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# **Market testing and market policing: illuminating the fluid micro-sociology of the illegal drug supply enterprise in liquid modernity**

## **A qualitative enquiry into West of Scotland drug dealers' constructions of urban turf**

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### **Abstract**

Understanding Scotland's illegal drug market continues to challenge social scientists. Most evidently neglected are processes related to social supply, from *supplier* perspectives. When analysing illegal drug markets, demand-based approaches, customarily sourcing drug users, grossly overlook supplier perspectives. Thus, a qualitative research inquiry interviewing former drug dealers facilitated exploration of a supply-based approach that detailed processes of supply in relation to market level. Situating the findings within the disruptive lens of Chatwin and Potters' (2014) concept of extending drug use normalisation to embrace a dimension of market fluidity to drug supply dealing in Scotland, the researchers interviewed 35 former drug suppliers, learning about drug distribution behavioural patterns. Retail-level dealerships and higher market echelons exemplified an embodiment of the complexity of this social world. Any model aimed at characterising Scotland's illegal drugs market must acknowledge and incorporate aspects of social supply (e.g. recreational drugs) and recognise the fluid nature of 'normalisation', taking account into its tacit embeddedness in a 'local economy' with its own history and distinctive cultural geography. Unless the nuances of these various social formations are acknowledged the potential of national policing strategies to address the crimes connected with drugs will go unrealised due to their conceptual and pragmatic inadequacies. It is ironic that a commitment to a generalised drug market conception of official enforcement is likely to sow the seeds for an unnecessary criminalisation of minor serendipitous offenders and encourage reoffending patterns.

**Keywords:** drug dealing, fluidity, markets, normalization, police, Scotland.

### **Introduction**

The paper presents primary qualitative empirical research findings from field work undertaken during 2014-16 in urban areas of the West of Scotland. This project was designed to explore drug supplier perspectives and identify market complexity, especially the extent of its labour fluidity, including 'normalisation' and drug supplier opportunistic diversity, as the locally mobile street actors that were interviewed construed their liquid social world of the

marginalised inner-city street. We argue Police Scotland's policing strategy, grounded in an 'one-size-fits-all' homogeneous interpretation of the *Misuse of Drugs Act* in 1971, whose general objective was to disrupt illegal drug supply, may require detailed re-focussing and a departure from what Zygmunt Bauman terms 'solid modernity'. The choice of informants offers an insider perspective on this phenomenon. Our contribution to knowledge falls within the exploratory methodological aperçu of the renowned Chicago School of Sociology which, unlike the Positivists, combines qualitative data into narrative expression, privileging urban interest and qualitative methodology. The work of R.T. Park and E.W. Burgess was foundational to its scientific orientation to *illuminate* phenomena rather than pursue generalisability and hypothesis testing.

The theoretical basis for Western industrialised nations' market economies was developed by Adam Smith (1723-1790) and David Ricardo (1772-1823). Market economies work on the premise that supply and demand forces are the most suitable mechanisms for achieving aggregate wellbeing and national prosperity. Government intervention is minimal, with the legal system playing the role of a final arbiter, should conflict between the parties, in this capitalist free-market cash-nexus, threaten to disrupt the flow of transactions. The recently published government report entitled '*Scotland's Serious Organised Crime Strategy*' (2015) (SSOCS) epitomises contemporary lack of acknowledgement of the local nuances of drug supply within neighbourhoods. Alluding to a top down organisational system enabling the unified flow of drugs, the report overlooks intricate local processes involved in illicit drug distribution. Not only, therefore, does this criminal market economy challenge conventional thinking about aggregate wellbeing, the opacity inherent in illegal economies, which are characterised by disruption, means identifying drug distribution is a matter of calculative estimation rather than certainty. The endeavour in this paper is to illuminate social constructions of illegal market economies in terms of their micro-sociological functioning, as this is understood by those who participate in this criminalised field.

A discussion of drug supply economic models is beyond the purpose of this article, which aims to foreground illegal drug market complexities and develop a greater understanding of the dynamic of actual supply processes within a Scottish context where, if a choice of model is required, a fluid mixed-economy embrace affords a potentially apposite typology. Furthermore, by applying focus at retail-level dealerships, and to a lesser extent mid-level distribution, the paper highlights the failure of SSOCS to recognise a highly-fragmented market as evident, and this foregrounds inadvertent criminalising tendencies which can occur when adopting a broad over-arching criterion. Throughout history, for medicinal and recreational reasons, the amelioration of the human condition is replete with a relationship with psychoactive substances. Yet, despite this apparent normalisation of drug consumption, the conundrum has developed whereby the modern state control of social life has occurred alongside urbanisation in developed western societies where an anti-drug discourse has been in the ascendency for some forty years (Inglis, 1975). Complex cultural and socioeconomic globalisation processes, not to mention the intensity with which individuals are globally mobile, saw something of a transplant of the US style '*War on Drugs*' into Europe, although this policy has become, in more recent decades more nuanced and even includes recognition of cannabis as therapeutic. The current period, however, is marked by criminalisation symbolised through anti-drug discourse (Justice Policy Institute, 2008). Empirically we see its impact on the demography of custodial settings: in the US federal prison service roughly half

of inmates are serving custodial sentences for drug offences whereas a modest 7% are incarcerated for violent crimes (Carson, 2014, p.17).

