



Dimensions of women's power in the illicit drug economy

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to elaborate on the gendered social and economic organization of the illicit drug world by articulating several dimensions of women's power. The main thesis is that women are not only powerful actors in the drug world, but that their work is central to the drug economy. Four core activities (e.g. providing housing and sustenance needs, purchasing drugs, subsidizing male dependency and participating in drug sales) that women routinely perform are both fundamental to drug world organization and earn them important forms of capital that may facilitate future, conventional pursuits. Pursuing this objective may improve our knowledge about the relationship between illegal market organization, gender, power and capital. It may also assist crime control and social welfare policies.

Key Words

capital • drugs • gender • power • theory

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to advance our understanding of the gendered social and economic organization of the illicit drug world by articulating several often overlooked dimensions of women's power. I develop the argument that women routinely perform four core activities (e.g. providing housing and other sustenance needs, purchasing drugs, subsidizing male dependency and participating in drug sales) that show not only their power in and contributions to the illicit drug world but also how the organization

of this social world is fundamentally gendered. Thus, I offer an alternative to the leading 'pathology and powerlessness' narrative in the drugs and crime discourse, especially as this discourse relates to women. In addition, developing this view promises new directions for social policy and related research.

Understanding power

The argument to be presented here requires a particular and broadened definition of power. Power has traditionally been defined as entailing dominance and control over others (Connell, 1987), that is, as a possession one does or does not have, or can or cannot obtain. Some (Allen, 1999) have called this 'power-over'. This definition of power is also structurally oriented, viewing power as something unequally distributed in society, especially by gender, race/ethnicity and class. Indeed, discourse on problems related to the illicit drug world often presupposes a 'power-over' definition. Furthermore, a dualistic construction of hegemonic masculinity and femininity (Connell, 1987) has often also been taken for granted, one wherein men's dominance over women is seen as predominant in the organization and routine activities of the illicit drug economy.

Feminist concepts of 'dominance and control' have tended to be more complex, and ought to be mentioned given this article's overall purposes. For example, some feminist theories have focused on the transformative and relational character of power (Allen, 1999) rather than on its expression in relationships of dominance and subordination. Power is transformative when it is oriented toward accomplishment and change; its relational nature pertains to usefulness for the self as well as others (e.g. for children, loved ones or a more communal entity). In order to envision women's experiences with this more transformative and relational concept, one must also define 'power' in the sense of competency and ability to achieve desired ends. Feminists have often referred to this 'power-to' as 'empowerment' (Hartsock, 1985; Allen, 1999), an idea that is nested in connections to others. Of course, prior to these usages, Foucault (1979, 1990) also famously distinguished between 'power over' and 'power to' in expanding our understanding of how both operate in modern society.

The organization of the drug world features multiple types of power that are interdependent in character. At a bare minimum, these include structural features of power (i.e. possession of resources, domination and control) as well as relational or transformative features of power (i.e. empowerment of the self and others). However, an effect of gender has been to skew the possession and utilization of these types of power. In general, men have been able to exercise more structural power while women frequently utilize power in relational and transformative senses that involve 'empowerment' (defined here as the ability and competence to influence and achieve desired outcomes) and 'agency' (defined here as the

ability to benefit others as well as the self,¹ and in terms of actions that bring about these outcomes).

A point to be developed is that men's greater possession of structural power (i.e. 'power-over') in drug markets is, to a considerable extent, made possible by women's agency and the types of relational or transformative power (i.e. 'power-to' and 'empowerment') they wield. In other words, *women's more relational power assists males' accumulation of structural power and is, therefore, fundamental to 'successful' (i.e. stable and lasting) illicit drug world organization.* Therefore, men's and women's powers are interdependent.

Many women, especially minority and lower-class women living in inner-city neighborhoods, regularly use agency on their own and others' behalf in ways that are both relational and autonomous. For example, single mothers who attempt to care for children and run the household have historically and increasingly exercised agency by the above definition as they face large-scale economic changes that have decimated legitimate work opportunities in urban areas and punitive social policies that have institutionalized large numbers of men (and also, though in fewer numbers, other women). Thus, the assumption that males active in the inner-city drug economy are the predominant ones with power and status effectively obscures a more gender-intertwined reality where women share power (by a more complex definition of this term) and accrue capital from their own exercising of agency. More precisely, then, empowerment in the sense of ability and competency to operate in the drug world are patterned by gender into routine interactions. Men and women share some experiences but differ in other, important ways; again, the roles and undertakings of each are interdependent and facilitate the drug world's existence. Therefore, a fuller understanding of the gendered organization of power in the illicit drug economy is possible through analyzing the connection between women's activities and the various forms of capital they produce for themselves and others.

