. (Netherlands Ministry of Health, Welfare, and Sport, 2003: 22)

Dealers are aware that drug tourists frequent the Red Light District, and also that addicts find the area attractive. The flipside to this is that "normal Dutch people" and certain kinds of foreigners/tourists are perceived as uninterested in buying drugs off the street. Accordingly, dealers develop a "likely customer schema." When searching for potential trade partners, dealers focus their efforts on finding and identifying persons who match the likely customer schema. In practice, this is done by doing such things as looking at persons' style of dress and personal hygiene (e.g., that of addicts is notoriously poor), and listening to whether Dutch or another language is spoken.

Rationality and opportunity theory help us to understand the likely customer schema and dealing script.[v] Opportunity wise, drug tourists and addicts are not the only persons in the Red Light District, but are the most likely to be seeking drugs. Unlike integrated and better-to-do Amsterdamers, addicts and especially tourists are unlikely to have stable house or phone dealers to obtain drugs from. Without such contacts, customers' opportunity to trade is narrowed to known public markets – a famous one being the study area. The irony here is that customer's lack of options provides opportunity and rationale for street dealing. Knowing customers are found in this area, dealers travel there to search for them.

Once in the area, dealers must decide on whether to walk, stand, or do both. It seems like a simple decision, but is has far reaching consequences. Rationally speaking, the optimal choice is to stand still. This is for several reasons. Compared to walking, standing increases the chance of crossing paths (assuming potential customers walk every street in the area). Over time, customers may learn that this is a likely place to find a dealer. Perhaps least pertinent, less physical energy is expended when standing than walking.

With that said, dealers must be careful not to spend too much time in any one spot or the whole of the Red Light District because police officers or concerned citizens may begin to suspect and investigate wrongdoing. "Hanging around", or what others call loitering, is both a cultural activity and rule violation depending on who is doing it and why. This activity – or lack thereof – may be perceived as facilitating drug dealing for the

rational reasons mentioned directly above. Therefore law enforcement officials have good reason to deter this activity. Our field observations suggest that while dealers stand on occasion they are much more prone to walk around when looking for customers (also see Grapendaal, Leuw, and Nelen, 1995). When they do stand it is typically for only a minute or two. The dealers are conscious of the police presence and are apt to forgo the benefits of standing for the reduced risks associated with walking.

B. Solicit the Customer

After a potential customer and dealer have linked up, the next facilitating step is solicitation of this person. To *solicit* is to let others know that a particular good or service is available or wanted for purchase (see Gambetta, 2009). This action requires the dealer to make two decisions: What to signal? How to communicate?

The "how" of solicitation is more specifically a question of "In what way to send signals?" Different modes of communication have different benefits and costs associated with their use. Nowadays, drug market participants typically solicit each other by talking in person or over the phone and through written word used in email or text messages. These types differ in the convenience, risk, and limiting preconditions. For example, written messages sent electronically are often unwittingly saved in one way or another, making them vulnerable targets for evidence gathering by police. It would seem spoken words are less susceptible in this regard but not entirely so (e.g., phone taps are a well-known tool of law enforcement officials). Maybe the least risky way to communicate is also the least convenient, verbally in-person, but doing so with an undercover police officer is a hazardous possibility. And one precondition for communicating over the phone or through the internet is that the would-be sender has the receiver's number or address – a facet of opportunity.[vi] Without such information these signaling devices cannot be used, which makes face-to-face communication a necessity.

The "what" of solicitation is in some respects a straightforward issue. "Drugs are for sale" is what a dealer hopes to communicate to potential customers. There are many conceivable ways of relaying that information, each of which comes with its own benefits and costs. To literally say or write "drugs are for sale" is a very direct approach with a low margin of error (i.e., miscommunication), but for that same reason it exposes the dealer to considerable risk of detection by law enforcement officials. A less direct approach is to say/write something in code; for example, "white" or "brown" will be interpreted by knowledgeable persons as meaning "coke" or "heroin" respectively (also see Grapendaal, Leuw, and Nelen, 1995; van Gemert and Verbraeck, 1994). Coded signals have less obvious meanings and are therefore less likely to lead to formal detection or the successful solicitation of a customer. An even more abstract and less blatant signal involves literally saying and writing nothing at all; this is where the "how" and "what" of solicitation intersect. In the streets, at least, potential dealers and customers show interest in each other through body language, like eye glances and head nods; such a method has the benefit of keeping the dealer's intentions hidden from police but does so at the cost of losing business.