In Britain, the *Misuse of Drugs Act 1971* enshrines a hegemonic anti-drugs discourse providing the legislative base for anti-drug criminal justice infrastructures (Police Foundation, 2000; Release, 2009; Sentencing Council, 2012). In Scotland, the 2008 publication '*The Road to Recovery: A new approach to tackling Scotland's drug problem*' elaborates and outlines the Scottish National Party's (SNP) ambition to make Scotland 'drug free' before 2019. While the SNP's Report generally approaches drug use from treatment based, welfare perspectives, SSOCS deals directly with halting the illegal supply economy, suggesting a more punitive US emphasis. The details of this paradigm, and its international adherents are explored in the next section.

### **Drug supply in Scotland: Market fluidity and policy (miss-)modelling**

Scotland's 2015 SSOCS is the main report platform expressing Police Scotland's serious and organised crime policy strategy. Accrediting 65% of overall organised criminal activity to drug supply – 70% of which is attributed to the West of Scotland – the report sets out strategies aimed at disrupting illegal drug markets. May and Hough (2004) conceptualise a general typology of illegal markets into either 'top down' or 'fragmented' and admit complex overlaps of these conjectured types. Expanding the top down conceptualisation, Coope and Bland (2004) outline a rigid hierarchical, three tier model, as being applicable to a Scottish context. However, while alluding to a similar top down system, the SSOCS fails directly to affirm either model, which may indicate a decision to conceal their approach so as not to jeopardise policing effectiveness. Failure to indicate market structure and recognise market fluidity, however, neglects temporal and local complexity and processes of supply that are one of the factors that lever market complexity.

Consequently, ignoring crucial knowledge about the empirical landscape of illegal drug markets and their supply dimensions, criminal justice representation will prove problematic when implementing grass roots tactical planning and enforcement. In addition, the SSOCS report fails to acknowledge distinctions between organised crime typologies. Instead, a generalised approach is adopted: only organised crime as a whole is broadly outlined, and according to the report it '*a) involves more than one person, b) is organised, meaning that it involves control, planning and use of specialist resources, c) causes, or has the potential to cause, significant harm, and d) involves benefit to the individuals concerned, particularly financial gain.*' (SSOCS, 2015. P6). Those meeting these prescriptive criteria are referred to as Serious Organised Crime Groups (SOCGs). However, overarching official descriptors designed to create 'one size fits all' definitions of criminality fail to distinguish between crime typologies and the unique processes that accompany different crime families. Similarly, all-encompassing definitions designed for criteria fitting national organisational purposes may inadvertently criminalise minor offenders, and so wastefully divert scarce policing resources.

Recent decades have seen criminological scholarship pursue attempts to provide satisfactory illegal drug market definitions, yet these efforts have, unsurprisingly, proved problematic, partly due to the challenges of accessing empirical data to inform the pursuit; drug market activities are illicit, so finding suitable informants is difficult (Coomber, 2004). As mentioned,

May and Hough (2004) provide two distinct conceptualisations, yet note the drug market's capacity for rapid response to perceived external threats, which means supply processes may be nuanced and mobile, emerging and disappearing rapidly whilst cloaked by a chameleon capacity to blend with the urban milieu. Lower market regions connected with drugs that have a lower financial mark-up particularly may prove highly fragmented, with not all transactions commercially motivated. Market relations are homogenous neither by drug type nor by drug user. Adopting a top down perspective, Preble and Casey (1969) outline a simplistic model, integrating several levels of contextual interaction. While numerous street dealers may operate retail-level dealerships, the apex consists of a few transnational large scale importers who will utilise the local expertise to distribute.

Pearson and Hobbs (2001) identified three distinct market levels, and account for middlemen linking top and bottom, such as drug runner Ricky Ross who supplied L.A street gangs with cocaine (Alonso, 2004). Instead of advocating a unified national market, they present a series of loosely connected localised markets with regional variations, and conjecture their existence. However, recent studies, Densley (2012) and Pitts (2008) being notable examples, arguably present empirically convincing data indicating an increase in street gang involvement within illegal drug markets spanning several levels in the hierarchy of drug markets. Additionally, Chatwin and Potter (2014) found that social supply dealers are common at retail-level, but also regularly shift back and forth along dealership continuums, sometimes acting as level intermediaries. In Scotland Coope and Bland (2004) attempted to analyse a regional drugs market, concluding a three-tier pyramid structure consisting of international, middle, and retail-level dealerships. However, McPhee et al (2009) found lines of drug business between levels and note that the specific roles within them are unclear, making formalised classification intractable. Scholarly efforts aimed at tackling an understanding of Scottish drug supply must account for the market complexity identified in the literature and increased apparent normalisation of drug supply, not in a normative sense, but rather in terms of these markets appearing to have developed an embeddedness in certain areas (Chatwin and Potter, 2014). The next section pursues further the normalisation perspective.