Shifting the narrative

This article's objective counters much of the sociological literature on women, drugs and crime which, to date, has told a surprisingly traditional tale about women 'deviants', especially drug users. A repetitive narrative has emphasized themes of dysfunction, dependence, exploitation and victimization, whereas references to agency and power rarely appear (Zerai and Banks, 2002). A recent piece by Evans et al. provides a typical example:

Women still occupy marginal positions within drugs markets and this has increased their risk of victimization. Women get into drugs because of experience with abuse and violent trauma early in life. Men lead them into drugs. They are still forced to rely largely on prostitution for economic gain

and when they do engage in other crimes, such as stealing, it is always in partnership with a male leader. Furthermore, when women are able to gain access to the dominant drug market, it is through their boyfriends or husbands. Women's participation in the informal drug economy, in terms of drug sales and distribution, is contingent upon their link to men in their lives.

(2002: 488)

Reports like this come from both male and female scholars studying women's experiences in the illicit drug economy (Rosenbaum, 1981; Bourgois and Dunlap, 1993; Inciardi et al., 1993; Maher, 1997; Sterk, 1999; Sommers et al., 2000; CASA, 2003). The few empowerment-related stories that analysts do tell often end in failure or other negative outcomes, keeping them consistent with the pathology narrative. For example, some have concluded that women's infiltration of drug selling is controlled and exploited by men. They are relegated to high-risk, low-paying jobs, or are manipulated into turning over criminal profits to men or the products men sell (Inciardi et al., 1993; Sommers et al., 2000; Cross et al., 2001). Ultimately, women fail at these activities because they become addicted to drugs and do not realize any positive outcomes or experiences. Thus, they return to prostitution where they defile their essence as women (Ettorre, 1992).

This raises another concern about the voyeuristic nature of the discourse on women in the illicit drug economy involving sexual objectification as another form of pathology and powerlessness. For example, the voluminous literature on prostitution and drugs details the 'sexual' activities and consequences of women sex workers (see, for example, Inciardi et al., 1993; McCoy and Inciardi, 1995; Inciardi and Surrat, 2001), prioritizing them as the critical focal point for social science and policy research. Equal treatment of their power and agency in broader respects are absent, an observation discussed in more detail later.

What makes this pathology and powerlessness narrative even more compelling is that women's fall from grace into drug use is considered even more tragic than men's. A recent report by CASA highlights this notion:

Females experience physical, psychological and social consequences from smoking, drinking and using drugs, many of which are different from or more severe than those experienced by male substance users. For instance, at the same levels of use, females are more likely to become dependent on tobacco and more intoxicated from drinking than males and are more vulnerable to alcohol-induced brain damage and other substance-related problems than males. Females with substance use disorders are likelier than males to have co-occurring mood or anxiety disorders.

(2003: 17)

This article, then, offers an alternative view to women's experience in today's illicit drug world by suggesting that women's agency is fundamental to the social and economic organization of the drug world and earns them

various forms of capital among their similarly situated peers. This more 'empowerment' oriented narrative does not deny the victim-centered version told by past and present scholars; of course, women do suffer abuse and varied forms of discrimination that have led them to participate in the drug world. Moreover, while several routine activities performed by women illustrate their significance and centrality in illicit drug world organization, they also expose women to abuse, neglect, victimization and social penalty. Still, my point is that the situation is not quite as simple as it has been made out to be: 'victimization' and 'empowerment' can be, and often are, interrelated.

Moreover, adding this level of complexity may have notable policy repercussions. For while scholars and policy makers discuss the consequences to society of the illicit drug world and participation within it, those directly involved often hold a different or competing view. While women's contributions in the illicit drug world may not be recognized as legitimate in conventional society, they may be perceived as valuable indeed from within the illicit drug economy. This point is supported by research on criminal success (McCarthy and Hagan, 2001), which shows that both males and females gain confidence and identity empowerment from being able to exercise some level of independence in the drug world. It is, therefore, imperative to understand the nature and form of such perceived empowerment in order to promote offender re-integration and combat the social ills related to drug abuse. To date, then, the absence of scholarship on women's economic contributions in the illicit drug world hinders a more comprehensive understanding of this important dynamic. This article seeks to address that shortcoming.