Among street dealers in the Red Light District, solicitation principally involves verbal face-to-face communication (52%) and body language or facial expressions (15%).[vii] We also find that a fair number of solicitations involve a phone (26%). For face-to-face communication, the range of what is communicated extends from blatant whispers to discrete physical movements. As dealers walk or stand in the area and cross paths with a potential customer they will sometimes say in a light voice, "ecstasy" or "coke." In other cases dealers will use glances with the eyes or head nods to make initial contact with a customer. On occasion a customer will initiate contact with a dealer by acting on their presumptions about what dealers look like (e.g., black, alone, and dressed in a certain style of clothes) and approach such persons despite them being strangers. Dealers may also first arrange a deal through the phone; these cases principally involve friends or trusted customers.

Street dealing has a particular solicitation script for rational and opportunistic reasons. [viii] It is possible to imagine otherwise, but it would seem the nature of an illicit street market based on tourist customers is unlikely to rely on phone numbers or email addresses to send messages. After deciding that in-person signaling is best, the next question is what exactly to communicate. Dealers have seemingly selected a middle-ground option where they either quietly say the name of a drug or give off body language that suggests "something is up." Dealers perform a combination of signaling strategies depending on the present environment. These middle-road techniques are effective in so far as they provide moderate benefits due to their ability to successfully solicit customers without overtly inviting the attention of formal control agents.

C. Agree On & Go To Trade Locale

Once a dealer and customer have passed through the solicitation stage they must implicitly or explicitly agree on where to trade and, in some cases, travel to that place.[ix] The questions facing a dealer are "How to communicate? What to signal? Where to meet? How to get there? And when?" Here, how to communicate is a question of language (e.g., spoken, written), distance (e.g., miles vs. in person), and tool use (e.g., whether to phone/message or talk to face-to-face). What to communicate involves figuring out an exact place and time to trade. If this can be agreed on then the customer and dealer are able to meet, travelling if necessary.

Agreeing on and going to a trade locale has important implications for the sale and safety from police. These kinds of choices are guided by rationality and opportunity. Different languages, distances, and tools of communication vary in their *availability* and *ability* to facilitate signaling to potential customers without attracting police attention. For example, some directions are more precise but take longer to explain, thereby increasing exposure. Some places are closer but riskier because of CCTV. A distant time may be safer from police but inconvenient for a trade partner. And some forms of travel, such as bicycling versus walking, are faster but – for their own reasons – more likely to lead to detection by police. These are the kinds of cost-benefit analyses that dealers must engage in, consciously or not.

A key decision for Red Light District drug traders is how to travel to do a deal. This decision requires an agreement between buyer and seller, but whether the decision is guided jointly or one party is a separate issue. In all but one the sales we examined, the dealer made the decision about where to go, not the customer. There might be a number of explanations for this finding. One is that the market relies heavily on tourists, who are unfamiliar with the city; it is only rational that local dealers will decide where to go.

A sub-decision in deciding how to travel is how far to travel. Dealers in our sample perceive further distance to be a cost not worth the benefits. For the sales that began through communication in the Red Light District, two-thirds were completed in the same area and a quarter took place just outside it. These areas are fairly small; for example, a person walking from one corner to the other of the Red Light District would take about three minutes.

There other common actions of street dealers that belong in their script. After the solicitation but before the trade, the dealer uses (1) words or body language to tell the customer that the exchange will be in the immediate or a nearby place, (3) at the immediate or nearby time If necessary, they travel to the place by foot. [x] The physical and temporal immediacy of the event reduces risks associated with detection by police. Words are beneficial due to their directness, but body language is useful when a verbal communication barrier exists. When travelling together, the slowest form of travel, walking, is popular most everyone can do it (i.e., the opportunity exists).

Necessary Steps

A necessary step is an action that must logically occur for an ultimate goal, such as a drug sale, to happen. The definitional properties of "drug sale" – namely that it is a *fair* (i.e., agreed upon) exchange of resources between parties – requires it to involve two steps: a dealer and customer must (1) agree on trade terms and (2) make an exchange of drugs for something else.[xi] Whether in Amsterdam or Bangkok, America or Britain, among the rich or poor, *all* drug deals will involve agreeing on trade terms and the transfer of wealth. The script used by street dealers in the Red Light District involves face-to-face verbal agreements to make a small scale trade.