### **The 'Normalisation' of drug supply**

The sociology of deviance has progressed beyond viewing users as a deviant sub-group in cultural studies scholarship. Traditional studies conceptualise drug use as abnormal and deviant (Blackman, 2004) yet Parker et al (2008) found some recreational drugs like cannabis and dance drugs like ecstasy have steadily become more accessible and apparently socially accepted, to some extent and to a degree of use and drug type, among some sections within the UK class structure, although ambivalence towards drug use of all types challenges the validity of any normalisation thesis. Young people specifically were found to come into frequent contact with drugs, thus demystifying some drug use processes. Some would consume drugs sporadically, if only with experimental intent, while others would become regular users and incorporate drug use into otherwise law-abiding citizenship. Interestingly, law-abiding citizens who did not, nor had ever, participated in drug use still frequently associated with individuals who had used drugs, including regular users, suggesting processes of (some) acceptance or (some) greater tolerance of life-style differences. Drug use was by

no means confined to putatively deviant populations, but had gradually been integrated into mainstream culture via processes of apparent normalisation.

Although media sources have been somewhat readily accepting of the normalisation thesis, academics have, understandably, approached it with scepticism. While Shildrick (2002) argues the normalisation process is a largely oversimplified model, neglecting the impact of wider socioeconomic factors, Shiner and Newburn (1999) go further and argue that Parker et al have exaggerated findings of fairly ubiquitous, and historically rooted, drug experimentation among youth groups. Although South (1999) acknowledges outright drugs use may not have become the norm, nonetheless drug use no longer retains the symbolic deviancy it once expressed. Rather, whether retaining negative or positive connotations, aspects of drug use have become part of contemporary life in the UK; in this sense it would stretch the sociology of deviance arguments to apply them to drug use and dealing in contemporary UK.

Extending the normalisation theory, Chatwin and Potter (2014) draw attention to unforeseen consequences drug use may have had in establishing normalisation of drug supply, particularly among lower market levels. The authors point out conventional wisdom informs public audiences that drugs dealers lack basic moral attachments and are driven exclusively by financial gain. Furthermore, proactive dealers acquiring the largest and wealthiest clientele are also the most successful, occupying the apex of organised criminal drug markets. Yet while public hostility towards such 'successful' individuals enticing the next generation into what medical authorities would deem addictive drug use is an endorsement of government efforts to capture the amorphous constituency of apparent amoral dealers, the scholars argue the top down analysis, presumed to be valid by government, lacks traction in the case of other prevalent drug supply processes. In reality traditional stereotypes contained within policing of drugs models and used to identify those who supply drugs often do not fit the ground on which they conduct this illegal practice (Coomber, 2006; Coomber and Turnbull, 2007). Pointing to cannabis supply, Chatwin and Potter (2014) emphasis this misconception and, therefore, the lacunae in our knowledge.

These authors suggest instead that many users are also recognised dealers within their own social networks. Supply may not only be occasional behaviour, but can continue to occur over a considerable duration. Contrary to traditional belief that drug supply typically occurs via open markets where profit driven street dealers openly sell to anyone (Venkatesh, 2008), increasingly research has shown supply predominantly to occur within informal closed markets based within more trusted networks involving friends and acquaintances (Nicholas, 2008). Although elements of sociability involved in drug supply have long been recognised, contemporary behavioural patterns suggest social drug supply to be on the rise as a growing number of users are simultaneously becoming suppliers, which is unsurprising given the street knowledge and expertise gained through contact with suppliers. Consequently, traditional deviant stereotypes of drug dealers are eroding, as distinctions between user/supplier are blurring, with many users regularly adopting both social supplier and drug dealing work behaviours (Coomber and Moyle, 2014; McPhee, 2013), whose fluidity is readily accommodated by Bauman's liquid modern theorisation.

So far, we have argued that deriving information from official statistical data connected with Police Scotland and its drug prevention and policing strategy aimed at disrupting the flow of illegal drugs via SOCGs does not adequately reflect the reality on the ground of processes involved in drug supply within distributional networks. Official statistics gathered by law enforcement agencies are flawed in several ways, namely a) data represents only those who have been arrested, b) arrests may be driven by external factors and current policy, and c) official sources, such as the British Crime Survey, are limited in the questions they pose and additionally require electoral enrolment (Hutton, 2005). Likewise viewing drug supplying of various substances from user perceptions accessed via treatment centres may fail to account for complexities connected with wider networks of drug distribution. In the light of this review and the identification, through analysis, of gaps in knowledge, the choice of methodology for this study is designed to tap the knowledge of those actively participating in drug supply markets.