Theoretical assumptions and operating premises

I begin by stating several premises on which this article is based that flow from the character of the illicit drug economy. First, the perspective offered here derives from research on inner-city, street-level illicit drug markets that are dominated by the sale of heroin, crack, cocaine and marijuana. By extension, observations to be made about gender, power, agency and capital may be limited to the extent that this type of market differs dramatically from others. For example, inner-city, street-level markets are most often located in impoverished areas, characterized by physical environment deterioration, high residential turnover and ethnic heterogeneity (large populations from ethnic and racial minority groups) and low informal social control and community efficacy (Harrell and Peterson, 1992; Anderson, 1999). Obviously, then, the distribution and nature of power in drug market organization and the agency demonstrated by participants therein likely differs from what occurs in suburban white, middle-class settings where different drugs tend to be marketed (e.g. ecstasy, ketamine, powder cocaine).

Second, I am presuming a particular historical framework. The ideas presented here should be placed in the larger context of a voluminous literature on the illicit drug economy of the late 1970s through the mid-1990s, a period when heroin use escalated after years of stability and the crack cocaine epidemic stormed the urban landscape. It was during this time that theory and research about drug market organization, the drugs–crime connection and drug-related social consequences itself exploded (see White and Gorman, 2000 for a thorough review). At present, though, many scholars are arguing that the crack epidemic has ‘subsided’ and government agencies (ONDCP, 2002, 2003) seem more concerned about other drugs and crime problems (e.g. club drug use, Oxycontin diversion and blunt smoking) that may impact the same communities hit by crack cocaine and heroin. These impressions of change have also been conveyed through media coverage. But while crack cocaine and heroin therefore receive less public attention than before, the criminal justice system still processes a considerable number of cocaine, marijuana and heroin offenders, especially in inner cities (see ONDCP, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c). In addition, given the cyclical history of cocaine use in the USA and the persistence of heroin use, theoretical observations about the marketing of these substances remain highly salient. Finally, even if crack and heroin were to disappear from the urban landscape, inner-city drug marketing would continue to thrive absent major economic renewal (Wilson, 1996; Marable, 2000; Sassen, 2002; Wallerstein, 2004).

Third, focusing on gender in this article does not amount to denying that, overall, drug sales are still ‘dominated’ by men. Men are more often sellers than women, and they typically occupy more economically lucrative or higher status roles in the illicit drug economy. As already stated, men therefore possess a disproportionate share of structural power in the illicit drug world. Fewer women (although more so now than in earlier periods) participate directly in sales and distribution and when they do so, they are congregated in lower-status positions.

But it is at this point where this argument diverges from a good deal of prior research that, due to its reliance on dominance and control definitions of power, has neglected vital ‘behind-the-scenes’ action where women play important roles in facilitating drug deals or making the market thrive. This agency empowers themselves and others in a relational sense even if it does often earn them a more powerful position in the drug market hierarchy defined in structural terms. For this reason, the following paragraphs expand on women’s ‘supporting roles’ in drug marketing endeavors (e.g. as middle-men/women, cooks/baggers) and on their ‘parallel industry’ activities (e.g. sex work) that feed the drug economy with necessary money capital and an ever-expanding consumer base. The purpose of this elaboration is to show that women’s power in the illicit drug economy comes from their use of agency in performing such ‘supporting roles’ that are fundamental to illicit drug world organization. Without these supporting roles,

the performance of direct marketing activities and the growth and persistence of the drug market overall could not occur.

It should be noted that in recent debates about gender and the family, some feminist scholars have been suspicious of such performances of 'supporting roles'; these roles can be seen as manifestations of sexism, reflecting household divisions wherein dependent females are subordinated to independent, dominant males. Moreover, feminist critics have held, these roles neutralize women's sense of agency, defining them in 'other' oriented terms. Feminists have also shown that a woman's domestic agency permits the accumulation of more structural forms of power by her husband and children, while keeping her relatively powerless (see Allen, 1999 for a review). But, while valuable, these critiques may not fully encompass the complexity of women's experiences in illicit drug markets. Alternatively, I suggest in the following that the 'supporting' functions that women perform are not exclusively relational, nor are they primarily intended or performed for men's benefit. This is especially so for female-headed homes in the African-American and Latino communities. Rather, these functions may be performed for the women themselves and their families; they comprise exercises of both autonomous and relational agency (Allen, 1999) that have social value. While it is true that women's agency does not earn them a more structurally recognized position of power in the illicit drug market, less recognized is that their agency may empower them to better excel in future conventional (i.e. legal) activities than their male counterparts. This point is discussed further later.

