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African-American males drug trafficking behaviors : implications for curriculum development

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A Dissertation

entitled

African-American Males Drug Trafficking Behaviors: Implications for Curriculum
Development

by

Diana M. Labiche

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty as partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Doctor of Philosophy Degree in Curriculum and Instruction

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December 2015

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An Abstract of
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The lived experience of being a drug trafficker is something that fortunately most of us will never go through. However, for young African-American males living in the inner city, the likelihood of being involved in or exposed to drug trafficking is much higher than the average population. In fact, 1 in every 10 African American adolescents within the age of 14 to 17 living in urban areas were directly or indirectly involved in drug trafficking in the past (Stanton & Galbraith, 1994). Because most people have no idea what it is like to be a drug dealer, in order to successfully intervene and deter young African American males from dealing, it is necessary to understand what it is like to be one. What social and psychological pressures, rewards, punishments, reinforcements, and deterrents do they experience? To understand the perspective of drug dealers and to collect information for a new intervention program, this study applied a phenomenological methodology to investigate the lived experiences of three adult African-American males who were drug dealers as youths. These men are currently successful career and family men who have left their former drug dealing lives behind. Based on the results of interviews with these men, the major similarities, differences, and

themes of their experiences, I collected and analyzed to arrive at the essence of their experiences and related them to my own bracketed experiences working with this population in the past. I analyzed and interpreted this essence within the social learning theory framework of Julian Rotter. Finally, the essence of their experiences within Rotter's framework informed a new curriculum for a program to deter young African American males from becoming future drug dealers based on the reality of their experiences rather than imposed beliefs from outsiders.

Keywords: African-American males, drug dealers, lived experience, social learning theory, curriculum

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation focused on the reasons why African-American male youths between the ages of 18–30 disproportionately choose to follow a life of crime and violence rather than more socially constructive paths based on education and hard work. Building on the current research, the ethical and moral decision making theory, and findings from the proposed surveys, focus groups, and interviews with former African American male drug traffickers, my ultimate goal is to develop a 12-week, 5-day-per-week Prevention curriculum-based program with a total of 120 hours of contact-time.

This chapter introduces the background of this issue, states the problem, describes the purpose of the study, presents the research questions, outlines the theoretical framework, explains the nature of the study, and summarizes the main points. The background summarizes how my previous experiences and the central theme of previous research conducted in this area supports the fact that adolescents within the age of 14–17 are recruited into peddling drugs across various cities in the United States and suffer from a perceived lack of alternative opportunities. The problem statement demonstrates that drug trafficking is rapidly growing within this population, and that it is becoming a social challenge that is influenced by socio-economic and environmental factors that have lured the mindset of youth into the business. The purpose of the study is to examine the involvement in drug trafficking amongst African-American males and explore what perceptions, beliefs and attitudes motivate them. Based on the purpose, my three research questions are: (a) What are the lived experiences of the 18–30 year old population who formerly sold drugs?; (b) What environmental factors do they believe contributed to their

decisions to traffic in drugs, to drop out of school, and to make changes leading to their relative success since?; and (c) How they might act as agents of curricular change based on their experiences? Together, the answers to these questions indicated what program aspects the participants view as being a deterrence to youths becoming involved in drug trafficking, leading to the development of a program to be used by teachers, counselors, administrators, and any professional working with this population.

The target population is African American males aged between 18-30 years of age who are former drug dealers. The qualitative methodology consisted of interviews and analysis of the major concepts in order to inform the development of a curriculum to address this problem locally. Combating drug trafficking among the youth is becoming more and more urgent. It is therefore imperative to learn how to develop a curriculum that shall reflect the reasons why young African Americans males enter drug trafficking. This will impact how counselors, school psychologists, and criminal justice professionals (among others) engage with this population.

Background

My interest in this topic arises from my previous experience. I was employed at a local drug and alcohol treatment facility in Northwest Ohio during the late 1980s. The courts referred youths to me for evaluations of drug and alcohol treatment; however, in doing the evaluations, I discovered these youths did not have alcohol and drug usage problems. Instead, they had problem *dealing* drugs. It turned out these youths pled to drug and alcohol use and abuse offenses at the advice of their lawyers for lesser charges. When I brought up this observation, the president and CEO of the treatment facility

challenged me to develop a program to address the needs of this particular population, which were drug dealing-based rather than usage-based.

I began the challenge by making inquiries into the population when I worked with them, including their level of education, if and when they dropped out of school, and their family dynamics. I also asked how long they had been selling drugs, what types of drugs, and how much money did they make, and to whom were they selling. To answer these questions, I developed a questionnaire, which I distributed among this population. Although this was not a formal pilot study, I did discover some of the patterns that I aim to explore further in this dissertation.

What I learned from the questionnaire and interactions with this population was that they were willing to risk their lives and freedom in order to make money and afford a higher status within their particular community of peers. These findings were included in a grant proposal to the Ohio Department of Youth Services, which the treatment facility received in order to develop an intervention program. I played a pivotal role in developing the program, from which I learned this population is highly exclusive, so an intervention program needs to be developed based on directness, honesty, strong mindedness, and a positive rapport. I also learned that most of these youths came to their criminal lifestyle as the result of a lack of family stability, few if any positive role models, and a sense of survival. I continued to run this program with continual grant funding from 1991 to 2001, at which point the state funding was removed.

The body of literature also provides insight into the ways drug trafficking among young African Americans living in low-income neighborhoods is increasingly becoming a challenge. According to Roettger and Swisher (2011), this nature of trafficking is

associated with violence, murder, health consequences and legal undertakings that have constantly beleaguered the families of these young teens. The central feature of different studies conducted on this area is the fact that adolescents within the age of 18 to 30 are constantly recruited into peddling drugs across various cities in the United States and even beyond.

Many youths have engaged themselves in drug trafficking as a result of exposure to drug trafficking neighborhoods. Interview results from research in the past shows that one out of ten youths interviewed had witnessed someone sell drugs or were directly or indirectly involved in selling or peddling drugs (Whitehead et al., 1994). The fact that these youths have witnessed someone selling drugs or been involved in the sale may motivate them into the trade given the social and economic challenges they are riding on with their families. Those exposed have potential to exhibit delinquent behaviors, engage in violence, use drugs or even be involved health threatening behaviors (Whitehead et al., 1994).

Research carried out by Stanton and Galbraith (1994) shows that nearly 1 in every 10 African American adolescents within the age of 14 to 17 living in urban areas were directly or indirectly involved in drug trafficking in the past. However, the rate of involvement in drug trafficking substantially increased as they neared their late teenage years (Stanton & Galbraith, 1994). Furthermore, available research indicates that those teens within the sample age engaged in drug trafficking by having a misguided belief that their peers and family members were also engaging in the same activity (Stanton & Galbraith, 1994). In addition, across various studies it is evident that living in drug trafficking neighborhoods and needing to supplement family income to meet socio-

economic obligations are the two greatest motivating factors (Galbraith, 2012). These arguments are in tandem with the results of a bulletin published by the U.S. Department of Justice in 2009, which indicated that the involvement of teenagers between the age of 18–30 in drug trafficking was widespread and cutting across the population (as cited in Peterson, 2012).

From the research reviewed, it was evident that little exposition had been done regarding reasons that have contributed to African Americans males to involve themselves in drug trafficking particularly within 18–30 years. In the past programs, like DARE, and after school programs have had limited success, due to budget cuts, lack of funding. The DARE programs worked more specifically with youth who use alcohol and drugs, rather than sold drugs. After school programs did not address this population. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to examine the motivation, beliefs, attitudes and perceptions that trigger teenagers between the age of 18–30 to engage in drug trafficking and from that develop a prevention program curriculum for this population.

Problem Statement

Drug trafficking is a rapidly growing social challenge and is highly influenced by socio-economic and environmental factors that have lured the mindsets of teenagers into the business. In addition, drug trafficking has resulted into many risky behaviors including murder, violence, morbidity and other health risking issues. These are critical observations that are raising social-psychological questions: why are African-American males between the ages of 14–17 involved in drug trafficking? According to Whitehead, Peterson, and Kaljee (1994), available survey results show that despite these youths living in drug trafficking neighborhoods, certain perceptions and beliefs have motivated

them to enter into the business. Due to cases of homicide, youth violence, murder and sexual abuse cases that are motivated by drug use, it is important to review this problem especially from its root. In theory, drug trafficking is very current and relevant for this research. Adolescents are continually being recruited in drug trafficking. Youth trafficking in drugs is a problem. This is what makes this study current and relevant for this research since adolescents are continually being recruited in drug trafficking and the effects are apparent owing to the many cases of youth violence, murder, morbidity and homicide cases.

Available data indicates that nearly 10% of African-American youths living in urban areas have engaged in drug trafficking or have anticipation of selling drugs in the future. In addition, indicators show that drug trafficking incidence increases with age as the adolescents move from 14 to 17 years of age (Stanton & Galbraith, 1994). In addition, drug trafficking has been associated with extreme consequences including morbidity, deaths and violence among males of the stated sample population. Studies from survey interviews indicate that there are key social, economic and environmental factors that can be associated with the increasing trend of drug trafficking among this population (Li, 2009). When it comes to economic issues, African Americans have historically suffered from resource inequalities and perhaps been sidelined from power which has rendered the families incapable of managing their daily expenditures (Peterson, 2012). To them drug trafficking has been perceived as an opportunity for economic breakthrough and a way of supplementing income for those who feel alienated from mainstream opportunities (Li, 2009).

Lucas County lacks prevention and rehabilitation programs for youth needing this type of intervention other than detention or jail for this population for 18–30 year olds. There are few programs in place that address issues of youth returning to school/or staying in school and obtaining their education, youth have to be taught that education is the key to success. If taught in school the importance of graduating, and shown alternatives to succeeding in life. This approach creates safe and secure communities, and youth off of the streets, and that taking responsibilities for their actions equals success. These perceptions include their attitude towards socio-economic challenges like employment; need to supplement income and the legal system. Most of the existing research has only focused on health consequences of drug trafficking and associated risks, however; there lacks a single research that has reviewed the motivations, perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes that motivate adolescents into drug trafficking. It is for this reason that this research focuses on filling this research gap and provide a well-researched paper to address this issue.

Significance of the Problem

Drug trafficking African-American males within the age of 14–17 living in low income neighborhoods particularly in urban areas has increased significantly in the past two decades. However, there has been little corresponding exposition on this staggering issue in psychological literature. This study needs to be conducted to help African American males between the ages of 18 and 30 to discontinue making poor choices, and specifically to deter them from distributing drugs and to show them alternatives of becoming successful and staying in school. This population needs to learn that success comes from having a good solid education. The study is worthwhile, because it will

establish a baseline for one obtaining an education instead of selling drugs. Available evidence shows the need for this research based on the social, cultural, historical and economic factors that have motivated youths to engage in drug trafficking. I explored a different perspective due to my number of years of experiences. The study will benefit Lucas County and the outlining counties when working with this population. The study can provide a blueprint of alternatives for youth between 18 and 30 years. Based on findings from the interviews, a curriculum that aims to provide job training, educational courses, employment opportunities, and self-esteem enrichment emerged. My program is unique as it addresses changing one's mindset and providing alternatives to one's behavior.