### **Methodology**

In order to ground our perspective in empirical realities our methodology is to access data from informants whose knowledge and insight is derived from work on the streets in drug supply processes (Chatwin & Potter, 2014; Hutton, 2005). Qualitative interviews are effective when investigating marginalised, hard-to-reach, or secretive groups and their voices (Bhopal and Deuchar, 2015). As little is known about actual processes of drug supply within Scotland's illicit drugs market in the West of Scotland from supplier perspective, our inductive methodology helped prevent us pre-judging the area.

The 35 participants whom we interviewed were recruited by adhering to the following criteria: a) they had experience of drug (of varying categories) supply, b) they were or had been involved in what the SSOCS identifies as SOCGs, and c) they were over 16 years of age. Initially key gatekeepers from voluntary organisations were used to access these participants, yet due to the illicit nature of drug supply, a snowball sample technique was later applied with our initial consenting participants, a process of sample formation used widely in complex areas of vulnerability and criminality. Due to some participants' local notoriety among associates and the authorities, voluntary organisations who facilitated our field work cannot be named as this could compromise participant safety and confidentiality.

The conduct of data collection through semi-structured interview methods took cognisance of opportunity, informant history and capacity to build rapport. Interviews ranged from between 1 to 5 sessions whose individual duration ranged from 30 minutes to 120 minutes. Interviews generally took place in public places, although some were held within settings personal to interviewees. In this way, our flexibility helped respect the agency of these vulnerable informants. Once interviews were recorded and transcribed, the original digital tape recordings were deleted. Data analysis was conducted in accordance with Glaser and Strauss' (1967) grounded theory where, as noted earlier, it is an iterative process whereby theory development gives especial attention to the meaning of the raw data and themes are inductively developed.

All participants ranged from 17 – 27 years of age and had held residency in and around the city of Glasgow for most of their lives with their extended families. They were white and of working-class status. The researcher's prior history with, and knowledge of, the region

enabled pre-existing connections with hard-to-reach groups to be accessed and facilitate sample recruitment. All participants were male and considered themselves indigenous to the areas in which they were domiciled. In terms of life histories concerning drug supply and drug use, most informants were found to have, or have had, some form of drug addiction connected with various substances including class A drugs. Addictions often hindered their ability to develop the resources, such as networks, street credibility and capacity, to move upwards in this criminal milieu to progress into occupying higher market levels. Several participants had multiple addictions, drugs, alcohol, or gambling. Almost all participants used cannabis daily.

This life-style feature of routinized drug consumption that characterises our informants was found to be true regardless of the market level participants considered themselves to have operated within prior to their claims to have desisted from criminal offending as dealers. Market positions of these informants, adopted by implication, were determined by the following criteria a) whether dealings resembled social supply or drug dealing connected with social and other needs, b) the amount and range of illegal goods being purchased and sold over a sustained duration of months, and c) participant subjective perspective about their drug labour activities. To protect identity, participant names are pseudonyms of fictitious villains from X-Men Marvel Comics. The use of conventional first names might have inadvertently drawn attention to those in the networks of actual informants.

### **Research Findings 1: Scotland's fragmented Illegal Drug Market(s)**

To contextualise our empirically evidenced narratives below, a brief recapitulation of the research problematic of the project is required: organised crime, we claim, cannot be discussed in a holistic manner without misleading characterisations emerging. The data extracts we select to support our paper were chosen on the grounds of their typicality of our wider data set. We focus our results through two broad frames, firstly on market fragmentation, followed by a section on what we name as 'Retail-level Supply Processes'.

Similarly, failure to provide or mention models specific to Scotland's illegal drug market – along with level relevant descriptors – leaves us with an overly simplified mapping of organised crime and perplexity in relation to actual supply processes. Thus we adopt Coope and Blands' (2004) illustration of a regional drugs market to provide a more workable framework for both SSOCS inadequacies and assumptions - based upon the report alluding to pyramid like structures. While the researchers were unable to gain access to criminal dealers operating this hierarchy at its apex, the participants in our study are considered to occupy middle and retail-levels. It is their understandings that feature in the finding's section. We evidence here, beginning with Sabretooth, the analysis of the drug market structures provided by actors with first-hand knowledge:

*'Not everyone can import stuff...I've only met them bringing the stuff in, but they won't be the actual guys arranging the smuggling [from outside the UK]. They are like representatives [in the UK], obviously working for [traffickers outside the UK]. Probably [extended] family or something...They (the importers) sell large to a few guys who [then] move it on to people who sell it in smaller bulks or [initial UK buyers even sell small amounts over a considerable duration].....not everyone [of the initial UK buyers] would buy the same amount...depends.'* (Sabretooth)