One last point that deserves reiteration: again, by elaborating upon dimensions of women's power in the illicit drug economy, I am not saying that women always experience empowerment nor that victimization (personal, economic and legal) does not occur. Women active in the illicit drug world regularly suffer exploitation and victimization at the hands of other participants and are subject to social controls via punitive drug laws seeking to stamp out the trade. Scholars have done well in documenting their plight and mobilizing resources on their behalf. Nevertheless, women, like men, persist in risky activities. Therefore, it is important to recognize that successful re-integration of drug offenders may require more knowledge about the satisfactions, not only the pains, that people obtain from drug world participation so that we can counterbalance both with meaningful and conventional alternatives during criminal justice and other interventions.

Four dimensions of women's economic power

Women routinely perform several core activities (e.g. providing housing and other sustenance needs, purchasing and selling drugs and subsidizing male dependency) that are fundamental to the social and economic organization of the illicit drug world. These involve exercises of empowerment

and agency that can satisfy women's needs and those of their families, while simultaneously securing the organization of the illicit drug economy. Moreover, the contributions about to be detailed earn women important forms of capital that can arguably assist them in establishing more conventional lifestyles in the future. Themes of responsibility, risk-management and stability permeate these activities, making resultant forms of capital more reliable and transferable than the high-risk activities or more unstable capital their male counterparts amass.

Capital

Four types of capital are relevant to this discussion. These are financial capital (tangible forms of material wealth such as money, credit, investment and assets), human capital (degrees, education, skills, training and experience), social capital (benefits from relationships individuals have with or resources they get from others) and personal capital (the desire for wealth, risk-taking propensity, willingness to cooperate and competence; see McCarthy and Hagan, 2001). Capital, in any form, must be reliable and stable in order for its benefits to accrue. Uncertainty and unpredictability reduce its value. In the following sections, I discuss four dimensions of women's power in the illicit drug economy, which produces various types of capital valuable both in the illicit drug world and outside it in more conventional activities. Furthermore, the capital accrued by women is often more reliable and stable than that of their male counterparts, which acts to empower them further.²

Women's control of the household

The first dimension of women's power in the illicit drug economy pertains to the housing that non-drug using women and, at times, drug-using women, provide to members of inner-city drug worlds. Providing housing and/or controlling the household is one example of how women contribute resources to the illicit drug economy while at the same time keeping themselves, and their families, anchored in conventional society. Thus, it is an example of both empowerment and relational and autonomous agency that benefits the illicit drug world (and, by extension, its perpetuation within conventional society).

For example, Dunlap et al. (2000) discussed the role of grandmothers in providing housing to drug-using family members. This shows the power, capital and importance of older women's contributions not only to the lives of others but also to the stability and solidarity of families in an institutional sense. Additional work by Hardesty and Black (1999), Murphy and Rosenbaum (1999) and Sterk (1999) also reminds us that women, including those living in inner-city drug markets, remain committed to the responsibilities of running the household despite considerable risk (e.g. victimization or financial exploitation) and consequence (arrest or dislocation).

Dunlap et al. (2000) did not, however, discuss the provision of housing as a form of empowerment for women. In fact, few researchers³ have taken such a perspective. I hope to show how women's control of the household (i.e. securing and maintaining its physical structure as well as furnishing basic sustenance and social support that make a 'home' for its residents) is fundamental to the economic and social organization of the drug world and, consequently, returns precious forms of capital to participants in that world.

To begin, research on inner cities consistently shows high concentrations of female-headed households with grandmothers, mothers and other female relatives securing and maintaining residences for family members (McNeil, 1998). Both non-using and using women are more likely today than ever before to be financially responsible for the costs of the household. For example, using US Census data, McNeil (1998) showed that female-headed households with children and no spouse grew dramatically between 1969 and 1996, precisely the same period when illicit drug use became an 'epidemic' and rose to national prominence. Older non-using grandmothers typically provide shelter in inner-city, drug-infested neighborhoods (Wilson, 1993; Maher et al., 1996; Anderson, 1999; Dunlap et al., 2000). According to the US Census (Casper, 1996), single females over 65 years of age are more than twice as likely than their male counterparts to run households nationally.

A perusal of ethnographies (e.g. Hamid, 1990, 1992; Bourgois, 1995; Dunlap and Johnson, 1996; Anderson, 1999; Sterk, 1999; Dunlap et al., 2000) on the illicit drug world provides consistent evidence that both male and female drug users and sellers often reside in both nuclear and extended family households controlled by women. In fact, drug-involved family members remain in or return to older female relatives' homes well into adulthood (see, for example, Anderson et al., 2002). According to Laidler and Hunt, 'It is the mother who they define as the primary caregiver and nurturer in the family. It is the mother who they look to for shelter, care, affection, support, discipline, guidance, and structure' (2001: 665).