1. Agree on Trade Terms

After a successful solicitation (and either before or after agreeing on going to a trade locale), a dealer and customer find themselves in a position to discuss trade terms. This involves communication – whether written, verbal or otherwise – between a customer and seller (or in some cases an intermediary) about what resource(s) and/or service(s) each party is obliged to give the other, and when. No matter the mode of communication, the seller must ask him or herself, "What should I agree to?" Every economic transfer has three principal components: how much of what the customer owes the seller; vice versa; and, when the payments are due (see Jacques and Wright, 2008a). For a trade to occur, the dealer and buyer must come to agreement on these

matters.[xii] This will raise decision points for the dealer: "How much should I agree to charge (and what forms of payment to receive)? Should I agree to give credit and, if so, for how long?"

Whichever answer has the perceived greatest utility should, in theory, be the one chosen by the dealer. The dealer must weigh, for instance, the potential benefits of trying to charge an excessive price versus the risks of having the customer walk away. Or customers may counteroffer or altogether turn the down the deal. At that point the dealer can pull out, counteroffer the counteroffer, or accept the customer's proposal. This (joint-)decision making process – including whether to continue or abort it – must account for not only the direct costs and benefits of the exchange but also include, at a minimum, consideration of the legal risks associated with open air drug markets. Although communication is beneficial by facilitating trade, it is costly when it draws the attention of government officials. The time component is important in another way as well. The dealer may have to agree or reject selling on credit. Giving credit is beneficial if it facilitates a trade that would otherwise not occur, but it does so at the cost of delaying income or opening up the possibility of never being paid at all.

As discussed above, the relationship between a Red Light District seller and customer initially begins when one signals to other that trade is a possibility. Following this, the seller and buyer immediately talk out a deal, which takes little time and effort (thereby reducing risk) and hastens the transfer of goods (i.e., quickens benefits). In the streets, agreements are made swiftly or the process aborted. This process usually lasts seconds or at most a couple of minutes (also see Kraan, 1994).

Failed attempts to agree on trade terms may spring from the inability to communicate – a facet of opportunity. The Red Light District market involves not only Dutch (immigrants) but also a considerable number of foreigners, few of whom speaking the native tongue. Street dealers do have competence in Dutch and English; this bilingualism facilitates drug trade by allowing for trade terms to be discussed. Potential customers who cannot speak at least one of these languages are more likely to be uncomfortable with negotiations or unable to communicate and agree on trade terms.

Street markets based primarily on stranger-traders, especially tourists, are unlikely to involve agreements for credit (but see Jacobs, 1999). This would be risky business by opening up the possibility of fraud. Obviously a customer who will be leaving the country in short time may be apt to renege on promises to pay debt. Related to this, but only in part, is that persons who are not familiar with each other may lack the necessary trust involved in giving now and getting later.

2. Make an Exchange

The final necessary step in all drug trades is the actual exchange: a movement of wealth (i.e., drugs for cash, sex, etc.) between parties (see Jacques and Wright, 2008a). This step involves a decision on what to *actually* trade and when, as compared to merely agreeing on what *should* be done (which is step 1).

The quantitative information we collected from Red Light District sellers is useful in deciphering a script for this step in street dealing and the previous one. First, consider what the sales were *supposed* to involve according to agreements between the seller and customer: the vast majority were over cocaine (88%), but a few were about heroin (8%) and cannabis (4%). If we exclude two outliers, the amount to be traded was no more than 3 grams, as little as two-tenths of a gram, and the average was about 1 gram; this was also the most commonly trade weight. The most common price was €20 but the average was €50, and the price ranged from €20 to €150.

A related but separate issue is how much weight and money was *actually* involved. What a person says they will do and actually do is not always the same[xiii]; such discrepancies that involve trade are known as fraud (see Jacques and Wright, 2008a). Like many street-level drug markets (Jacobs, 1999), the one in the Red Light District is thought to be a hotbed of rip-offs. Blickman et al. (2003: 26) suggest the dealers here "hardly ever really sell what they offer." "The risk of buying a pig in a poke is very real", and customers are "ripped off sooner or later: thinking they are a purchasing heroin or cocaine, they buy coughtablets, ground catlitter, Epsom salt, or lidocaine…. [which] is a bit like cocaine, in that both drugs produce a slight numbness if a small amount is rubbed against tongue or gum. But here the likeness ends" (Grapendaal, Leuw, and Nelen, 1995: 93).