This diffuse structure helps ensure processes of secrecy and so control, as secrets set boundaries between the known and the unknown (Costas and Grey, 2014). Although Sabretooth's statement concurs with the identification by Coope and Bland (2004) of importers operating the drug market apex, lower distinct and separate market levels are not as clear. It would seem the market demonstrates tremendous flexibility to adjust according to circumstances. Levels are by no means fixed or static, but rather fluid, on occasions incorporating a variety of complex sub-levels of supply, operated by diverse group structures. Sub-themes are evident in Sabretooth's account: the autonomy of actors is dependent upon their access to what appear to be opportunities to participate in large amounts of drugs being imported from outside the UK. In this way, there is differentiation amongst the drug supply network. Fragmentation of the social groups importing drugs also emerges in terms of their participants only knowing a limited part of these 'enterprising' importers and drug handlers. The degree to which drugs are purchased is also differentiated: who buys what "depends". This is particularly evident among middle to retail-level supply. A reformed drug offender, Magneto, explicates further the social structures and style of distribution:

*'Sometimes you work with your pals, like in group(s).....guys you hung about with, know what I mean? Can trust them to do business way.....You'd chip in a couple a G[rand] to buy big and shit. Cut and sell in [smaller] packages.....doesn't happen like every other day or nothing. Sometimes this kind of thing comes in, other times it doesn't. Probably most times it doesn't (laughs). Mostly that's when you end up selling to people you know, say wee grams here and there, shit like that fella.'* (Magneto)

While Magneto considers himself and friends as primarily operating lower market levels – than, say, that of Sabretooth – nonetheless his statement illustrates a varied and complex drug market in relation to supply processes, beyond rigid hierarchical tier models (Coope and Bland, 2004; Pearson and Hobbs, 2001). He also foregrounds the importance of the scarce commodity of social capital where the fall-back position is to trust only those who you see as "your pals". Like others involved in criminal activity they face a stark dilemma in terms of who they can trust. Other scholars of serious crime and of violent anti-social behaviour uncovered the challenges involved in placing trust, given the histories of the parties involved: joint criminal enterprises meant criminals had to use personal and public 'signals' of trustworthiness in their search for suitable associates (Gambetta, 2009; Hammill, 2011). Sub-themes arising are uncertainty of supply and opportunistic adjustment to make the best of what is possible, at any one time.

Pyramid models indicate a steady top-down flow of drug supply based on demand, yet Magneto suggests product flow to be largely sporadic and even unreliable. His cognitive script suggests the more stable of the factors is working only with people who you know and with whom you are friends. Inconsistent product flow sees those operating market levels regularly move vertically back and forth along a rather fluid drug dealing continuum, i.e. from middle level brokering to retail-level dealership. Chatwin and Potter (2014) similarly found the normalisation, in this sense, of drug use/supply had seen many cannabis users become dealers who had occasionally moved between definitions of social suppliers, drug dealers proper, and even to traffickers (see also McPhee, 2013). Pragmatism and opportunism emerge here as fundamental to the conduct of their enterprise. Behaviour largely depended

upon continuous and steady product flow, as well as opportunity. Yet to add further complexity to drug distribution, it was also found in addition to top-down product flow, distribution could occur horizontally i.e. from middle to middle or retail to retail, as suggested in the next extract where we hear the voice of Apocalypse, which again draws us back into narratives of fluidity, uncertainty and issues of trust and complex reciprocal obligations arising from the trade of this commodity:

*'Isn't that simple, no. You're not always [bulk] buying off same cunts (dealers). Depends really on who's got what.....[even then] see, you can get gear in, your no always going to mix it.....Say you owe somebody or another guy (business acquaintance) is short that week, you might sell it on to him, maybe only add a wee bit on. Really just do him a good turn you know, eh mate. Means they might help out when you're stuck yourself.'* (Apocalypse)

Here the practices of exchange entail tacit moral codes: by helping another in the network you create possibilities of support that can be utilised as and when required. A sub-theme is how in this market there is a scarcity of knowledge about the future availability of supplies and the identities of the dealers about whom the relationship appears fraught: they are the "same cunts".

Juggernaut elaborates by introducing a code of a different type which is a-moral: "you're no fucked who's taking it". The theme of shifting this commodity is the priority. Openness to the dynamics of the market at any one time requires them to be "pure smart" and selfishly oriented: "Let them take all the risks".