Women have been able to retain control of the household despite considerable financial challenges. This is due, in large part, to their qualification for rental support (e.g. Section 8 housing vouchers or other public housing assistance), purchasing of homes via assistance programs (especially common in the past) and their subsequent commitment to paying household rent or mortgages. Most importantly, however, it is an outcome of their continued commitment to the family (see Dunlap and Johnson, 1996; Maher et al., 1996; Hardesty and Black, 1999; Dunlap et al., 2000, 2002 for examples).

Housing provisions are critical to the accumulation of capital not only for household heads but also for dependents living therein. Moreover, while analogies between the two realms do not always hold, this aspect of the analysis does apply both to people living in 'convention' and in illicit drug worlds. Recently, Bratt (2002) specified the value that housing affords to all

individuals. Women's maintenance of the household provides safety, sustenance needs, a sense of identity (and therefore empowerment), accessibility to employment and educational opportunities and job search networks to household members. All are examples of social, human and personal capital. In turn, female heads gain social and personal capital for themselves by demonstrating considerable commitment to household responsibility and stability. Their agency empowers their own futures and those dependent on them.

This is especially the case for poor African American and Latino families that have historically provided needed assistance, child rearing and care for household members. According to Hill, 'It [housing] is perhaps the most enduring cultural strength that has enhanced the functioning of Black families since their days in Africa' (1998: 21). The Black family protects members from life obstacles and provides needed support that is unavailable in major social institutions (Hill, 1993; McAdoo, 1997; Nobles, 1997). Dunlap et al. add that:

Helping someone meet their own basic needs frees them to find and implement hopefully lasting solutions to their problems. When their efforts are rewarded, the pool of demands shrinks while resources become more abundant, thus buttressing everyone's eventual access to resources, thus reducing the salience of stress for all members.

(2000: 153)

Housing and drug market success

While sociologists have previously acknowledged the contributions women make to household sustenance, few have considered the centrality of this provision to the economic and social maintenance of the illicit drug world. For example, the opportunity to attain a powerful position in the drug trade and to accumulate financial capital by young males is facilitated, one could argue, by women's control of the household and responsibilities for basic sustenance needs.

Private residences enable dealers to bring the product to market (a place to prepare and package product and store commodities and supplies—see Wilson, 1993 and Maher, 1997). In addition, the re-designed ADAM survey shows that in major US cities, on average, more than 60 percent of arrestees made their last drug purchase indoors (ADAM, 2002), suggesting the importance of residential properties as a place of sale. Moreover, housing reduces the 'costs' of business by guarding against law enforcement or other social control agencies (e.g. police must obtain search warrants to enter private residences) and victimization (see also Jacobs, 1999 for more on this point). Finally, housing provides a consistent or stable way to contact the dealer, that is, to locate someone for a potential transaction or business deal. While cell phones and pagers are also used for communication, having a secure residence enables one to always be located by customers or associates.

To summarize, women's autonomous and relational agency in providing housing and sustenance needs for themselves and others helps earn important forms of capital for themselves and their dependents. It also assists in organizing the drug world, enabling both men and women to engage in drug selling. Dealers are able to eschew the financial demands of complete independence and responsibility that setting up and running a conventional business would require, thus promoting their attainment of structural power positions in the market. Such independence calls for much more capital than most dealers typically possess (see Bourgois, 1995; Jacobs, 1999).

While numerous social, economic and political factors have positioned women as the predominant heads of households in the inner city, late 20th-century anti-drug policies threaten to invalidate these exercises of positive agency and destabilize neighborhoods. Consider, for example, landlord-tenant, anti-drug policies that evict household owners or heads for drug arrests (*Daily Business Review*, 2002). This provides a powerful example of how power and consequence coexist for women in the illicit drug world. When housing tenure is lost, families are often disrupted and members may 'double up' with others, contributing to crowding and a host of other problems (Anderson et al., 2002). This is especially the case with public housing, which is often boarded up and sits empty until a qualified tenant can be located. Such houses may remain unoccupied for a long while since public housing support has increasingly dwindled. Abandoned homes and residential transition, researchers⁴ have found, contribute to illicit activity and other social problems. Therefore, the female-controlled household may be a lesser evil (and in many respects a socially valuable entity) than the outcome of increasingly punitive war on drugs policies.