Our data suggest the majority of trades are fair (88%), but in three cases (12%) the dealer or customer gave less than promised. In two of the cases the dealer defrauded the customer by providing fake rather than real cocaine; the other instance involved a customer who turned over €100 instead of the €120 that was owed. In large part, we see that exchange in the Red Light District's illicit drug market is small scale and usually but not always fair.

The reasons for this state of affairs are largely related to rationality and opportunity. Typically, bigger sales come with greater financial incentive per unit of energy expended and time spent, but it is far harder to find a customer for, say, 1 kilo of cocaine than it is 1 gram of cocaine. This suggests that the small scale trades characterizing the Red Light District street market under study are affected not so much by rationality as by opportunity. It might be true that the dealers we studied would prefer to move from small to large trades and profits, but they cannot do so without the necessary means (e.g., money, suppliers, or customers). In such a position, the most rational option is not a possible action and thereby relegates the seller to the bottom division: the retail-level market.

Fraud is a rational action for dealers in so far as it increases profits by reducing the amount of drugs provided to buyers. Based on previous research (Blickman et al. 2003; Grapendaal, Leuw, and Nelen, 1995), we might have expected fraud to occur far more often than in approximately one-tenth of trades. Nonetheless, this is a fairly high rate. We would be surprised, for example, to find that bars selling a legal albeit regulated drug, namely alcohol, rip-off one in ten customers.[xiv] It has been argued that illicit markets involve more predation than licit/regulated ones for the reason the latter group has access to law whereas the former one does not (Black, 1983; Jacobs, 1999). When a trade is illegal, a defrauded exchange partner is unlikely to report the

victimization to police and eventually lead to arrest, prosecution, or punishment (Black, 1976). Thus, there is a low likelihood of law punishing fraud among illicit drug traders and this makes them attractive targets for predation.

That theory begs the question, "Then why are there not more rip-offs?" Formal control is not the only way to handle wrongdoing (Black, 1998). Informal control is another option (Cooney, 1998, 2009). This includes everything from retaliation to less aggressive response such as negotiation, avoidance, and toleration (Jacques and Wright, 2008a, 2011). Each of these forms of social control has their own unique costs and benefits for both the controller and the controlled (Jacques and Wright, 2011). Deciding whether to defraud a trade partner involves weighing the monetary benefit against the cost of being informally controlled. For example, giving a customer fake rather than real cocaine may increase a dealer's profits, but doing so may not be worth the risk of being robbed as retaliation for the transgression. Or, a rip-off may risk future business if the victimized buyer thereafter avoids the dealer Dealers who are aware of such possibilities may forgo the benefit of defrauding in order to avoid the costs of popular justice (see, e.g., Jacques and Wright, 2011).

Failure

A script provides drug dealers with a plan of action for how to complete drug sales. As alluded to above, however, the script is not always successful. Each step, both facilitating and necessary, can fail to produce a drug sale.

For step A, a dealer may be unable to find and identify anyone who matches their likely customer schema. Unless a customer locates and solicits the dealer, the only outcome of this failure is for the dealer to give up the search for the time being.

Regarding step B, even when a potential customer is discovered the solicitation of that individual may fail. This occurs when the dealer is unable to capture the person's attention, unsuccessful in communicating the intent to trade, or simply because the solicitee is uninterested in purchasing drugs (of that particular type or from that particular seller). When this happens, the dealer will return to searching for a customer, give up, or retry solicitation with the already identified individual if the reason for failure was the inability to capture the person's attention.

As with step B, the inability to communicate may also prevent potential trade partners from agreeing on and going to a trade locale, which is step C, or from agreeing on trade terms, which is step 1. Other factors – such as anxiety about the suggested time and place or the exchange rate – may also deter success at this point in the script. This type of breakdown will lead a dealer to search anew or call it quits.