*'Want a quick sale you're no fucked who's taking it. More you shift in one go the better.....might take a parcel and move it to somebody else because you've found somebody selling cheaper and want to buy [it]. Be pure smart when buying (shop for deals). Let them take all the risks, you know mate.....Depends on circumstances don't it.....can't be passing up opportunities.'* (Juggernaut)

In agreement with Magneto, both Apocalypse and Juggernaut point to the normal nature of regular inconsistencies regarding product flow and hierarchical supply. Buying/selling patterns accord with issues relating to product availability, demand, opportunity, and quick resale. While on occasions buyers would shop around, on other occasions purchasing patterns were forced. Supply routes among middle and more specifically lower levels were routinely altered. Ultimately Scotland's illicit drugs markets could be described as significantly fragmented. However, the agency of those involved, in the light of our discoveries about trust and knowledge scarcity, indicates that some of the factors that contribute to fragmentation are associated with how dealers and suppliers operate without the support of a legal system to underpin their commodity trading logic.

## **Research Findings 2: Retail-level Supply Processes**

At no other level of supply was Scotland's illegal drugs market found to be more fragmented than at retail-level; even more so when associated with the supply of cannabis and dance drugs (Coomber and Turnbull, 2007). Chatwin and Potter (2014) suggest drug use normalisation has been extended to drug supply as contemporary user/supplier definitions

increasingly overlap, resulting in a growing diversity among retail-level dealerships. While these scholars suggest social suppliers are predominantly independent dealers who, via drug use normalisation, have also incorporated supply aspects, Pitts (2008) and Densley (2012) on the other hand present retail-level dealerships in London as typically retaining street gang affiliation whose dealing in this commodity is connected with the organisational dynamics of the particular gang and the affordances of its turf. However, this London based study found that although individuals who held prior territorial street gang affiliation were regularly involved in drug distribution, gang membership was by no means invariably present, nor was supply carried out for the progression of a gang purpose (Davis, 2007; Deuchar, 2013). In the next extract, Mystic attempts a portrayal of the ways in which there is some intersectionality between drug dealing and the gang:

*'Aye he (the dealers business partner) did fight a bit [but was not a gang member].....I suppose it did [influence Mystic to work with him] cause I knew he could handle himself but I wouldn't say that's the main reason we joined up, was more to do way the fact he got gear (cocaine) on the cheap [while] I knew cunts [from having prior street gang affiliation].'* (Mystic)

This extract suggests violence and the capacity to be violent in an effective way is important as a qualification for operating in the fluid networks described in the previous results section. Person and Hobbs (2001) found criminal associations established within prisons helped in network formation, where violence helps to enforce debt collection. Although it is not clearly stated, it is not unreasonable to infer from Mystic's analysis that street gang affiliations, however remote from the present, nevertheless lubricated collaboration and decisions about appropriate partnerships (see Gambetta, 2009). Mystic outlines how actual gang membership is not essential for distributing drugs, but may prove advantageous given the criminogenic networks and necessary protection it may offer participants. Alonso (2004) similarly found bulk suppliers, like Ricky Ross, used gang associates in Los Angeles throughout the 1980s for aiding successful supply processes. While upper and middle level distribution was primarily motivated by financial gain, supply among retail-level dealerships proved considerably more complex: it ranged from working independently, in socially based partnerships, territorial street gang, or in what could be identified as SOCGs. Retail-level distribution encompassed both aspects of drug dealing proper and social supply depending upon circumstance and settings. Regardless of supplier structure, distribution primarily occurred within closed markets in the sense that the customers and dealers formed a network community where they were familiar to different extents with other members.

Hutton (2005) draws attention to the ironic aspects masculinity performs in dealership motivation, whereby suppliers are more than content to be known dealers – particularly at retail-level where financial gain is considerably lower - despite risk increase. Interestingly this study concurs, yet found suppliers only wanted localised and subcultural populations, as well as females, to know, believing such assertive behaviour helped portray a *'hardman'* image and one of personal wealth. For Avalanche, drug supplying appeared to be a mechanism for establishing his social life and attracting, through exchanges, sexual favours:

*'I don't mind people knowing I sell. Helps [me] get business. Not wanting every Tom, Dick, and Harry (random people) knowing but or I would end up having Pigs (police)*

*at my door.....When I would sell sweeties (ecstasy) at the dancing I didn't really be too sneaky (discreet) about it. I kind of liked having people know what I was doing. Suppose it was a good way of meeting birds (females)..would sometimes give them a wee freebie. Ask for a winch (kiss) in exchange.'* (Avalanche)

Avalanche enjoyed an individualistically crafted masculine image projected by participation in drug distribution. But it is not merely image construction that matters for Avalanche. The critical purpose of his heterosexual operating style was to make him appealing and powerful, securing the attention of females who he would then exploit for his own gratification. For this 'strategy' to work for him his business in drugs had to have a certain public profile, and that profile resides in places of heterosexual play and bodily display - "at the dancing". Pearson and Hobbs (2001:31) called clubbing a "system of fraternity" that can facilitate drug networks and accelerate dealing careers. 'Dance drugs' include ecstasy, amphetamine and cocaine: Avalanche is not unusual in this market in making little distinction between 'friends' and 'customers'.