Women drug users' purchasing power

While control of households is also a dimension of power that non-using women exercise, this section elaborates directly on the economic power of drug-using women. For a second critical dimension of women's power in the illicit drug world emerges vis-a-vis spending on drugs and related products. Here, the focus is on consumer empowerment (i.e. his/her ability to raise finances for the purchase of goods and services as desired) and agency (e.g. actual spending on themselves and others), which helps stimulate both illegal and legal economies.

To begin, the capacity to consume is fundamental to the growth of capitalist economies and to personal existence within them. This principle applies to all individuals living in capitalist societies, even those engaged in illegitimate activities. In the illicit drug world, then, women's ability to generate money and subsequent spending on drugs increases dealers' profits. Furthermore, this spending expands illicit markets by providing additional and stable revenue sources, contributing thereafter through 'legal' purchases to the maintenance of the US and global mainstream

economies⁵ (ABT Associates, 2001). In other words, women's ability to generate and spend money is a good example of relational agency that further empowers them in attaining their desired goals and helps males achieve structural market power,⁶ even if it is not intended to do so.

Women's spending on illicit drugs is typically not discussed in this fashion, although a recent study by Murphy and Arroyo (2000) has opened dialogue about the power and control women possess as consumers. Many ethnographers (Hamid, 1990, 1992; Maher, 1997; Sterk, 1999) have noted that women have considerable income to spend. Consider, for example, recent findings from large survey-based studies. They show women's drug expenditures approximate those of men or surpass them (Fagan, 1993; Lovell, 2002). Too often this point gets lost in the pathology narrative highlighting women's drug-related misery, that is, their decline into sex work where they settle for crack instead of money capital (Bourgois and Dunlap, 1993; Inciardi et al., 1993; Ratner, 1993). But the following paragraphs articulate the centrality of women's spending to the capital accumulation of male dealers, the social organization of the drug world and the economic vitality of the drug market and the larger society.

The purchasing power of the female user and addict comes from numerous avenues, many of which introduce new and stable sources of income into the market, allowing it to thrive and expand. I consider three here: sex work, social transfer payments and employment in the secondary labor market.

First, sex work engaged in by women drug users provides a constant infusion of financial capital into illicit markets. This view of women's sex work departs dramatically from the more voyeuristic literature that focuses only on their sexual activities. For example, May et al. (2000) found that the survival of drug markets is largely dependent on women sex workers. This is especially the case with crack cocaine and, to a lesser extent, heroin. Profits for male dealers can be maximized not only from the money drug-using women sex workers spend on drugs for themselves and others, but also the money their clients spend (some of which are introduced to the drug world through the purchase of sex). Previous work on crack-abusing sex workers (e.g. Bourgois and Dunlap, 1993; Inciardi et al., 1993; Ratner, 1993) maintained most transactions were for drugs instead of cash⁷ or were controlled by male pimps. Maher's (1996, 1997) study of women drug abusers in New York, Miller's (1995) work in Columbus, Ohio and Sterk's (1999) research in Atlanta found the opposite; most sex work featured cash exchanges with women operating independently outside of 'pimping' relationships.

Sex workers bring new sources of revenue (i.e. money from outside clients) into illicit drug markets (May et al., 2000). Revenues from drug-using female sex workers are abundant and stable because of the ever present desire for sex. They deliver new financial capital infusion into the drug world via sex-for-money exchanges (non-using johns who pay for sex and get more heavily involved in drugs). For example, men's purchase of

sex transfers financial capital to women. Women drug-abusing sex workers, in turn, transfer money capital to male sellers when they buy drugs for themselves and, for example, their addicted male partners (see later for more on this point). Male dealers, subsequently, often spend their money on retail goods in displays of machismo and status (Bourgois, 1995, 1996; Anderson, 1999; Jacobs, 1999). Thus, women are central to the growth of the illicit and licit economies. The market is dependent on their agency, yet it disallows their accumulation of structural power. Though women also waste money on highly disposable goods, many channel monies from illegal activities into home maintenance and the sustenance needs of family members (Dunlap et al., 1997; Sterk, 1999; Sommers et al., 2000). In fact, Hardesty and Black (1999) found that women addicts are committed to simultaneously supporting their drug use and families.