Drug trafficking has been a major social challenge in the United States especially in low-income neighborhoods. In such, it is important to carry out a research that analyzes the causes, motivators and implications of drug trafficking among African Americans between the ages of 18-30 who are living in economically deprived neighborhoods in the United States. Research from independent researchers and government publications have identified drug trafficking among African Americans as a delinquent behavior that has been growing across this population as a result of social, historical, cultural and economic reasons (Whitehead, Peterson, & Kaljee, 1994). Notably, the prevalence of recruitment or engagement in drug trafficking grows as the adolescents move from the early teenage to late teenage years. Most of these teens are recruited to engage in drug trafficking from their schools, recreational areas or even in their neighborhoods. This research was be very significant because it discovered motivating factors into the venture. It also addressed the question of what social,

environmental, and economic factors affect these individuals' decision-making processes, such as single parent households, sporadic utility services, and impoverished conditions.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the involvement of African American male's involvement in drug trafficking and come up with current results regarding their perception, beliefs, and attitudes that motivate them. The study also intends to offer important contributions to the body of knowledge regarding this contentious subject. Finally, the purpose is to develop a curriculum for a preventative program. To this end, the three main research questions are:

1. What are the lived experiences of the 18–30 year old African-American male population who formerly sold drugs?
2. What environmental factors do the 18–30 year old African-American males who formerly sold drugs believe contributed to their decision to:
 - Traffic in drugs?
 - Drop out of school?
 - Make changes contributing to their relative success?
3. What type of prevention program might help avoid this type of lifestyle?
 - a. What types of preventative programming could be developed to reduce the incidence of African American male engaging in drug trafficking behaviors?
 - b. How might the formerly drug-dealing African-American males act as agents of curricular support or change based on their experiences?

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework is based on social learning theory, and particularly the ideas of Julian Rotter. Rotter combined the research on behaviorism with studies of personality to expand studies of behavior to include the social element. From behaviorism, Rotter borrowed the premise that individuals seek out reinforcement and avoid punishment; however, Rotter added more of the social environmental to that conceptualization. For Rotter, personality develops from the interaction of the individual with his or her environment. From these behavioral and social factors, Rotter developed a predictive formula that can be read as follows: behavior potential (BP) is a function of expectancy (E) and reinforcement value (RV); $BP = f(E \& RV)$ (Rotter, Chance, & Phares, 1972). The likelihood exhibiting a particular behavior, such as dealing drugs in this dissertation, is a function of the probability that a specific behavior will lead to a given outcome and the desirability of that outcome. If both expectancy and reinforcement value are high, then behavior potential is high. Applied to the topic of this dissertation, this formula predicts that a young black man is likely to deal drugs if he highly expects it will lead to easy money and a flashy lifestyle, and that expectancy is repeatedly reinforced by the actual reward of money, material goods, and social attention.

Within the expectancy factor, Rotter also developed the locus of control and a questionnaire instrument to measure it. The locus of control refers to people's general belief in the amount of control over what gets reinforced in their life (Rotter, Chance, & Phares, 1972). People's beliefs on locus of control fall on a spectrum between very internal and very external, where those who have a very internal outlook believe they as an individual have internal control over their decisions while those with external outlooks believe most control exists outside of the self (Rotter, Chance, & Phares, 1972). While

the formula above and the related instruments and measures are not used in this dissertation, the general theory is used. Instead, based on interviews, I relate the participants' responses to their expectancies and reinforcements as well as to their locus of control.

Nature of the Study

This research paper is based on qualitative methods and specifically falls within the phenomenological approach to qualitative research. I developed an interview research instrument to collect qualitative data for this research. The qualitative research is based on an exploration through one-on-one interviews into the lived experiences of three African-American males who formerly dealt drugs. The data involved subjects who have in one way or another have been involved in drug trafficking and the issues that motivated them into the business of selling drugs.

The interview sessions in this study built from my unique position as a researcher with a good rapport among positive history with the target population. My years of experience have made me uniquely qualified to obtain an honest perspective from this target population. I have gained the trust of this targeted population on many occasions. While at the detention facility, I overheard the youths say to the other drug traffickers "she's ok," "you can trust her," and "she good people." This population has shared with me their stories and struggles for years. My experiences have provided me with the ability to earn their trust; therefore this population was primed to open up and discuss with me anything that I asked them without reservation. My relationship enabled me to maintain information that others cannot get from this population because typically this population is very guarded and the youth are cautious about to whom they open up.

Summary

This study gathered descriptions of the lived experiences of three African-American males between the ages of 18 and 30 who formerly dealt drugs and were incarcerated. Based on the interview data, I approached the essence of their experiences. Based on what I learned from their experiences, I propose a program to help deter African-American youths from making the choice to deal drugs. The following chapters of this dissertation proposal address the previous literature related to this topic (Chapter 2), the qualitative methodology of the proposed study (Chapter 3), the findings of the research (Chapter 4), and the discussion of the results along with the proposed program curriculum (Chapter 5).

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Drug trafficking is an all-too-common and detrimental practice for African-American males living urban areas. Drug trafficking has appeal because of the economic gains that the teenagers gains despite the many risk factors. The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of African-American males who formerly trafficked drugs between the ages of 14–19. The essence of their experience gathered through interviews provided the information to create a youth program designed to deter and rehabilitate young black males from a life of dealing in illicit drugs. In pursuit of this main purpose, I am guided by the follow three research questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of the 18–30 year old African-American male population who formerly sold drugs?
2. What environmental factors do the 18–30 year old African-American males who formerly sold drugs believe contributed to their detrimental decisions in the past and their constructive decisions in the present?
3. Based on their lived experiences, what type of prevention program might help avoid this type of lifestyle?

This chapter includes a review of the literature that relates to drug dealing among young African-American males.

Literature Search Strategy

To find relevant peer-reviewed primary research articles and statistics on the topic of drug dealing among young African-American males, I accessed and searched the following databases: EBSCOhost, ProQuest, Electronic Journal Center (EJC), Google

Scholar, Galileo University Online Library, Bureau of Justice Statistics, and the Department of Justice Reports. Within those databases, I searched the following key terms:

- African-American/Black males/men and drug trafficking
- Experiences of drug dealers
- Drug trafficking in urban and suburban areas
- Causes of drug trafficking
- Belief/perceptions/motivations of drug trafficking
- Environmental factors and drug trafficking
- Social-economic motivations for drug trafficking
- Drug distribution and selling

In conducting the search in the online libraries and user databases, I engaged in objective iterative research process. The search results directed to me various peer reviewed journals and articles that offered substantive materials for the research.

Furthermore, the Google Scholar search engine was also instrumental in this research. I obtained data and statistical figures from Bureau of Justice Statistics and reports published by the Department of Justice. The keywords used for the Department of Justice and Bureau of Justice databases included: drug trafficking, drug distribution, young, youths, teenagers, adolescents, black, African American, men, and males. This research pursuit was not limited to keyword search but I also ventured into visiting materials provided at the “related links” section on the websites so that I could review what other writers had to say about the search keywords. Due to the broadness of the topic, the entire research was not tied in the listed database alone so that I do not restrict

my scope. Other available sources including physical libraries were also revisited for the purpose of obtaining authoritative and credible information regarding the research problem.

Background

Peterson (2012) argues that this problem is increasingly becoming rampant among African American males living in urban and sub-urban areas of the United States. The authors have noted that this social problem was motivated by the need to supplement family income, peer pressure, and exposure to neighborhoods that were actively selling and distributing drugs. Peterson (2012) reported that this problem is distributed across the African American population and is exacerbated by the challenges identified above. Stanton and Galbraith (1994) pointed out that drug trafficking prevalence within the sample population increased by age as the offenders advanced from 14 towards 19 years of age.

Similar to the findings of Stanton and Galbraith (1994), Schanbacher (2013) found as those of the latter after carrying out research among 7573 young teenagers attending grade nine to twelve in Washington, DC. They reiterated that they had witnessed, sold or perpetrated the sale of drugs within their neighborhood. In addition, many of them noted that they had been approached by their peers in more than one occasion with an intention of recruiting them to the sale of drugs. From the results, it was evident that some of the youths who were peddling the drugs were not consuming them but instead acted as vehicles for distribution. However, the larger portion of the young peddlers was abusing drugs and substances. The results of this research conducted by Schanbacher was very overwhelming, he was able to discover that African Americans

males within the age of 14-19 were twice probable to be recruited into drug trafficking than their white counterparts. In addition, African American males within the sample age were also twice as much likely to be abusing drugs (Schanbacher, 2013).

In 2003, more than 59,000 African American drug trafficking offenders were in residential placement in juvenile facilities, 61% countrywide. The drug trafficking African American youth accounted for a total of 38% of all the offenders who were in custody (National Center for Juvenile Justice, 2006). An increase in criminal behavior relating to drugs and African American males has been realized, thus bringing the question back to those responsible about what needs to be done to remedy the situation. Rodney, Tachia, and Rodney's (1999) research indicated that out of the total number of juvenile arrests, African American youth involved in trafficking amounted to 28% of the total juvenile arrests involved in drug trafficking. Overall arrests in 2003 indicated that 16% of African American and 16% of black arrests involved a person younger than 18 years of age (National Center for Juvenile Justice, 2006). There is belief that factors such as community, economics, and the dynamics of the family play key roles in their involvement. However, other factors have contributed substantially to the risk of black youth involvement in drug trafficking (Howell & Gleason, 1999).

Early research has indicated that approximately 10% of male, urban, African-American youths are reported to have engaged in drug trafficking, a larger number of youths are reported to have been asked to sell drugs, and others have indicated that they expect to become involved in drug trafficking. Drug trafficking is associated with increased mortality, with some studies showing it causes a third to a half of homicide-related deaths. Drug trafficking is also associated with other health-risk behavior and

incarceration. Social pressures by family members or peers to engage in drug trafficking and the belief that the only way to earn money is limited to drug trafficking are highly correlated with engaging in drug trafficking behaviors.

The US has the highest number of drug dealers on earth (Weinstein, 1999). Though this has been the case in the US, some States record the highest number due to varied reasons. For instance, Colorado and Washington DC are some of the states where a certain amount of drugs are allowed for recreation purposes. For instance, the states allowed 10g of marijuana to be smoked as a recreational drug while others such as Florida allowed a up to 28g of cocaine transportation. Though they have restricted over eighteen individuals to use the drug, it is evident that not all families can keep children away from the drugs if at all one of the parents or both use. With these reasons, adolescents are introduced to drugs at their earlier ages either passively or actively in the sense that if parents use them in the presence of their children, children inhale them or can easily access and start practicing.

All the theorists and researchers consulted under this category converge at a point about commonness in the perceptions, attitudes, beliefs and motivations towards drugs trafficking among this cohort. African American are identified as a marginalized population that historically has been deprived opportunities to access employment, education, power and resources (Stanton & Galbraith, 1994). Historically, some urban centers in the United States went through an experience of declining growth as resources were being expatriated. It is for this reason that certain illegal economic activities sprouted as a means to support living and earn extra income (Whitehead et al., 1994). According to Whitehead et al. (1994), these illegal economic activities acted as stop-gap

means of revamping gender identities, way of asserting entrepreneurial power, means of gathering reputation and most importantly to supplement income.