The exchange of drugs for another item of wealth, typically money, is the final step in the script. Despite agreeing on trade terms, a buyer may pull out at the last second if they come to believe the substance is fake or "short" (i.e., less than the agreed upon quantity). A dealer may do the same if they perceive, for instance, the

buyer's money is counterfeit. In addition, factors beyond the immediate control of the traders may deter their exchange, such as a police officer walking by at an inopportune time. When the exchange fails to occur, the reaction may be to renegotiate a time and place to trade, the trade terms, or to simply start over the search for an exchange partner.

But there is another, more costly, way that dealers experience failure in exchange. Dealers' adversaries include defrauders and police. Not all rip-offs are equally troublesome. So long as a dealer makes some profit off of an exchange, it might not be deemed a complete failure. For example, if a customer pays €40 instead of the full €50 owed for a gram of coke, the exchange is typically still profitable for the seller despite being fraudulent. Yet if the dealer is ripped-off on such a scale that the trade actually costs them money, as happens when counterfeit money is accepted, then the exchange is no doubt a failure. The other way a completed exchange can be a failure is when it leads a seller to be formally sanction. A dealer, for instance, may be arrested, fined, imprisoned, or otherwise punished by the law for selling to an undercover officer or in sight of CCTV camera. Depending on the circumstances, these costs can, on the one hand, lead a dealer to desist or reduce the frequency at which they act out the dealing script, or, on the other, escalate in criminal activity by working harder in the drug underworld or retaliating against the victimizer or law enforcement officials (Jacobs and Wright, 2006; Jacques and Wright, 2008b; Topalli, Wright, and Fornango, 2002).

Implications for Prevention

The analysis above presents a general script of drug dealing and, nested within it, a track level script of street dealing in the Red Light District of Amsterdam. The two necessary steps are agreeing on trade terms and making an exchange. To reach those necessary steps, dealers must often search for customers, solicit them, agree on when and where to meet for trade, and travel there. Among the dealers we studied, their *modus operandi* involves face-to-face verbal agreements about trade terms that lead to small scale drug-cash trades. To facilitate the ultimate goal of making a sale, dealers walk or stand in the area while looking for males, especially suspected tourists or addicts. They solicit potential customers with whispers, nods, and glances. This act may lead to an agreement about doing a deal in the immediate or a nearby place or time travelled to by foot. Each of these steps in the street dealing sequence is thought to happen for rational or opportunistic reasons.

This raises the question: How do we lower the rationality of or remove the opportunity for each step in the script? Rather than focus on punishing crimes that have already occurred, how might they be deterred and prevented? "Crime scripts can help to design prevention measures by revealing potential 'weak spots' where the crime-commission process could be disrupted by reducing opportunities and resources and increasing risks associated with the commission of crime" (Chiu, Leclerc, and Townsley, 2011: 359). More specifically, what are the implications of the *general* and *track* level scripts we described for reducing the frequency of drug sales?

It should be stressed at this point that drug dealing is a consensual crime. Unlike predatory crime, which involves a victim motivated to prevent crime and a target that can be guarded, consensual crimes are very difficult to prevent because they involve two parties who both are willing to enter into an illegal transaction. Thus, the two parties directly involved are not motivated to prevent drug dealing, it are only third parties (parents, school administrations, business owners, neighborhood residents) that have stakes in preventing drug dealing.

The fact that general scripts have greater breadth at the cost of less precision means they are useful for orienting initial thinking about crime prevention but less valuable for creating specific intervention measures. Essentially, the general script for drug dealing described in this chapter suggests that law enforcement practices should aim to reduce the utility of and remove the necessary elements inherent in each step of drug dealing. One way this is done is to more severely penalize the necessary steps: agreeing on trade terms or making the exchange. Less attention is paid to adjusting the rationality of facilitating steps, but this is another possibility. For example, searching for customers or soliciting them could be given greater penalties. Penalties are not required, however, if the opportunity for various steps in the crime commission process are reduced. If it is possible to take away the ability to carry out each facilitating or necessary action, then the government could save itself and offenders from the costs of penalizing people.