Yet free drug supply was restricted to close friends, individuals held in esteem, and females, although lesser known associates may still receive discount prices. In such circumstances, financial currency was not, apparently, the primary transaction motivator as payment came by way of respect, sexual favours, or status. Almost all social supply transactions, however, still included financial fees. Financial gains from drugs were largely perceived as income to be spent on 'luxuries' which might otherwise be unaffordable. Normal living expenses would be covered by part-time work or more commonly, social welfare benefits. Sabre explains how this works:

*'I do work part-time.....helps pay bills.....[But] my car, wee old school Saxo, pure belter as well mate..... If I hadn't been dealing at the time, I would never have afforded it mate. Canny pure work part-time and have wee luxuries like a motor. Fuck, it's worse if you're full-time. Selling weed is like pocket money.....get extras way it, nights out, [etc.]'* (Sabre)

Drug dealing for him is not, apparently, a source of significant income. His role in this fragmented market seems serendipitous and additional to mainstream aspirations of the 'good life'. Material possessions such as his "motor" are "wee luxuries". His reference to his previous "wee old school Saxo" implies a desire to integrate into a materialist hedonistic mainstream, but securing this belonging requires harvesting "pocket money" from dealing. Residing within one of Scotland most deprived areas, Sabre expressed a sense of feeling marginalised and cut off from mainstream society despite retaining legitimate employment. While retail-level dealership could not sustain a dependable living wage, nonetheless it enabled him to engage in consumer society and feel reconnected (Bauman, 2005).

However other research participants spoke of often reinvesting finances gained back into drug markets in the effort to sustain their own drug consumption. Having worked in partnership with a former colleague, an ex-heroin user, Toad, explains how he sold drugs to feed his addiction. In this extract his use of neutralisation is evident as a way of justifying drug dealing:

*'It's an addiction. Most people like a wee dunt (euphoric feeling).....To get [a dunt].....most addicts takes blues, yellas, and your prescribed meds (medication) as well.....it's easy to get and sell [your medication] plus it's no illegal, but I have sold brown (heroin) to feed my own habit.....it's no actual drug dealing, well suppose it is kind of, but no really. Only sell so I can get my own [fix].....police don't see it like that.'*  
(Toad)

He conjures a world of shared feeling with the “wee dunt” giving pleasure. The discourse he draws upon to characterise this world of drug dealing and consumption arguably downplays its seriousness and danger: a class A drug is now just “brown”, other drugs have bright colours - “blues”, “yellas”. Despite such arguably self-deluding behaviour characterised through a landscape of social supply, under current official criminal justice sentencing guidelines, Toad and his associates were in fact considered a SOCG and classified as drug dealers proper. Coomber and Moyle (2014) similarly suggest that while social supply is typically affiliated with cannabis sale, it should be extended to many heroin suppliers who are themselves addicts.

## **Discussion**

While adopting an apparently open market policy may provide advantages for increasing clientele base, nonetheless such trading procedures simultaneously result in increased risk of detection factors at a formal, risk of state prosecution level, and supplier victimization, violent assault or credible threats of harm. Therefore, while closed markets may reduce potential profit via limited clientele, such procedures can prove equally advantageous by way of decreasing risk and increasing dealership durability (Nicholas, 2008). Situating a fragmented drugs market against the backdrop of traditional three tier pyramid models allows this article to demonstrate both the complexity and adaptability of Scotland's illegal drug market, including the values unearthed in the informants' narratives. Rather than presenting a static either/or approach the article intertwines both models to present actual supply methods from supplier perspectives as opposed to data gathered from official police or government sources, or participant samples accessed via addiction centres. Pyramid models alone provide a basic diagram for product flow but nonetheless prove overly simplified, neglecting adaptability and temporary arrangements like those discussed by Magneto anent opportunistic purchases and sales. Simultaneously fragmented models lack clarity and thus prove ineffective when constructing strategies aimed at addressing drug supply and distribution (Coope and Bland, 2004).

The continual fragmentation of Scotland's drug market is perhaps not confined to this context alone but rather is indicative of the anchorless character of society signalled through the trope of the liquid modern. Studies by Zhang & Chin (2003) and Paoli (2004) similarly found that in an era of increased cross-border dynamics a variety of illegal markets have become more fragmented, also resulting in decreases in monopolisation of potentially lucrative market activities by traditional apex criminal organisations like the Chinese Triads or Italian Mafia groups whose fearsome networks span continents (Varese, 2011). In a contemporary climate speed and fluidity, which large traditional organisations lack, are essential aspects of trade. Such findings add to contemporary discussions as to whether UK street gangs are involved in drug supply. The fragmentation of the market has enabled a range of individuals to enter. As

with Magneto, it was found drug supply was not based upon gang membership but rather membership had built prior aspects of symbolic and social capital which could be tapped into to allow successful involvement in drug supply. This is in strong contrast, however, to the drug dealing street gangs found in London by both Densely (2012) and Pitts (2008), who occupy territory for financial gains via illegal markets.