Consequences of Drug Trafficking

The adverse effects of engaging in drug trafficking include addiction, violence, murder, incarceration and morbidity (Li, 2009). Young teenagers between the ages of 14–19 still remain soft targets for perpetrators (Li, 2009). A plethora of research results conducted in the past still support the idea that drug trafficking also involves use. However, different respondents have pointed out that they began with trafficking before starting to use the drugs (Fallon, Ma, Black, & Wekerle, 2011). A research article by Okundaye , Cornelius, and Manning (2001) indicated that young adolescents’ greatest motivation to drug trafficking was the short term gains they received as perks for their boldness to carry out the risky task (Okundaye et al. 2001). Additionally, authors like Roettger and Swisher (2011) have provided more evidence for this argument by pointing out that lack of employment of opportunities for this cohort has caused a high social marginalization which has pushed many families to the edge. In addition, this literature inclines towards a perception of social marginalization among African American as major throw back into this social evil. Most of them belong to the low income population of Americans and believe that engaging in odd and illegal economic activities will salvage them from the woes of tough economic times. It is apparent that difficult economic times and lack of employment have steered this group of young Americans into the business to enable them meet their socio-economic obligations, acquire social respect and most importantly gain self-pride as men (Whitehead et al., 1994). Many African American in the past have suffered a lot during economic meltdowns and probably been

the soft targets for layoffs during such times. In such, most of them have resulted into unpleasant economic activities to solve their plight and meet their economic needs.” Some of them have convinced themselves to sell drugs to achieve” respect since they believed that they were presented with few opportunities of enjoying the luxuries of middle class.

Okundaye et al. (2001) bring in an important perception that African American men have when it comes to solving their social and economic plight. This author from research result he consulted notes that several respondents from past research had opened up that they were willing to engage in any economic activity regardless of its legality status. In addition, some of the interviewees noted that they were even willing to work odd hours, engage in a number of activities that generated money and take whatever risk for money. In retrospect, what this means is that the respondents were ready to take advantage of any income generating activity regardless of the risk involved (Okundaye et al., 2001). The fact of this matter is reflected in the Whitehead et al. (1994), which reviews beliefs and perceptions that African Americans have when they engage in this illegal business. There was a growing perception that whites were also believed to be involved in other illegal businesses which reaped high incomes, however; instead of being apprehended and convicted they were rewarded for it (Whitehead et al., 1994). This is a perception that some African Americans have.

Whereas there was a strong relationship between economic incentives and engagement in drug trafficking, various theorists attach the growing social ill to a failure in the legal system to incarcerate juveniles who commit this crime for a long time. Research by Okundaye et al. (2001) found young African Americans made a lot of

money in the business, but they did not receive hefty legal punishments to incapacitate or deter them from engaging in the sale of drugs. The spillover effect of this misgiving of the law is that youths perceive their peers in the business as powerful and reputable. Some interviewees argue that adolescents were soft targets of drug barons because they [adolescent] viewed sale of drugs as something amazing and less harmful probably because of their ignorance of the apparent consequences. The biggest question that one would ask him/herself is where do all these adolescents get recruited from? Stanton and Galbraith (1994) addressed this question by carrying out a survey which concluded that most of the participants were recruited from recreation centers and schools within the neighborhood.

Motivating Factors

In research that was conducted by Baltimore and later reviewed by Stanton and Galbraith (1994) indicate that certain environmental factors played significantly in motivating young adolescents into drug peddling and selling. Young teenagers within the sample age perceived that even their neighbors were involved in drug trafficking. In such, Stanton and Galbraith established a correlation between sell of drugs in the neighborhood and likelihood of being involved in the trade. This fact was exacerbated if any of the family member was involved in drug trafficking. Teenagers who perceived that any of their relatives was in drug trade were more likely to be lured into the business. Other researchers associate this fact with poor communication between the parents and their sons (Stanton & Galbraith, 1994).

On another level, a belief that other peers were also engaging in drug trafficking was another motivator. This perception can be related to past involved and also future

intentions to drug traffic. Association with dealers and the surge to be reputable among peers is another reason why adolescents get endorsed into the illegal business. Peer pressure was also found to motivate delinquent behaviors like carrying weapons, truancy, use of alcohol and engaging into risky sexual behaviors had a positive correlation with drug trafficking or even the intention of doing it in future (Fallon et al., 2011). Those young teens who involve themselves in constructive and perhaps recreational activities were less likely to be recruited in drug trafficking as opposed to those were engaging in erratic and delinquent behaviors. In pursuit of reputation, teens believed that arrest by police for drug trade was not severe and neither did it bear serious consequences (Okundaye et al., 2001).

Poor parental supervision and monitoring is one outstanding factor. Lack of parental involvement and the effects caused by poor parenting were clearly reflected in the research literature. According to Nebbitt, Lombe, and Lindsey (2007), parental guidance is directly correlated with adolescent substance use and trafficking. A relationship between broken homes and involvement in drug trafficking may reflect social class effects (Nebbitt, Lombe, & Lindsey, 2007). The relationships between home environment and children, family, education and parents all show that parenting has a direct influence on the decision of many American youth to engage in drug trafficking. Parental involvement at an early age helps in redirecting and addressing behavioral issues prior to the onset of involvement in drug trafficking. Such factors can be addressed through the creation of an atmosphere which promotes healthy interactions, and a positive environment may be a contributing factor to the development of constructive outcomes among adolescent African American males (Roettger & Swisher, 2011).

There is a strong relationship between the significant number of African American youth who are incarcerated and involvement in drug trafficking. Even though the reasons why the youth between the age of 14 and 19 engage in drug trafficking are complicated and involve a number of factors, one outstanding factor is the absence of fathers, which likely increased their predisposition to early involvement in drug trafficking. However, even though various studies have highlighted the issue of enslavement of African American youth raised in families headed by female parents, few studies have identified the youths who have beaten all odds to avoid involvement in drug trafficking and have sought to internalize the mainstream American values non-involvement in drug trafficking (Roettger & Swisher, 2011).

Drug dealers engaging youths in drug trafficking is a new practice that is highly advantageous to the employer for several legal and economic reasons. From the perspective of the drug dealers, young males are particularly useful in drug trafficking because they work for lower wages. Further, even if the youth are arrested, the juvenile justice system enables their rapid return for continued service in the drug trade. From the perspective of the youth, drug trafficking offers one of the few economic opportunities available to them. Further, the numbers suggest a tremendous racial disparity in the juvenile justice system.

The prevalence of the hardships faced by African American youth has contributed to the notion that the group is at risk, which has led to stereotypes that they are irresponsible, anti-social, and even dangerous. In some instances, social scientists have contributed to this discourse by suggesting that urban youth are products of a pathological “culture of poverty” that renders them incapable of overcoming

environmental hardships (Murray, 1984, p.79). Such views being widely accepted by policy makers and the media have given rise to a broad set of punitive policies aimed at controlling the behavior of African America youth through security, law enforcement, and incarceration (Polakow, 2001). Such measures reflect a broader societal tendency to overlook the environmental factors that place urban youth at risk, hence the need to conduct the research and identify these environmental factors that have been overlooked.

Various scholars and researchers have asserted themselves objectively with the purpose of finding reasons, motivations, perceptions and beliefs that are motivating young African American to sell drugs. It is a worrying situation regarding how rapidly drug trafficking has emerged as a social problem. However, different scholars including Whitehead et al. (1994), Stanton and Galbraith (1994), Okundaye et al. (2001), and Peterson (2012) among others, have identified economic gains, needs to acquire status, peer pressure, and gender identity as the key drivers motivating this social ill. It is also apparent from these researchers that African American males were more likely to participate in drug trafficking due to economic gains as opposed to their female counterparts. On the contrary, females were found to engage in drug trafficking as a way of strengthening their personal relationships with the perpetrators and not necessarily for monetary gains (Stanton & Galbraith, 1994).

Whitehead et al. (1994) addressed the problem from a historical and multi-cultural perspective throughout his research. He found the correct answer to the question of drug trafficking among youth it is important to first of all understand the context under which drug trafficking takes place. According to him this understanding will prompt an instinct

of why and how this vice has grown so rapidly within the last two decades among teenage African American males (Whitehead et al., 1994).

Deterrence and Rehabilitation Programs and Policies

An essential component of any comprehensive national prevention strategy is understanding what might be done to reduce and prevent drug trafficking among the youths. The potential benefits prevention programs are clear, but many schools and community-based organizations have had difficulty designing programs that meet the needs of incarcerated African American male youths. This has arisen as a result of the initiatives not being tailored to reflect the position of the incarcerated male youths in the community.

Many scholars and researchers have provided different literatures and opinions on drug abuse and selling. Being one of the major burdens that have revolved in most parts in the 21st century, studies and statistics indicate that in the global world, more adolescent are selling drugs and alcohol which result into trading (Australian Drug Foundation, 1999; Drug Nexus in Africa, 1998; National Drug Strategy Household Survey, 1995, 1998; National Household Survey on Drug Abuse 1994–1999; World Drug Report, 1997). The major drugs that have been used and sold by most adolescents include cocaine, Mandrax, ecstasy, hallucinogens, alcohol, cannabis, heroin, LSD and tobacco. In their explanation, Roettger and Swisher (2011) claimed that the accessibility of drugs and other substance is the major cause for the increase in drug trafficking among individuals. However, the accessibility of drugs in the US has ended up affecting a particular class of people than the other. This paper focuses on African-American young individuals of aged 14–19.

The differences arise in the self-management of each individual on noticing the existence of drug abuse (Delgado 1997). “How adolescents” both blacks and white, manage themselves towards drug selling and usage differs greatly. Statisticians have provided that the inhalants proceed to increase in popularity among eighth and twelve grade students. For example, Illinois has been one of the states where there has been an increase in teenage drug trafficking of ages between 14 and 17 have increased the usage of illicit drugs particularly alcohol, cocaine and marijuana (Duncan, Cas, & Nicholson, 2000). Whereas the state government tried to reduce the increase in teenager trafficking between 1998 and 1999, the changes have not been significant; 6.2 and 7.0 in 1998 and 1999 respectively (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services - HRSA, 1999). The fact that about fifty six percent of the adolescents surveyed in 1998 showed that marijuana was easy to obtain, 30 percent demonstrate that it was easy to obtain 21 percent heroine and most said that the drugs were readily available.

Research conducted to investigate drug dealing among the African American and the contextual factors associated to drug dealing gave out a clear picture on what is at the field. It was identified that peers are the key sources of drugs. About 25% of students in Grade 12 and 10% in Grade 9 stated that someone had sold, used, or given illegal drugs. Approximately 42% of high school students indicated that they bought drugs from a relative or friend. It is also found that 11.6% of all juvenile arrests represent 12.4% of all arrests for drug crimes (Stanton & Galbraith, 1994).