Obviously those possibilities are quite abstract and could lead to a variety of law enforcement practices. Track level scripts allow for the abstract to be brought down to the concrete. Because the steps of street dealing in the Red Light District have unique traits, there are specific strategies that can be used to disrupt them. Based on our findings, here are some possibilities:

- Dealers typically sell to and, by logical extension, search for and solicit males, tourists and addicts. This suggests the government could focus their attention on pushing addicts away from this area; warn tourists of the risks involved in making trades – including not only formal sanctioning but also victimization; and, largely ignore interactions involving females in order to focus on males. These tactics would make law enforcement more efficient and, in turn, less costly.
- Whispers, nods, and glances are the most common ways of communicating to potential customers that drugs are for sale. Undercover police officers could make use of this information by walking or standing in the area and initiating or reciprocating these styles of body language to see if they lead to communication about trade terms and an exchange. The chance of being solicited in the first place would be increased by having male officers act as addicts or tourists (e.g., by dressing as they do or speak in English). Should dealers learn that police are mimicking their actions and customer base then at least some may be deterred from offending.
- More intensive surveillance (in person, or CCTV) may hinder dealers to solicit customers and make the exchange. Surveillance is not limited to police controls. Public space can be designed to making searching and soliciting customers and exchanging money for drugs more difficult. The design would imply

maximization of intervisibility (preventing hidden corners, blind alleyways, etc.) and minimization of opportunities for loitering.

Reducing drug use and sales may be seen as meritoriously beneficial actions, but what must be kept in mind is that law enforcement practices have costs for society as a whole and for individual citizens – including offenders. As researchers we are not in a position to decide what is ultimately right and wrong; justifiable or inexcusable. It is our duty, however, to inform governments and the public of not only the benefits but also the costs of various law enforcement practices. For example, the earlier suggestion of focusing on males and ignoring females is empirically based and would be efficient, but this is a form of gender-based discrimination. We did not suggest that undercover agents should employ the "whisper" strategy of dealers to solicit them because this is – or at least approaches – entrapment. Scaring dealers and users away from the Red Light District might come with the cost of having a replacement market "pop up in another" area that is more disruptive and difficult to control (Grapendaal, Leuw, and Nelen, 1995: 85; Leuw, 1991; but see Weisburd et al., 2006). Imprisoning drug dealers may prevent future offenses through incapacitation, but whether the greater harm is caused by drug sales or this formal sanction is an open question. Perhaps the legal policy with the greatest utility would be to have no drug law at all, which might increase consumption, but would also open avenues for taxation, regulation and formal control – including quality control and providing access to law to resolve conflicts. Research can lead toward "objective" answers about these issues, but it is inevitable that what and how we describe, count, weigh, and analyze is inevitably situated within a particular moral context.

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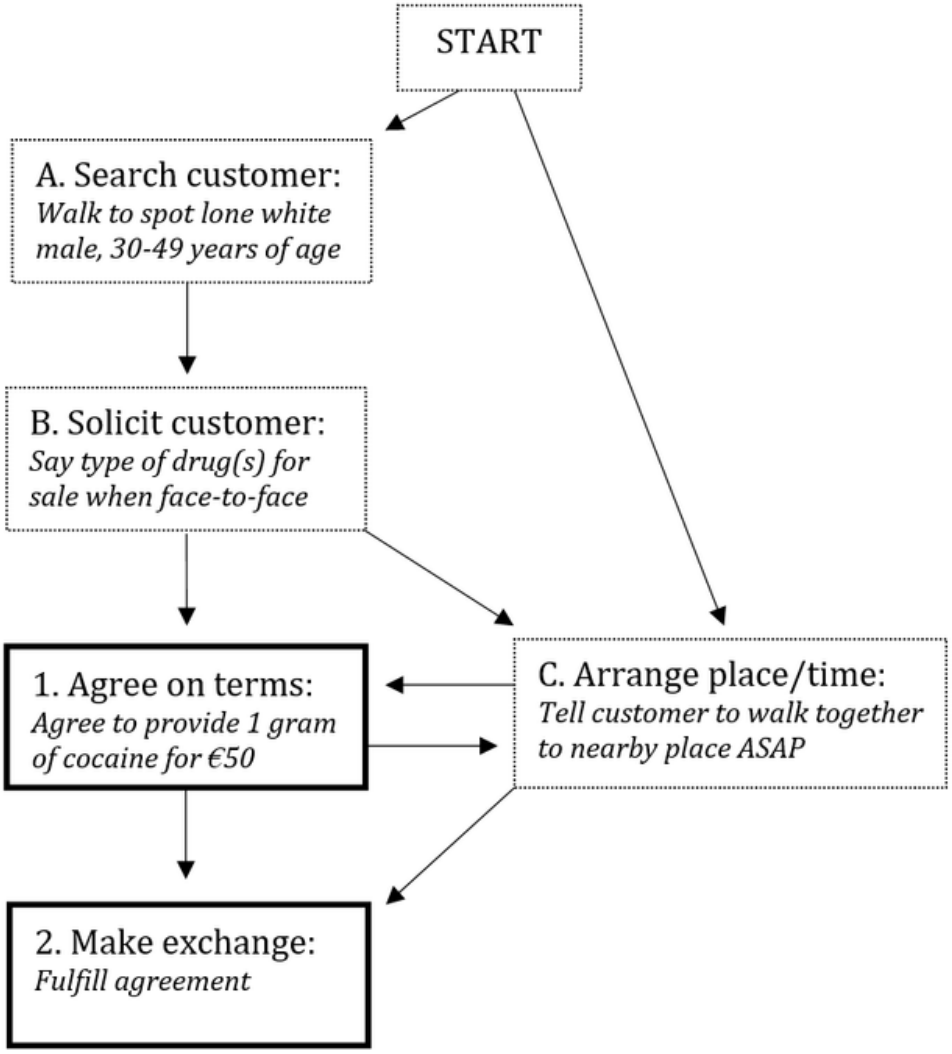
Figure 1: General Drug Dealing Script & Track Level Script for Street Dealing in Amsterdam's Red Light District