Those 'speaking' through the chosen illustrative extracts have experience of different drug markets and urban places as suppliers and users; this functional overlap is a strategic feature often found in the drug associated social world. Earlier we claimed that in an era of globalisation processes, and rapidly increasing demographic diversity, organised crime typologies are less susceptible to empirical mapping of these constituencies. A corollary has been increasing difficulties experienced by criminal justice personnel in identifying, with precision, the structures relevant to understanding the nature of criminal markets (Paoli, 2004). Despite this conceptual problem attendant on the fluidity of the liquid modern condition, the SSOCS (2015) neglects such thorny issues, and opts instead for generalised criteria that disaggregate broadly serious organised crime from non-serious and less organised crime. This hegemonic official policing policy was achieved via a four-point identification system used to recognise SOCGs, but this approach inevitably fails to distinguish features of the niches that crime typologies attempt to portray.

## **Conclusion**

The work reported in this article was part of a larger study of gang organisation for criminal ventures in a Scottish context, of which drug dealing was one focal concern. Traditionally drug dealing – as part of organised crime - and street gangs have been viewed as independent and distinct phenomena (Deuchar, 2013). The data presented in the current paper cannot, given the limitations inherent in qualitative research, be generalised as representative of drug dealers in these markets, but rather provides a contribution specific to a West of Scotland context of urban deprivation, which is itself not without complexity. However, themes identified in the data echo findings from studies conducted elsewhere, so our work is not without triangulation (Pearson and Hobbs, 2001).

The fragmentation of Scotland's illegal drugs market will arguably continue to increase, not only due to processes of globalisation but also to continual welfare cuts and a slow economic recovery from recession. Consecutive UK governments have steadily rescinded the financial safety net of the welfare system, resulting in both an increased exclusion from benefit entitlement and a process of ghettoization. Extending the effects of the Thatcher Government's *Right to Buy* policy, contemporary Conservative policies have continued to relegate the poor to socially deprived neighbourhoods with caps on housing benefits, the introduction of the 'bedroom tax', and inadequate regulation of the private housing sector.

Alonso (2004) and Wacquant (2000) point to similar processes in the US where the congregation of the poor, marginalised, and socially excluded, become disenchanted with the mainstream society from which they are disconnected, resulting in the gradual, steady replacement of the legitimate market by an illegitimate market. Commodities which are known to the community become a source of income. Drug use normalisation, in terms of practices of consumption and supply, may contribute as one driver of drug supply's seeming normalisation. Evidence consistent with this claim is reflected in the study, with all

participants residing within Scotland's 20% most deprived communities and admitting to having used drugs regularly; for them, drug use appears normalised in the sense of apparently forming part of the fabric of everyday life. Drug supplying activity was simply a sequential step in the cultural geography associated with drug use (Coomber and Turnbull, 2007). Similarly, being congregated together in deprived communities has resulted in friends, peers, and associates working together to supply available commodities for financial gain as legitimate opportunities for income are perceived to be lacking. This type of local neighbourhood therefore energises a collective capacity oriented to undertaking the labour connected with dealing and using drugs. Normalisation in this nexus signals shared cognitive scripts about a criminogenic enterprise which marginalise the relevance of mainstream norms, creating a form of 'code of the street' (Anderson, 1999).

However, such structural impacts are not being given proper attention by the Scottish government nor by the authoritative bodies enforcing policy. The broad criterion used to define organised crime - encapsulated by the SSOCS (2015) report – puts minor and sporadic offenders at serious risk of being criminalised and subsequently labelled as serious and organised criminals working in purpose-built SOCGs. Instead this type of offender is typified by disenfranchisement and exclusion. Typically, these individuals arguably neutralise the prohibited nature of the drug enterprise that offers them income and risk-taking, instead viewing themselves as supplying available commodities – on occasions along with friends – to consumers within the deprived communities in which they live.

In this case normalisation is an undercurrent of collective efficacy below the radar of the mainstream which helps create its existence. Occasionally boundaries from social supply to drug dealing proper to trafficker become blurred as suppliers move serendipitously along a socially constructed drug dealing continuum, often in relation to pragmatic opportunity which interrupts a progression in the supposed continuum. However, the traditional stereotypical mould of the drug dealer is certainly one which does not fit with processes of supply identified in this paper. Both must be given acknowledgment in any nationally focussed strategic planning aimed at halting supply processes and prosecuting criminals. With warrant Coomber (2004) notes the normalization of the contemporary UK drugs market has potentially significant consequences for the criminal justice system's understanding of what exactly constitutes an illegal drugs market. Whilst we accept the qualification of the normalisation thesis explored by Shiner and Newburn (1999) our argument embraces the nuanced complexity of the social phenomena described without rejecting *tout court* the existence of kinds of normalisation whose ephemerality forms part of the emergence and decline of supply and user social worlds.

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