Another factor leading to drug dealing is the socioeconomic deprivation on adolescent drug dealing. In essence, socioeconomic deprivation is a subject that place African American youth at the increased risk for drug dealing. Researchers point out that

black youths are placed in a low socio status that creates pressure which motivates participation in criminal activities.

On objecting to focus on the African American Males who sale drugs, two question incorporated within can be posed. Firstly, is there a correlation between the substance use and drug dealing differ by the type of the drug used by the African American youth? Secondly, is the receipt of public assistance has a relation to drug dealing? In this case, different models are then tested for white and African American adolescents. Since substance use is tied to drug dealing, prevention and treatment will likely reduce the involvement in drug trade. Further, the research indicates that if there will be a variance across socioeconomic and a race status, interventions may be required.

Conceptual Framework

The social learning theory provided the framework for this research. Julian Rotter combined the research on behaviorism with studies of personality to expand studies of behavior to include the social element. Rotter based his theory on the premise that individuals seek out reinforcement and avoid punishment; however, Rotter added to the basic behaviorist model by addressing more of the social environmental. In this framework, personality comes from the interaction of individuals with their environments. Rotter developed a predictive formula that can be read as follows: behavior potential (BP) is a function of expectancy (E) and reinforcement value (RV); $BP = f(E \& RV)$ (Rotter, Chance, & Phares, 1972). In other words, the likelihood exhibiting a behavior is a function of the expectation that a behavior leads to a certain outcome and to what extent that expectation is reinforced. If both expectancy and reinforcement value are high, then behavior potential is high. This formula predicts that a young black man is

likely to deal drugs if he highly expects it will reward him financially and socially in addition to the degree to which that expectancy is reinforced by the actual reward.

Rotter also developed the locus of control, which refers to people's general belief in the amount of control over what gets reinforced in their life (Rotter, Chance, & Phares, 1972). Locus of control falls on a spectrum between very internal and very external. Those who have a very internal outlook believe they as an individual have internal control over their decisions while those with external outlooks believe most control exists outside of the self (Rotter, Chance, & Phares, 1972). I do not explicitly use the formula above and the related instrument, but I use the general theory to categorize the participants' responses.

Summary

It is apparent from the in depth research on the listed site database using consistent and thematic keywords that drug trafficking has become a menace in modern American society. Various literature discussed in this chapter indicate different motivations that adolescents have that drive them in drug trafficking. It has been noted that historical injustice has had a great contribution towards the sprouting and growth of illegal business particularly drugs in the United States. A section of African Americans believe that history has deprived them important socio-economic capacities that have pushed them to the edge and apparently resulted into drug trafficking. Most importantly is that African American living in low income neighborhoods engage in this business as way of salvaging their economic obligations particularly at a time when the economy has been ailing from downturns. In furtherance, the need by young teenagers command reputation and gender sensitivity among their peers is also another motivation that

various authors agree with as a reason for involvement in drugs. However, all these motivations have not happened without the proper environment. That, those adolescents who were living within neighborhoods and families that were involved in the sell and peddling of drugs had a higher probability of being endorsed into the sale of drugs. It has also been noticed that a belief that the legal system was not heavily punitive to deter and incapacitate drug dealers motivated some of the teenagers coupled with the fact that they needed to be commanding within their peer groups. Interplay of all these factors have triggered and asserted many young teenagers into the sale of drugs not caring about the consequences involved. The literature review presented addresses issues of concern central to this research and essentially fills the gap of information regarding motivations to drug trafficking. The fact that economic issues, living in drug trafficking neighborhoods, need for enhancing gender identity and search for reputation among peers have been identified as key motivations to drug trafficking will help derive the research methodology in chapter three.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of African American male's former involvement in drug trafficking and come up with current results regarding their perception, beliefs, and attitudes that motivate them. The study also intends to offer important contributions to the body of knowledge regarding this contentious subject. Finally, the purpose is to develop a curriculum for a preventative program.

Research Design

To address the purpose, I will follow a phenomenological research design that addresses these three main research questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of the 18–30 year old African-American male population who formerly sold drugs?
2. In their experience, what environmental factors do the 18–30 year old African-American males who formerly sold drugs believe contributed to their decision to:
 - a. Traffic in drugs?
 - b. Drop out of school?
 - c. Make changes contributing to their relative success?
3. Based on their lived experiences, what type of prevention program might help avoid this type of lifestyle?
 - a. What types of preventative programming could be developed to reduce the incidence of African American male engaging in drug trafficking behaviors?

- b. How might the formerly drug-dealing African-American males act as agents of curricular support or change based on their experiences?

I utilized a phenomenological design to explore in detail, in depth data collection of former drug traffickers. Phenomenology is the study of structures of consciousness as experienced first-hand. This approach studies the structure of experiences starting with sensory perception and continuing through mental processing, interpretation, memory, imagination, emotion, desire, volition, and finally to action (Moustakas, 1994). It is distantly based on philosophical arguments by Kant (1804) that humans can never have direct access to reality, but only to the contents of their minds, so reality is always what is interpreted by the human mind. Phenomenology is more closely related to the philosophy of Heidegger (1962), who believed that people and their actions are always “in the world” (p. 61). As a result, the meanings experiences have are interpreted by looking at the context of our activities *within* our world, which is the definition of lived experience.

My purpose is to identify phenomena through how the former drug dealers describe their lived experiences. The goal is to gather deep information and perceptions through inductive, qualitative methods such as interviews and discussions from the perspective of the research participants. To this end, I examined their lived experiences as closely as possible. Phenomenology is concerned with the study of experience from the perspective of the individual, bracketing taken for granted assumptions and usual ways of perceiving. Moustakas (1994) stated that phenomenological approaches are based in a paradigm of personal knowledge and subjectivity, and emphasize the importance of personal perspective and interpretation. He further stated that phenomenology is simply a powerful understanding of subjective experiences, gaining insights into people’s

motivations and actions, and cutting through the clutter of taken for granted assumptions and conventional wisdom. The research seeks essentially to describe rather than explain, and to start from a perspective free from hypotheses or preconceptions (Husserl, 1970).

Role of the Researcher

My role as the researcher was to provide a safe confidential setting for the participants, develop and maintain a positive rapport, and gather candid descriptions of their experiences. I explained to the participant that they can end their participation in the study at any time and they may opt to not answer if they feel uncomfortable with the interview or questions.

Because this study followed a phenomenological approach, the experience with the phenomenon begins with me as the researcher. I have previous experience with the target population in this study because of my involvement developing and running an intervention program for drug-trafficking youths in Northwest Ohio. Because of my prior experience, I have preconceived notions about the phenomenon. In order to acknowledge my experiences but separate them from the responses of the participants, I used a standard phenomenological procedure called *bracketing*.

Bracketing in qualitative research is a method used to mitigate the effects of preconceptions that may taint the research process. Bracketing is a term in the philosophical school of phenomenology describing the act of suspending judgment about the natural world to instead focus on analysis of one's mental experiences (Creswell, 2007). Ultimately, the role of the researcher and the purpose of bracketing in a phenomenology study is to ensure that the evidence is based on participants' descriptions

of experiences and their own meaning making with minimal interpretation from the researcher.

Participants

This dissertation studied African-American males who formerly dealt drugs in the late 1990s between the ages of 14–19. At the time of the research, the men’s ages ranged between 26 and 30. I drew my participants from a population of former drug dealers who participated in a program I lead in the late 1990s as appointed by their probation/parole officers. At the time, these young men participated in a 12-week program that strove to

- change their mindset about the realities of selling drugs, including attention toward the consequences of long prison terms or death;
- deter them from dropping out of school to pursue a life of crime; and
- introduce them to alternative programs, i.e. job training and career choices.

Based on the program’s success, I asked several participants who graduated the program after completing the 12-week program to return as mentors to the other youth. These relationships have become lasting friendships. The participants have kept me abreast on what they have been doing in their lives, such as when they have accomplished goals, gotten married, finished college, and had children of their own. Several of the participants viewed me as their second mother or someone whom they looked up to. The program made a difference for several of these young men. As the current researcher and former director of the program, over the years I have maintained a positive rapport with these men who have turned their lives around and who have become successful in their careers.

Selection Logic

The participant selection logic followed a criteria-based convenience sampling approach. I selected participants based on their previous involvement in a court-ordered intervention program, their availability, their discontinuation of criminal activities, and their willingness to consider being mentors to the future groups of young drug traffickers or those at risk for drug trafficking. I also selected them because I have maintained a friendly relationship with them and could reach them via email or telephone. Conversely, I excluded participants if they were unavailable or unreachable, still involved in drug-trafficking or related criminal activities, or if their willingness changed.

After reaching out to several former students in the program, a handful of potential participants who are now adults indicated they were willing to participate in a study of this sort. Initially, I generated tentative interest from five African American males who were previously in the youth drug trafficking program in the late '90s, who are now successful, and who want to contribute to our society by making a difference with today's youth. I selected these five participants because I still have contact with them, and communicate with them. I thought that this was a good number that would represent the lives of these former drug traffickers. The prospective participants all completed high school or have earned GEDs and have successful careers, and some have even completed college. I aimed to recruit five participants for this study because of the ability to obtain a firm commitment and their willingness to participate in the study. Additionally, five participants provide a variety of experiences while also allowing me to go into

descriptive depth about their lived experiences without an overwhelming amount of data to manage.

Ethical Issues

I contacted the participants via e-mail or telephones. The participant's give their consent without signing a form (to protect their identity) as approved by the University of Toledo's Institutional Review Board (IRB). I explained to the participants the purpose of their participation before beginning the inquiry of their lives as former drug dealers. The participants were fully informed and assured that I have not and will not publish any identifying information. Their identities and privacy were protected. Additionally, any identifying information about them was confidential and stored a locked filing cabinet in the office of the faculty member advising this research at the University of Toledo.

To protect confidentiality, each participant chose a pseudonym that I used when referencing them. Participant's names and identities were changed and protected and they were told that they could abort the interview or discussions at any given time that they feel uncomfortable. The participants were asked for their approval to use audio recordings and notepads were used to collect the data.

Instrumentation

In qualitative research, the researcher must have trust and respect with the population being studied and must also be confident in the accuracy of the responses, so the instrumentation was designed with that in mind. The data collection consisted of open-ended, semi-structured interviews with 10 guiding questions. I recorded the interviews by audio and transcribed the recordings. The interviews were conducted in-

person at a site that provided comfort and confidentiality for the participant. For participants who moved out of state, I offered them the option phone interviews instead.

I initially contacted the five participants via e-mail and telephone and ask them first if they would like to participate in the study. When the participant agreed, I scheduled an appointment with the participant and explained the purpose of the study to him and what participation entails. The location of the meeting was decided by the participant. For the study, data was collected in the form of structured interviews, a non-participant observation, collection of documents, and a reflective journal. The interviews were done separately. The interviews lasted 45–60 minutes and held in a location that was comfortable to the participant. All interviews were audio-recorded. Also during the interview, I took notes. I reminded participants that breaks were allowed if they felt the need to take any. I also informed participants that they needed to choose a pseudonym to protect their identity.