Social transfer payments are a second source of stable revenue, which involves some women as customers (see Hamid, 1990, 1992; Maher, 1997; Sterk, 1999). For example, numerous studies have established that a portion of monthly social transfer payments is spent by some recipients in the illicit drug economy (see Hamid, 1990, 1992; Bourgois, 1995; Anderson et al., 2002). Sellers compete for the very small number of compulsive crack cocaine addicts (Jacobs, 1999) at the beginning of each month (i.e. when social transfer payments are disbursed). That sellers actually ‘compete’ with each other for customers with social transfer payments (most of these customers being women) indicates the power customers have with this form of financial capital.

Moreover, receipt of a monthly check also allows its recipient to secure loans from dealers, who are willing to extend ‘credit’ in order to facilitate continuous sales and constant profit. This is an example of how financial capital also secures social capital within the drug world, while being devalued in the conventional world. However, while drug purchases with social transfer payments are problematic, numerous studies (Goldstein et al., 2000; Anderson et al., 2002) have shown that most recipients spend most, if not all, of these funds on basic sustenance needs for themselves and their families.

A third source of women’s purchasing power can be found in their employment in the secondary labor market. De-industrialization and uneven international economic development in the latter part of the 20th century have worsened the financial status of inner-city males and females (see Wilson, 1996; Marable, 2000; Sassen, 2002; Wallerstein, 2004). However, women’s willingness to seek and maintain employment in the secondary labor market (Browne, 1999; Browne and Kennelly, 1999) has not only assisted them in assuming family responsibilities, but has also provided them with a third source of reliable money capital available for drug purchasing. Women have had much more experience with these kinds of jobs (Reskin, 1999), using them to support themselves and their families over time. Money earned from secondary labor market employment is meager, often not enough to elevate an individual or family out of poverty.

Still, it is valuable in the drug world. It is easy to obtain such jobs because fast food restaurants and other service-sector employers have high turnover rates and low human capital requirements. For numerous reasons, many having to do with gender socialization, women are willing to seek and stay employed in them. This work commitment earns them capital (financial, human, social and personal) in the illicit drug world.

Unlike the more stable sources of revenue that women have to spend on drugs, men's financial capital is often less valuable or more problematic. For example, male drug abusers' revenue more often comes from illegal activities at greater risk of social control (e.g. major and minor theft and some violent crime). Thus, their income tends to be more sporadic even while it can, at times, be larger than women's.

Furthermore, men in the illicit drug economy have less access to social transfer payments since the advent of 1990s' welfare reform. For example, impoverished males received most of the supplemental security income benefits for the addiction disability (see Goldstein et al., 2000; Anderson et al., 2002), but these funds were abolished during 1996 welfare reform. Today, they seldom receive TANF benefits (i.e. temporary assistance to needy families) because they typically have not assumed primary responsibility for raising children (McMahon and Rounsaville, 2002). Therefore, drug sales reliant on social transfer payments today come, almost exclusively, from women.

Finally, men are reluctant to seek employment in the secondary labor market for the same reason, that is, gender socialization, women embrace it. This rings especially true for young African American males in the inner city who are routinely confronted with numerous symbolic disincentives to seek and remain employed in service-sector jobs (i.e. these jobs contradict core masculine values and identities: see Bourgois, 1995; Wilson, 1996; Anderson, 1999). However, there is some indication that this pattern may be shifting (see, for example, Bourgois, 2003) toward greater participation in the secondary labor market by inner-city minority males.

One last point about the differences between female and male's purchasing power is that while research has documented that women's work in the illegal drug economy involves an effort to balance work and family priorities (e.g. relational agency), men's work is usually primarily self-serving (e.g. autonomous agency). For example, studies (Bourgois, 1995; Jacobs, 1999) have shown that male dealers seldom channel money into the household or family responsibilities, spending their revenues instead on conspicuous consumption. This practice helps perpetuate their alienation from conventional institutions (e.g. the family) and should be addressed in drug treatment and offender re-integration programs.

In sum, women are powerful economic actors, contributing stable and reliable income that facilitates growth in the illicit drug and conventional economies. At least three of their income sources—sex work, social transfer payments and secondary labor market employment—earn them financial capital that is more stable, overall, than their male counterparts' sources of

funds. In their financial negotiations of the illicit drug world, women demonstrate empowerment and agency to earn important forms of capital. In fact, Murphy and Arroyo (2000) showed how women gain competence, control and power from negotiating drug sales and communicating with drug sellers. Personal capital accumulates from these risk-averse techniques that women use to independently manage their money to maximize their own drug use and that of others, while attempting to provide for their families. The stability with which they can purchase drugs and their non-violent and confrontational style in doing so, earns them social capital with dealers (who often compete for their sales and extend them credit) and obligation from other using friends, lovers and family.