Note: steps A, B and C are facilitating steps; steps 1 and 2 are necessary steps. Italicized script represents most common track of street dealers in Amsterdam's Red Light District. Failure may occur at each step and create feedback loop to a previous step (often to step A). For reasons of parsimony the corresponding arrows are omitted from the figure.

Notes

[i] Note that drug use *per se* is not illegal. Also, there are exceptions for the medical context.

[ii] Possession of less than half a gram of hard drugs has a lower law enforcement priority than the sale of hard of soft drugs (other than that done legitimately by coffeeshops) (Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2008). Typically no punishment is meted out, other than the confiscation of the substance (Leuw, 1991).

[iii] "The use of undercover agents to incite people into trafficking is not allowed by Dutch law" (Blickman et al., 2003: 77-8) "unless the person involved was already predisposed to do so. The presumed predisposition of a person is based on his criminal record and on facts from the operational reports of the undercover agent" (Silvis, 1994: 52).

[iv] This is probably true for other consensual crimes as well, such as prostitution.

[v] Our discussion of path crosses is by no means complete. There is far more to consider, which subsequent research may want to focus on. Potential lines of inquiry include how dealers' search patterns are shaped by conflict with residents, business employees/owners, or competitors.

[vi] Another, simpler, requirement is that they have access to these technologies; not everyone can afford such things.

[vii] Seven percent of the dealers did not remember or would not answer this question.

[viii] For practical reasons, we cannot delve too deep into the complexities of how and why signals are used by dealers to arrange and execute trades. Criminology would benefit if future work devoted more explicit attention to this behavior, both among drug dealers and other types of offenders (see, e..g, Gambetta, 2009).

[ix] Drug dealers do not always have drugs on their person and cannot always trade immediately. This caveat opens up a series of complexities that are not dealt with here. Future work should specify how this complication affects the script for drug dealing.

[x] The first necessary step in the script, agreeing on trade terms, may come before, after, or be intertwined with this step.

[xi] It could reasonably be argued that "obtaining drugs to sell" is a necessary stage as well but we leave it aside because it is in fact a separate crime than the one that is our focus. In effect, we assume dealers have the ability to obtain drugs for sale.

[xii] The rate of exchange does not need to be agreed upon in precise terms, and often can be quite loose. For example, one end of the specificity continuum is characterized by trades where the exact amount of drugs *and* money is agreed upon by both the customer and seller; the other end has exchanges where the customer has only communicated *which* drug they want and how much they will pay *but not* how much they expect to receive. Thus the agreement process involved in making a sale can be exacting and drawn out, sloppy and quick, or something between those two extremes.

[xiii] Admittedly, what interviewees say they did is not necessary always what they actually did. It seems unlikely, however, that dealers would speak about so many (incriminating) aspects of their offending behavior and at the same time lie about a well-known issue in their trade.

[xiv] To be clear, what matters is not the nature of the good/service but rather the (il)legal nature of it.