Researcher-Developed Instruments

The data collection instrument was a researcher-produced semi-structured open-ended interview design. Each interview session was one hour long, with 45 minutes of the semi-structured questions and 15 minutes at the end for clarification and to give the participants to ask any questions they had. Although the interview is a researcher-developed instrument, the basis for the interview approach is Rubin and Rubin's (2012) responsive interviewing method. The responsive interviewing method is based on the conversational partnership formed between researcher and participant in order for the researcher to understand experiences through the participant's words and stories to create meaning.

The responsive interviewing model “relies heavily on the interpretive constructionist philosophy, mixed with a bit of critical theory, and then shaped by the practical needs of doing interviews” (Rubin, 2012, p. 27). This approach is somewhat the opposite of a strict positivistic approach in that the design of the process “remains flexible throughout the project” and the goal is not to reach definitive answers or truth, but rather to seek out how the interviewee “understands what they have seen, heard, or experienced” (Rubin, 2012, p. 27). According Rubin (2012), for an interpretive constructionist researcher, the goal of an interview is to find out how people perceive an occurrence or object and, most importantly, “the meaning they attribute to it” (p. 27). It is imperative to note that this framework served as a general compass and not a strict guideline for the interview methodology.

Rationale for Using Interviews

The research questions revolve around discovering the lived experiences and beliefs of former teenage drug traffickers who are males and analyzing those experiences and beliefs to understand important concepts, trends, and the overall essence of their experiences to help develop a curriculum for an intervention program. A researcher-developed, open-ended, semi-structured and responsive interviewing approach addresses the research questions better than any other approach because the questions are exploratory in nature, so it was necessary to have a flexible and open-ended instrument in order to not exclude potentially relevant data. A survey questionnaire would not have allowed me to explore and discover the essence because it would be more structured, limited, and closed-ended. Creswell (2012) asserted that interviews are most appropriate for exploratory research questions like the ones in this study. If I would have conducted a

survey instead, I might not have been able to gather a comprehensive and in-depth picture of their experiences as drug traffickers in order to get to the essence of that experience.

Data Analysis

Throughout the interview process, I maintained detailed notes on the responses. Additionally, I reviewed the transcripts and highlighted common phrases, topics, and concepts with margin notes on the meanings. I analyzed the data by reading the transcripts from the interviews and looking for commonalities in the descriptions of lived experiences. I also looked for stark differences between lived experiences. Finally, I identified contradictions within each interview. After I identified the similarities and differences between participants and the contradictions within the interviews, I categorized them into concepts. The concepts emerged directly from what is stated or described. Each concept is based on a quote or group of quotes directly from the transcripts. Throughout the analysis of the interviews transcripts, I focused on discovering the essence of the lived experience.

To improve the reliability and validity of my analysis, I used member checking and peer debriefing procedures. Member checking can be done during the interview process, at the conclusion of the study, or both to increase the credibility and validity of a qualitative study. For my study, I conducted member checking at both points. During the interview, I restated and summarized the information and then question the participant to determine accuracy. After the study, I shared all of the findings with the participants involved. This allowed the participants to either agree or disagree whether the summaries reflect their views, feelings, and experiences. In member checking, the overall goals were to provide findings that are authentic, original and reliable.

I used member checking to ensure the interpretation of the responses ring true with the participants. Member checking is the process of double-checking the researcher's interpretation of the meaning of the participants' experiences with the participants who experienced it (Creswell, 2012). It allows the participants to review and correct the researcher's interpretations (Creswell, 2012). Member checking helps improve the accuracy, credibility, validity, and transferability of a study. The benefits to member checking are that the researcher can verify the entirety and completeness of the findings, which is a measureable tool of the accuracy of the findings. There are at least four additional benefits to member: providing an opportunity for participants to understand and assess what the participant intended to do through his actions, reinforcing credibility and validity, limiting personal biases within the study, giving participants the opportunity to correct errors, and challenging what are perceived as wrong interpretations (Creswell, 2012).

I also used peer debriefing for my study. In peer debriefing, the qualitative researcher seeks to understand the world through the perspective of others. This approach yields useful and in-depth information regarding people's motivations, concerns and behaviors. The benefits of peer debriefing are that others evaluate and look through an impartial lens and establish validity, which is used in addition to bracketing and member checks. Peer debriefing requires the researcher to work with a colleague who hold impartial views of the study. The colleague with whom I worked is a doctoral student in the social foundations department at the University of Toledo. This colleague has over 30 years of experience as a probation officer with the Toledo Municipal Court. In 2000, he and I wrote a grant to help combat drug trafficking in our communities. The peer

debriefers examined the anonymous transcripts from the interviews. This technique helped to enhance credibility and ensure validity by adding another expert opinion. I used all of these methods to improve validity and reliability because the most important objective of a phenomenology is to accurately represent the participants' lived experiences through their own descriptions (Creswell, 2012).

Summary

This dissertation methodology was designed to provide a new perspective on lived experiences of a former drug dealer who is now successful and contributing law abiding citizen in the community. By using interview data with a small group of former drug dealers with whom I have a positive rapport as a researcher, mentor, and former program director, I aimed to discover the essence of their experience in order to help design a curriculum for a preventative and rehabilitation program. My experiences are included as well, but are bracketed in order to keep them distinct from the lived experiences of the participants. Together, this methodology helped approach the lived experiences of former drug dealers and addressed the three major research questions.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

As stated in the methodology, I aimed for five participants. However, two of the participants who showed interest at the beginning dropped out before the interview. One moved to Colorado and indicated he did not want to conduct the research over the phone and meeting in person was not feasible, so he dropped out. The other one stated he was too busy. The three other participants agreed to continue with the study, signed the consent forms, and shared their shared experiences in the interviews. This chapter presents the results of those three interviews, starting with a brief profile of each participant, followed by a summary of the main topics and ideas from the interviews, and ending with specific concepts that emerged along with supporting quotes.

Participants

In the end, three men participated in this study throughout the entire process. The participants adopted the following pseudonyms to protect their anonymity throughout the study: Conscience, KD, and TJ. The following profiles summarize the men's current jobs, ages, education level, children, marital status, and goal. It also summarizes their former income from trafficking, drugs dealt, and age when they entered the drug-dealing lifestyle.

Introduction to Conscience

Conscience was the youngest participant of the study and also the one who was most recently involved in dealing drugs, having only stopped a year ago. He was in my previous program about 10 years ago in the mid-2000s. He also had some of the most recent major life events, including completing his GED and becoming a father. He was

the only participant who had to pursue a GED in lieu of a high school diploma. At the time of this study, he was in a major transition period in between his life of drug trafficking and trying to pursue more legitimate life goals, such as educational, career, and family goals. Table 1 presents a summary of his profile.

Table 1

Conscience's Profile

Profile Item	Description
Job	Social worker for local agency
Age	26 years old
Education	Recently finished his GED, currently enrolled at the University of Toledo
Children	First son born on September 26, 2015
Marital Status	Married
Current Goal	To finish college and become a director of a youth program.
Trafficking Income	\$2000–\$3500/week
Drugs dealt	“Every drug you can think of”
Age started dealing	~11 or 12 years old

Introduction to KD

KD participated in my program in early 2000s when he was a teenager. He is currently employed as a barber, but previously he tried to run his own barbershop. While he is passionate about being a barber, he stated that he did not have the necessary skills and habits to be a successful business owner, particularly regarding the legal and accounting demands. During the interview, he said he was happy to just be working as a barber. Table 2 summarizes KD's profile.

Table 2

KD's Profile

Profile Item	Description
Job	Barber and former business owner
Age	29 years old
Education	High school graduate with 1 ½ years of college
Children	Two boys
Marital Status	Divorced after eight years of marriage
Current Goal	To open and run his own business
Trafficking Income	\$2000–\$5000/week
Drugs dealt	Crack, cocaine, heroin, marijuana, opiates, pills
Age started dealing	14 years old

Introduction to TJ

TJ was the oldest participant with the highest level of education and the most experience in a straight-laced job. In the future, he hopes to develop a recreation facility for youths to help them stay off the streets and away from illegal activities, which is a natural progression from his current position as a substance abuse counselor. Table 3 provides a brief summary of the TJ's profile with items and descriptions.

Table 3

TJ's Profile

Profile Item	Description
Job	Substance abuse counselor
Age	30 years old
Education	High school graduate currently in second year of college
Children	Seven children: four girls, three boys
Marital Status	Single, never married
Current Goal	To open a youth recreational facility
Trafficking Income	\$1500–\$3000/week
Drugs dealt	Crack, heroin, marijuana, OxyContin, other prescription pills
Age started dealing	12 years old

Common Topics and Concepts

Throughout the interviews, I kept notes on the responses. Additionally, I read through the transcripts and highlighted common topics and concepts with margin notes on the meanings. This section presents the results of these notes.

Based on Rotter's theories of locus of control, I organized the results in terms of locus of control (internal or external control) and degree of control (no, low, or high degree). Although Rotter's locus of control questionnaire was not applied to this phenomenological study, based on the interview responses, I was able to fit the topics into the model. At each intersection of locus of control and degree of control is a general concept that ties together the specific topics. The general concepts that emerged from the interviews are choices, lifestyles, survival instincts, solutions, communities, and inevitabilities. Table 4 shows how these concepts and topics connect in relation to the locus and degree of control.

Table 4

Degree and Locus of Control

Degree of control	Locus of control	
	<i>Internal</i>	<i>External</i>
<i>No</i>	Survival instincts	Inevitabilities
<i>Low</i>	Lifestyles	Communities
<i>High</i>	Choices	Solutions

Survival Instincts: Internal Locus with No Control

Sometimes an individual feels like he or she must make a choice as a matter of life or death: survival. These behaviors are made at the basest level of the individual's

needs. Behavior at this level is practically instinct, hence the term: survival instincts.

Table 5 displays the most common topics related to this concept.

Table 5

Topics Related to Survival Instincts

Topic	Definition/Synonyms
Survival	Had to do what they did to survive, e.g., eat, pay bills, buy clothing
Robbing/stealing	Doing what you have to do to survive
No values	Don't care about anybody, do whatever you want
Selfish	Only the self matters, nothing and no one else
Self-raised	Absent parents and family figures, raised self and siblings

When the interviewees discussed the reasons they trafficked in drugs as teens, they rationalized their decisions in ways that fit in Rotter's locus of control as decisions that were internal but were largely out of control; in other words, some of their decisions were justified because they were a matters of survival and perceived needs. In this mindset, the right action depends on what meets one's own immediate needs and occasionally the needs of those close to the individual. The participants cited basic needs, such as the need for food, shelter, or clothing, as the initial factor leading them to begin making money by dealing drugs.

For instance: when talking with Conscience, he told me the primary motivating factor for getting involved with drug dealing was "Wearing three pairs of pants for school for a year." This type of response was typical for Conscience. He frequently answered questions in the form of a powerful symbolic image, but failed to elaborate on the meaning. Even though I understood the gist of his answer, I asked him more detailed questions to arrive at the essence of his experience. I asked him,

So survival?

Yeah.

Not having what you wanted?

[He replied] Not having what I needed. I can't even say not having what I wanted; not having what I needed.

“Not having what I needed,” for Conscience, included clothes, shelter, and family. He described how “My mom moved out when I was 11 years old, 12 year old sister taking care of me. We were barely surviving. That was my structure.”

Explaining the precipitating factors to his own decision to start dealing drugs, TJ also emphasized necessity but from a more general perspective. He explained,

Most of us [were on welfare]. I know our household was on welfare and about 90% of the community was on welfare. So you really get to see a whole lot of money around the 10th of the month, but when you see the people in the community who have money every day—it didn't matter if it was the first or 10th or the 15th—and found out how they got it, that's how I got involved in it.

So clearly, as youths, these men felt justified to start dealing because it satisfied a kind of necessity at first.

Lifestyles: Internal Locus with Low Control

Behaviors which one has some internal control over but are wrapped up in a way of life are called lifestyles. These decisions are made by the individual with strong influence and reinforcement from the lifestyle and persona created by the individual. The decisions associated with this lifestyle are controllable, but difficult to change because of habitual reinforcement. Table 6 displays the most common topics related to this concept.

Table 6

Topics Related to Lifestyles

Code	Definition/Synonyms
Gang	Belonging to a group, feeling loved by outsiders
Lifestyle	Life lived based on income afforded from work
Money	Everybody is trying to claim turf and make money
Change	No one can change you but yourself
Illusion	Living in a fantasy, not real for you
Risk	Selling drugs is worth the risk of getting caught
Reward	Money, girls, cars, and popularity: the lifestyle from selling drugs
Addiction	Addicted to using drugs <i>as well as</i> addicted to selling drugs; addiction can be to anything that one is impulsive about doing

Drug dealing is an addiction. TJ provided insight about the lived experience of being addicted to dealing. He told me, “it becomes a lifestyle that you become, that I became addicted to. I became too addicted to the lifestyle. I mean I really did.” He later claimed that in order to address and fix the problem of drug dealing, programs need to treat it as its own type of addiction—an addiction to a lifestyle and a mindset:

If you don't change the mindset, because you have to realize and a lot of people don't want to realize, what I've learned is drug trafficking is an addiction also.

And the only way you gonna combat drug trafficking is to deal with trafficking [directly and separately].

Likewise, Conscience described the lived experience of being a drug dealer as a kind of addiction. He told me, “Honestly, it's like, it's a high. It's a high. It's a high that's hard to kick.”

Because dealing is an addiction in and of itself, TJ argued that there is a problem with how it is legally and socially handled. His experience can serve as a critique the

supply-side attack used in the War on Drugs. He explained how targeting traffickers more harshly causes dealers to argue that they are actually users who are addicted to drugs. That way, they can get lesser charges and be put into rehabilitation and community service programs rather than getting incarcerated. Their lawyers tell them to do such because pleading guilty of drug use rather than trafficking is the easiest way to lessen the charges. However, that puts drug dealers and drug users in the same rehabilitation program, and TJ pointed out that if he is still in the drug-dealer mindset, then “that’s called a hook-up for me.” In other words, he now has a room full of potential customers. As an alternative, TJ argued that drug trafficking and drug using need to be treated equally but separately. He claimed both are addictions and should be treated as such, but when put together, it perpetuates the problem.

Choices: Internal Locus with High Control

For topics with high internal control, the participants had choices that they could have made or avoided. Anything one has the power to decide and choose fits within this concept. Table 7 presents the most common topics with their meanings concerning matters one has the agency to choose, decide, and change.

Table 7

Topics Related to Choices

Topic	Definition/Synonyms
Self-control	Making good decisions, controlling yourself, being responsible
Knowledge	Knowing how to make good choices
Information	Being wise, reading, and knowing what’s going on around you
Mindset	How one thinks, feeling like one’s choices affect one’s self

The men in this study referred to fairness as a sort of pragmatic reciprocity (you scratch my back, I’ll scratch yours) rather than absolute loyalty or gratitude. The

participants explained that the only loyalty and respect in the lived experience of dealing drugs were false types that depending on money and status. Again and again, the participants called this limited version of loyalty, trust, and reward a “mindset.” Mindset is something the men in this study indicated can and must be changed to address the problem.

TJ discussed mindset the most. For him, one mindset might look at a drug addict as someone who needs rehabilitation, whereas for him when he had the dealer mindset, he said “a user meant a hook-up for me.” He explained how

My curriculum would deal with mindset and change. . . . [Not addressing mindset] is like putting a person into a new house that can't take care of it. The house is gonna be torn down eventually. So you have to find a way, and my curriculum would also deal with change. It would deal with mindset.

In order to help change a young person’s mindset away from the dealing mentality, though, Conscience emphasized that it is necessary for leaders in the community to understand the dealer’s mindset. In other words, both parties need to change their mindset and meet in the middle. Conscience reflected,

What would make me want to do something different? And I thought of those people that were really there for me. And never ever gave up and never judged me at all. When I say I don't care if I was, if I'm in the streets and I'm banging, and they're right there on my side, they'll still come and talk with me like they don't even see what's going on with me. And just come down to, not down to my level, but come to my mindset.

Conscience is making a distinction between coming down to his level versus his mindset. It seems coming to his level implies adopting the entire drug trafficking lifestyle, while coming to his mindset means understanding what the lifestyle entails even if one has not experienced it firsthand.

One part of the mindset is a belief in the illusions of never-ending loyalty, popularity, money, and freedom. TJ told me “my mindset wasn't never on getting caught. Mindset wasn't never on any of that. My mindset was on this is money that is coming so good. This is gonna be here forever.” TJ also explained how he was fooled by other social reinforcements that in retrospect he now sees were illusory. He explained how he was swayed by the

false respect I got with [the money], the loyalty I had from, the false loyalty I had from the people using you. You actually put yourself on a pedestal. You feel like a king. Actually, you feel like an entertainer, getting out of your car and everyone's stepping around you want something from you, they want to be around you because you are the man selling drugs and they want to be around you because they need drugs or they want drugs, or some people just want to be around you.

Similarly, KD described how he “wanted the money, the cars, the women, the respect. That was the thing of growing up in the ‘hood. That's what you wanted.” KD also explained the difference between the behavior youths who deal today versus how they behaved when he was younger in terms of loyalty and respect. He claimed, “How things are on the street now, there's no respect for the game anymore.” For KD, respect for the game seemed to be a relativistic and pragmatic kind of respect that he perceives as having

been lost on the new generation of dealers. Sure they may have been breaking the law and running from the police, but the way they did it involved more respect for competing dealers and the police. KD tried to explain the difference:

When I was coming up, it was a lot of respect. You respected the guy you got from. You respected police. The respect has changed. And nowadays, there's no respect anymore. These kids are out there killing each other over nothing. Back in the day, it had to be a substantial amount. Nobody would rob you for petty change. We would say petty change is \$100 or something like that. If you were going to make a rob move, you knew this guy might've had a couple of keys [kilos] in the house, he might've had a couple ounces, he might've had \$20-\$30,000.

Clearly, the word “respect” here is highly relativistic. There appears to be a subtle difference that KD insisted exists regarding respect, but he repeats the word without seeming to get at the heart of the difference. While the distinction he makes appears to revolve the amount of money that makes robbery or murder worthwhile, it is a distinction without a difference. KD does not present the moral concept that theft is wrong or murder is wrong; he only asserts that robbing or killing someone for over \$20,000 is fairer and more respectful than “killing each other over nothing.” It is important to note that KD can only reliably speak about his own lived experience, while what he says about today’s young dealers must be seen through a lens of nostalgia while rationalizing his past behaviors.

All of these factors—the mindset, the belief in illusory lifestyle, and the knowledge or lack thereof—are all part of decision making that are within the control of the at-risk youth to change.

Inevitabilities: External Locus with No Control

All three cases pointed out some issues that were practically out of their control and out of the control of most people. I call these issues inevitabilities because they are bound to happen or seem bound to happen given the environment, history, and laws of nature. These are factors that one cannot change even with utmost amount of effort, or the amount of effort required to change it makes it practically unchangeable. Table 8 lists the topics related to the concept of inevitable and uncontrollable factors that can affect one’s life.

Table 8

Topics Related to Inevitabilities

Topic	Definition/Synonyms
Environment	Where you live, what’s going on in your neighborhood
Culture	Group of acceptable values existing in your environment
History	Relatives exhibit the same behaviors one generation after another
Nothing available	No jobs, youth clubs for young people
Nobody cares	Everyone is out for themselves, don’t care about you
Death	Loss of family and friends while locked up or on the run; not being able to see or attend services for loved ones; or being killed in the streets

Death is inevitable; it comes for all. However, depending on one’s lifestyle, it can come too early or it can come in the worst of times. So while death is out of one’s control, decisions can affect how or when one dies. Conscience, for example, explained seeing “15 to 20 dudes dead from gunshots, my dudes and family, dying, family passing

on.” Similarly, TJ pointed out how the experience of losing his grandparents while in prison was a major deterrent to the lifestyle. He recalled,

I lost my grandmother and my grandfather while I was incarcerated. And a lot of things I think about now in hindsight is she would always tell me when I called her is ‘I’m trying to make it until you come home.’ And she didn't make it. And that kind of stuff bothers me to this day. So that's part of my life experience.

So for TJ and Conscience, deaths of close ones strongly influenced them.

In addition to death being out of one’s control, one also cannot choose what family one is born into, yet family can have a serious impact. Conscience explained the converse situation, when family can have a negative influence. He posed a rhetorical question about what does one expect will happen “When the family's fighting at the barbecue, when your momma's about to get into it with your grandma. When your daddy's drinking too much. Police keep getting called to your house. Then the traditions.” Growing up with this experience, children and youths can be pushed and pulled into a life of dealing because it might actually offer a better quality of life than staying in an unstable home. He described how in such a setting, a gang becomes the family and the community. He said, “I don't even know what community means; I know the gang. I don't even know what neighborhood is; I know what the ‘hood is.” According to Conscience, the tradition is domestic violence, the community is the gang, and the neighborhood is the ‘hood.

Communities: External Locus with Low Control

Communities are groups we belong to where control is shared amongst each other, and while it is located externally, it is also somewhat controllable with enough

effort. Table 9 lists the common topics with the general definition of the meaning based on the interview transcripts and follow-up clarification questions.

Table 9

Topics Related to Community

Topic	Definition/Synonyms
Community	A sense of belonging among family, friends, neighbors, etc.
Trust	Developing a friendship and mutual interdependency with an individual, with whom one can talk to about anything
Making a Family	Caring about and being responsible for your own actions
No Ownership	Never owned anything, everything is given and rented
No Community Centers	No centers for young people to have recreational activities
No Parks/Recreation	No fun and safe places for youth to enjoy
Felony restrictions	People with a felony on their record are highly limited in their career paths and civic participation.
Nothing available	No jobs, youth clubs, etc. for young people
Bad influences	People who make poor choices and you follow in their footsteps by making the same choices.

One problem a couple cases pointed out that limits their control of the situation is the limitations placed on one based on having a felony on one's criminal record. For example, when applying for most jobs, the application asks if the applicant has ever been convicted of a felony. In all but the rarest cases, if the individual answers the felony prompt affirmatively, then they are excluded from the candidate pool. However, if the individual answers it negatively, then a background check will reveal their felony and they definitely will not be hired because they are both a felon and a liar on the application. In some cases, an applicant may slip through the hiring process by claiming they are not a felon if the employer does not conduct a background check, but as soon as that fact comes up, the employee will certainly be fired.

TJ described how this catch-22 affected his life and limited his ability to straighten out his life. He said,

One of the biggest things I found out: When you get a felony, it eliminates you from doing a lot of things. You can't even be a janitor in a post office. So, I was like what else am I gonna do? Even though I worked on myself in there, when I got out, the harsh reality was I didn't get a job right off the bat, I didn't do, couldn't get hired at any place. I had demands of probation, demands of parole, all that at the same time. So I really started dealing. I didn't get back to the magnitude that I was at before, but I did what you would call dabble and dabble in it until it got to a point where I was like, this is not going to work no more.

Later on, TJ added further explanation on the effect of felonies and how the current stigma limits people who have a lot to offer the community:

I think that the stigma of having people with felonies not working with youth, I think that's dead wrong. I think: who better to tell? Who better to show them than somebody who'd been through it and really had changed their life. But I think that's held back a lot because what I see out there today is a lot of people say, 'well he can't, you can't work with the youth because you have a felony.' But that same youth is on their way to a felony and they're not really gonna understand a person standing up there in a suit. Don't get me wrong, you can use both sides. But you have to use both sides. You have to use a person who's been through it and a person who's not been through it.

Conscience's experience also agrees with the value a former dealer with a felony mark can offer young people who are at risk of following the same path. As a social worker

working with young people, he has had friends who feel they have a lot to offer in that capacity as well. He told me,

I got lot of my dudes they tell me they wanna do what I'm doing. The majority of my dudes tell me they want to do what I'm doing. 'How you get that job? I'm trying to speak to the kids and everything, how you do that?' That's one of the first things.

Later on, he added, "Who better to teach the ones, than somebody who knows it?"

Clearly there is a desire to be a positive role model if it were not for the stigma and restrictions placed on felons.

Not only did TJ make a remark about the problem with a felony mark on one's record, KD also elaborated on the problem. He lamented,

I wish there was something we could do about the system, because if you go to prison nowadays, they label drug trafficking as a felony . . . first-time offenders, if they could just go into there and maybe drop it down to a misdemeanor. Because a lot people get out of jail and they want to do better, but it's just hard for them to do better when you have these felonies because now you can't find a job. Now you can't find another means of making money. So that's why a lot of our youth, our kids, adults, they go right back to the same thing. Because if you carry a felony, it's like you're boxed in. And it's not even, it's a non-violent felony, but nobody looks at what kind of felony it is. And I think it's kind of wrong, because it's a non-violent. Nobody killed anybody or put a gun to somebody's head or anything like that. When a lot of drug dealers go to jail and they get out, they have

nowhere to return. They have no other means, so a lot of them go back to the same thing and the cycle starts all over again.

KD's description of the cycle fits TJ's own example perfectly. In this context, the cycle implies an external locus of control and one with very low degrees of control. However, KD does not think there is no way to change this cycle, so at least he believes there is some hope for change. He points out the key, though, might be to define the crime as a misdemeanor. Whether this is the most feasible solution does not matter; the key here is that there is a chance for change if the crime and punishment can be redefined.

Otherwise, when the level of expectancy for reward from following a legitimate career remains low, the likelihood for straightening one's behavior remains low as well.

In addition to career opportunities or lack thereof, family is an important factor in either deterring or reinforcing an individual's likelihood of becoming a drug dealer, depending on how healthy and stable the relationship is. Making a family of one's own, unlike being born into a family, is within one's control. With the right choices, major family milestones such as marriage and having children can help dealers escape their lifestyle. When asked what deterred him from the lifestyle, KD said,

I got married, and just wised up over the years. I've always had a firm foundation as far as my mom and everything. And it was, she always preached to me, 'Boy, one day you're gonna have to work.' And it just finally sunk in. And once I wanted to get married to my wife, that was one of the terms she put out there: she didn't want to marry a drug dealer. That kind of put it to the end right there.

So both his wife and his mother helped provide him with an alternative lifestyle that rewarded him for avoiding the drug-dealing life. He also mentioned how maturing and having children of his own deterred him as well. He recounted,

Before, I was juvenile, then, but now, after being 18 years, now I'm an adult. So you start looking at the consequences of how much time you can do now. I started having kids, too. So I had to think of them, and being away from my kids and those were things, too, that kind of—with my wife putting out there that she didn't want me to be a drug dealer—those were the things that kind of deterred me from selling drugs.

For KD at least, his mother, his wife, and his children helped rescue him from living the life of a drug trafficker.

Solutions: External Locus with High Control

Towards the ends of the interviews, I discussed some ideas for solving some of the problems they identified earlier on. These solutions are generally outside of the individual's control, but they are changeable with enough group effort. Table 10 catalogs the topics and definitions related to solutions based on the interviews.

Table 10

Topics Related to Solutions

Topic	Definition/Synonyms
Education	Encouraging youths to stay in school and get a good education
Increase ownership	The inner city is full of people who never owned anything, everything is given and rented, but ownership is necessary to build responsibility.
Employment alternatives	Without available alternatives for income, youths are likely to start dealing, continue dealing, and return to dealing.
Open community & recreation centers	Not enough centers for young people to socialize and have recreational activities in a positive way
Become father figures	Few responsible males to guide youths, look up to, give direction,

12-step program	support and love without conditions
Invest in property	Program that helps individuals with addictions
	Buy and own your own property, business

One topic of interest brought up by all of the participants is the issue of alternative sources of income. One of the driving factors for dealing drugs according to the participants lived experiences is a lack of employment opportunities. When asked to offer a deterrent to drug dealing, KD explained:

First of all, if we could, especially in our community, if we could link up with maybe—I know, there's a lot of lawncare businesses, car washes in our community—if we could link up with them, and see if we can hire some of these kids. Because the one thing, we do have to give them some money. They have to make some kind of, even if it's not what they used to make, it's gotta be something. At least try to give them a chance to try to make a couple dollars because some of these kids have to take care of themselves when they come home. So they're gonna need something, income to bring in. Then I would say we go into the educating, getting them into the GED classes. Some of them might be young enough; maybe we can get them back into some kind of high school curriculum where they can earn their diploma, say. And then I would say after that, see if we can get them into some kind of trade school, maybe college anything along that line. And I say that. But the most important thing is that we would have to try to get into some kind of employment.

Noting the stark reality of the situation, though, KD cautioned that a program for youths that used legitimate employment as an alternative would also have to prepare the young person's expectations. Although he has never studied Rotter, from his lived experience,

KD knew that the wrong expectancy can affect the likelihood of a desired behavior to occur. He cautioned,

We [would have to] explain to them, ‘no, you're not gonna make the money you used to make, but it's gonna be something. You're gonna have a couple of dollars in your pocket, to be able to eat or if you want to buy something.’

TJ made the same point, emphasizing that any solution needs to involve a replacement for drug trafficking. He recommended,

I would suggest we offer them something to replace the drug trafficking and the drug dealing. Because it's easy to say ‘stop doing it,’ but do you have a job for me? . . . I don't have a GED, I don't have a high school diploma, I can't pay for a GED, . . . I don't have money to pay rent. So these are the things you have to replace. You have to have something in place to replace the drug trafficking. And that's what's needed the most for African American males, for real.

Likewise, Conscience reinforced the idea that an employment alternative is essential.

Always one for getting straight to the point, he said, “You ain't got nothing to influence them. It's like, give them something. Give them a job.”

Conscience also provided great insight into the learning process when he discussed the effect the environment he grew up in has on children. His observations reinforce what the social learning theory asserts: that learning happens all the time and it develops from the interaction between the environment and the individual. Conscience explained:

You are fertile in the mind, so you grasp everything quick. I learned when I got older, you're supposed to learn from the inside out, but growing up in the urban

community, the ‘hood, you grow up from the outside in. Your environment teaches you. The school teaches you, your homies do. Then you get home. The home is toxic. The home is already toxic. You get to school, with your homies. You meeting them, and they going do shit at home. Then you get on the block. On the block out there, that's your cycle you grew up with. Ain't no traditions.

Conscience is skeptical of the belief that young people are supposed to learn from the inside out, or, in other words, from some kind of internal logical, cognitive, and behavioral system. His astute observation is that learning actually comes from the environment, and children—with their fertile mind—are the most susceptible to the influence.

Summary

The locus of control and social learning theory framework developed by Julian Rotter helped organize the shared lived experiences the men in this study had when dealing drugs and in the time since they have left such a life. There are many external factors that affect one's life and also there are many factors that are out of one's control, at least on an individual basis. The results of this research have shown, however, that having more positive alternatives for living a productive life within the law is necessary. Social belongingness besides gangs is needed as an alternative to troubled homes, community centers are needed to replace the life of the streets and the ‘hood, and work and career opportunities are needed to replace the attraction of income from dealing drugs. The men in this dissertation are not bad men, in fact, their choices as adults show they desire success as legitimate and stable family and career men. They also want to be positive role models for today's youth. However, their mindset (i.e., personality) as

youths was shaped by their social environment: troubled home lives, basic needs not being met, attractive lifestyles of dealers, a desire for belonging filled by gangs, and no realistic expectation for an alternative lifestyle not involving drug dealing. As a result, the likelihood that these men and young African-American men today who grow up in similar situations end up in the life of drug trafficking is high given the expectancy and reward factors.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

The interviews with the participants were very informative. I knew that when I first embarked on working with this population that the lived experience selling drugs would be interesting, to find out exactly why these young men risk long prison terms and the possibility of death to sell drugs. I learned that two of the participants sold more drugs inside of prison than they did on the streets. Drug dealing in prison was lucrative. One participant even stated that he was saddened to be released on the day that he was released from prison. He said that he never went without anything because the prison personnel would bring in the drugs, and whatever else that he wanted including providing sexual favors on a weekly basis. He stated that several guards were heavily addicted to drugs and maintained their employment.

I also found out that drug dealing is an awful, cruel way of making money. One participant stated that he “served” his mother and sister, meaning he sold them drugs on a daily basis. His reasoning was that at least he kept the money in the household and that they would buy from his competitor regardless. He did this with no thought or feeling for the broad-scope and long-term consequences.

All of the participants recognized that their behaviors were driven by the money, fast life styles, cars, women, and the false sense of power.

Environmental factors, lack of good parenting skills, lack of having clothing, lights/gas, were one of the biggest factors. All of the participants listed survival as their reason. One participant said that he lived next door to a dope house, and that a dope house was across the street from him. One participant said that having everyone respect

him was very socially rewarding. The participants felt that they had no other way to earn money and that staying in school prevented them from having what they and their siblings needed.

Education was not an option. One participant said that his mother always encouraged him to get his diploma, and as a result he did graduate. Another participant also received his diploma, but not because his mother encouraged him. He said that he wanted to graduate. The 3rd participant said that he more recently received his G.ED. And that he is enrolled at a local university. Another participant is also enrolled and will be graduating in December 2015 from the university. I learned that these boys to men do have fears, do have feelings, remorse, and compassion. All regret their behaviors and actions.

All of the participants would like to contribute to society by giving of time to help others. All stated that if during their time of poor decisions had a mentor or individual work with them/talk that perhaps life would have been different. Another big factor was employment opportunities, recreational centers/gyms that they felt would have kept them out of trouble and might have kept them out of the streets.

In the late '80s when my former director challenged me to develop a program, I would have never thought that I could become passionate about working with this population. Some 30 years later I am still passionate and learning. I use to think that these young people were hard, unlovable creatures without hearts. How could they contribute to killing addicts? How could they help to destroy our community and lives of people for the selfish gain of money? I felt that these youth were a menace to our society and should be given long prison terms, the attorneys should go to jail for representing them and

telling them how to get lighter sentences. I was angry because I felt as though this was a revolving door. It is necessary to work closely with these young people, create change, and provide a forum for them to speak and act constructively. Take back the streets by providing opportunities. I talk to law officials, parole officers, probation officers, judges, etc. Everyone has said we need more dollars and funding to hire people to work with this population; more importantly, though, we need to be smarter with how the money is spent. We have to rehabilitate them, not incarcerate them.

All drug dealers are not meant to go to detention centers/jail. We have to begin working on behaviors and provide opportunities for these young people. We have to tell them to stay in school and get their education, we have to align them with positive role models, teach them skills, be mothers and fathers to them and then tell them that they too must give back, ask them to dream, but to be realistic, tell them to register for apprenticeship programs and colleges. Tell them that they have the responsibility to save our communities. Put away the weapons and stop killing each other.

I learned in these interviews that this has to be a community wide effort to discontinue drug traffickers from selling drugs. I learned that our policy makers have to support and fund programs that work with the population. I learned that we must redirect the thinking of our young people and together we can live in a safer community.

This phenomenological study helped me to design an effective program curriculum. Our young people want direction, but they also need encouragement, and opportunities presented to them. We are not ever going to eradicate drug trafficking. but we can work tirelessly to make a difference and possibly, save some young lives and persons using drugs.

Programs that do not offer prevention services, counseling, mentoring, anger management, victim empathy, drug and alcohol services, and GED services to youth will contribute to delinquent behaviors and crimes in our communities. Another important factor when working with this population is that programs be culturally specific and appropriate.

The profile of the drug traffickers have changed, to overt attention directed toward them. The drug traffickers have become more intelligent, less fashionable, and more enterprising. Many continue to make large sums of money dealing drugs and are thus difficult to convince that crime doesn't pay. We have to develop programs and show all individuals alternatives to life.

Community based programs are not available, job skills trainings, soft skills, apprenticeship programs, college opportunities ,job opportunities, GED classes, recreational programs available, nor responding to the needs of the population. Therefore a need for specific programming has to be designed and implemented.

Drug trafficking in the community needs to be dealt with effectively, or criminal drug activities will continue to plaque the community at alarming rates.

Relation to Social Learning Theory

Rotter's social learning theory mirrors that of the participants in my case study. All of the participants during the interviews stated that the environment was what first influenced their behaviors. One participant stated that it was a dope house next door to him as well as one across the street from him. Another said that all of his family members were drug dealers and still are today. He also stated that when he was released from prison that ,one of his family members welcomed him home and handed him a sack to get

started, day one. The participants said that the drug dealers were their mentors, because they had the money, cars, pretty women, and power and they too wanted to experience that same type of lifestyle.

Rotter said that personality, and therefore behavior, is always changeable. Change the way the person thinks, or change the environment the person is responding to, and behavior will change. Rotter does not believe there is a critical period after which personality is set. However, the more life experience one has building up certain sets of beliefs, the more effort and intervention required for change to occur. Rotter sees people as being drawn forward by their goals, seeking to maximize their reinforcement, rather than just avoid punishment.

The participants goals of living began as a means of survival turned into a way of lifestyle. Additionally, the rewards outweighed the consequences. As mentioned before, Rotter has four main components to his social learning theory predicting behavior: behavior potential, expectancy, reinforcement value, and the psychological situation. The behavior potential is defined as the likelihood of engaging in a particular behavior in a specific situation. Individuals will exhibit whichever behavior has the highest potential. Expectancy is defined as the subjective probability that a given behavior will lead to a particular outcome, or reinforce the outcome. Expectancies are formed based on past experiences. In the experiences of the participants whom I interviewed, they indicated they knew what they were doing was wrong however, but they reported that they must sell this dope in order to feed their own addiction. They were obsessed with making more money regardless of whom they hurt.

Reinforcement value is defined as reinforcement is another name for the outcomes of one's behavior. Reinforcement value refers to the desirability of these outcomes: what we want to happen, that we are attracted to, and that have a high reinforcement value. As the name social learning theory suggests, the social environment is of primary importance in shaping our behavior. Social outcomes, such as approval, love or rejection are powerful influences on our behaviors. One participant said that he was 16 years old with his own apartment and only dated women in their late 20's and 30. He referenced himself as being the man who had it all. Fast cars, money, and all the women wanted him. That was or meant power to him. One participant said he thought this lifestyle was forever. He knew nothing different.

Psychological Situation is defined as each individual's experience of the environment is unique. Rotter believed that different people interpret the same situation differently. Different people will have different expectancies and reinforcements and values in the same situation. Thus, it is people's subjective interpretation of the environment, rather an objective array of stimuli, that is meaningful to them and that determines how they behave.

Recommendations

One recommendation is that more scholars need to conduct research on the behavioral and social factors that influence young black men to live lives of crime and particularly drug dealing. Even though this lifestyle is omnipresent in the media, it is surprisingly under-researched in the academic world. That means most of what we think we know about this life is sensationalized, exaggerated, and skewed.

Another recommendation is that programs geared towards drug dealers, whether rehabilitative or punitive in nature, need to treat drug dealing as its own kind of addiction: an addiction to a lifestyle. Additionally, solutions need to target both drug dealing and drug using as equal but separate parts of the same equation. The men in this study and men like them are filling roles of supply and demand. It is not enough to be harshly punitive on one side of the equation while treating the other as an addiction. The logic of any program or solution needs to treat both sides in the same way. That is why the program I propose below addresses drug dealers specifically and recognizes that they are addicted to a mindset and a lifestyle that must be treated with alternative replacements that are more positive, empowered, and socially constructive.

Program Curriculum

Based on the results of the interviews with former drug dealers and the theories presented by Rotter, the biggest change I have made between the curricula of past programs and the current one I am proposing is in regards to what external issues need to be addressed. Previously, my own perspective and the intervention program I created focused almost entirely on individual responsibilities and consequences. In the current curriculum, this internal locus of control remains, but the external locus of control is addressed as well. Based on this realization, more social and community involvement from the participants in the program is expected. The participants will have to become the role models they wanted to have growing up, thereby empowering the participants and giving them purpose and responsibility as well as increasing the presence of positive male role models in the community. Having former dealers become role models and

leaders for others addresses the point Conscious made that “you have to use a person who’s been through it and a person who’s not been through it” presenting to the youth.

Additionally, this proposed program treats drug dealers as individuals addicted to a lifestyle just like drug users are addicted to their drug of choice. This social addiction needs to be broken just like drug addictions are broken: by providing alternatives to replace the addiction. In fact, recent research on the psychology of addiction conducted by Alexander (2000; 2008) have strongly supported that all addictions are actually social problems; the more fragmented the community, the higher the addiction rates and addiction can be treated by developing the community and the sense of social belonging. Thus, this program attempts to empower the participants and show them positive ways to belong to the community.

The program will be a 12-week program, and participants will be referred from parole/probation officers, courts, schools. Program will be run daily Monday-Friday for 2 hours with the exception of days that field trips will be scheduled out of town. The program will culminate with a ceremony during which they will be presented with their certificate of completion.

Specifically, the participants emphasized that all the programs in the world will not make a dent in the drug trafficking issue if there is not something in place to *replace* drug trafficking in terms of educations as the means and a decent job as the end. As a result, I built in more educational and career-centered goals and opportunities to the current curriculum. I also incorporated more community involvement and service into the program so that the participants can simultaneously learn from the experience and teach/guide/help others.

Curriculum Goals

The curriculum goals are divided into three components: self-awareness and mindset; education and career paths; and community needs. For each of the components below, the participants will:

Self-Awareness & Mindset

1. Become aware of strengths and passions.
2. Write about the consequences of drug dealing.
3. Identify other choices and opportunities to address survival needs.

Education & Career Paths

1. Earn or develop a plan to earn diplomas or GEDs.
2. Make career/educational choices.
3. Identify their career path with the resources needed to pursue it.

Community Needs

1. Commit to volunteer as a mentor for other youths.
2. Agree to be an agent of change
3. Give back to the community

Schedule of the 12-Week Program

- ***Week 1***
 - Introductions of staff, participants
 - Expectations, Rules
 - Reviewed
 - Get to know you questionnaire
 - Identify short-term goals

- 15 minute one on one interview with staff
- Discuss current education status
- What are the participant's expectations?
- Open discussion with former drug dealers
- **Week 2**
 - Pre-employment training skills
 - Soft skills training
 - Apprenticeship (visit)
 - 2/4 year college (visit)
 - GED Instructor for individuals needing to start or complete
 - Resume building
 - Pre/post testing
 - Mock interviewing
- **Week 3**
 - Discussion with former and current drug users
 - Short term goals/long term goals
 - Identify what career paths they want to pursue
 - Visits to prisons (scheduled)
- **Week 4**
 - Recreation at the gym
 - Pot luck w/families and guest
 - Bowling outing
 - Begin journaling about self, daily writing and submit

- Apprenticeship 2nd visit
- Guest speakers – different careers
- **Week 5**
 - 2nd week of journaling
 - Hospital visit to view babies who have been born addicted, with permission from parents.
 - Writing assignment on who am i?
 - Movie outing (group choice)
- **Week 6**
 - Hiv/aids 3 day presentations
 - Speaker's forum participants go to local schools to speak to young people about selling drugs
 - Journaling
- **Week 7**
 - Charles Wright Museum Detroit, Michigan scheduled visit
 - Participants will identify and discuss behaviors that led them to make poor choices
 - Why is Education important?
- **Week 8**
 - Scheduled Job Interviews
 - Dressing for Success
 - Former Drug dealers speak
 - In-house Activity

- ***Week 9***
 - How and what can I do to prevent trafficking in our communities?
 - Am I my Brother's Keeper Conference and reference model
 - Attorney's meet to help get records expunged
- ***Week 10***
 - Writing assignment (2-pages): living with my pain and pain that I caused to others
 - Resume Writing
 - Job Interviews
 - Visits to local learning institutions
- ***Week 11***
 - Former Drug Traffickers-Speak Out
 - volunteer giving back - Cherry Street Mission, senior centers,
 - Apprenticeship Visit 3 for participants to take inventory test and register.
Only interested participants
 - Job Interviews
- ***Week 12***
 - Sign Commitment to be a Volunteer
 - Last Journal Submission
 - Certificate/Ceremony for family and friends

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