Sometimes, no doubt, women's economic power is manipulated or exploited by others; dealers understand their value as customers and family and friends continue to rely on them as providers. Yet, while most participants in the drug world do not retain financial capital over the long term, women's experience in raising revenues for family support and drug purchasing earns them some level of independence, thereby highlighting the interplay between relational and autonomous agency among women. This experience will help them with more pro-social undertakings, including providing for themselves and others (i.e. economic independence and money management) and securing positive and fulfilling relationships.

Women subsidize male dependency

A closely related third source of women's economic power is subsidizing male drug users and addicts, that is, their consumption of drugs, sustenance needs and lifestyles. Again, this is an example of relational agency because women drug users often use their economic resources to pay for drugs for themselves and their dependent male partners.

Few studies have addressed the vulnerable position of the male addict and the empowered position of the female sex worker and/or drug user in providing for him. Instead, previous work has constructed this as another form of women's powerlessness and exploitation – for example, men force women into sex work to financially support their habits (Inciardi et al., 1993). Such constructions tend to ignore the interpersonal dynamics that sustain relationships between women and men. The following paragraphs elaborate on this notion as a form of women's empowerment, beginning with brief consideration of the prevalence of women's support of men.

Consistently, both large-scale surveys and smaller ethnographic studies have shown that adult males' rates of abuse and addiction are considerably larger than females'. For instance, a recent National Household Survey of Drug Abuse (NHSDA, 2002) reported that men are twice as likely as women to abuse or be dependent on alcohol or illicit drugs. Absent official estimates of how many male sellers, users and addicts there are in the inner city, the recent ADAM (2002) data show that despite a proportionately larger pool of female arrestees for drugs, male arrestees in large urban areas

were more often heavy drug users and heavy drinkers. It stands to reason, therefore, that the pool of drug-abusing and addicted men is quite large, outpacing the group of non-using male sellers.⁸

In addition, studies by Waterston (1993), Bourgois et al. (1997), Duneier (1999) and Anderson and Levy (2003) have shown just how capricious and unforgiving the world of drug sales can be to male abusers, especially those who are older. This larger pool of men is vulnerable, just like women, both in the conventional economy and within the drug world. Consequently, many may seek support from breadwinning females.

The idea of women drug users as breadwinners, who support the drug habits and lifestyles of male partners, is alien not only to the study of drugs and crime, but also to the discipline of sociology. Discussions of breadwinners and financial dependency often emanate from the economic dependency model. To date, very few articles have been written about women breadwinners and even fewer about men's economic dependency on women. Brines described the pervasive bias in favor of the male breadwinner: 'Some have argued that female headed households are too few and too poor to merit conceptualization on the same terms as male household heads' (1994: 655). This omission has remained in sociology because most studies have focused on legal, mainstream economic activity among married partners. However, knowledge about economic dependency can also help explain the gendered organization of the illicit drug world.

To begin, the economic dependency model presumes a dichotomized division of labor between financial support and domestic work. Traditionally, men provide financial support for the household through paid work in the external labor market and women provide unpaid labor in the form of household maintenance and childcare. In this model, women become economically dependent on men (Brines, 1994). Alternatively, when women drug users finance men's drug use, it challenges the basic tenets of the economic dependency model by reversing women's role to that of financial head.

The notion that bread-winning women provide for dependent men also departs from early drug abuse studies of the 1960s to mid-1980s which characterized female heroin users as needing a man to support their drug consumption (File et al., 1974; File, 1976; Hser et al., 1987). The reverse is true with crack cocaine (see Hamid, 1990, 1992; Maher and Daly, 1996; Sterk, 1999). As major breadwinners and providers, women drug users (especially those involved in sex work) who support drug-addicted male partners assume the more powerful economic role while their male dependants fall into economic subordination. In short, this is a very compelling case of women's empowerment and agency that past research has neglected.

Work by Anderson (1990, 1999), Jankowski (1991), Bourgois (1995) and Jacobs (1999) has largely ignored addicted men and their economic vulnerability within the illicit drug world. However, lower-class men's

economic dependence on women is likely to continue. For example, male drug abusers are likely to become dependent on others as they age. Research has shown they get shut out of the most lucrative hustles and often suffer injury and illness from their more violent and risky lifestyles (see Waterston, 1993; Bourgois et al., 1997; Anderson and Levy, 2003). To restate the point made earlier, the elimination of some forms of social welfare (SSI—see Goldstein et al., 2000) and increased social control policies (arrest and incarceration) may also increase men's economic dependency on women. Finally, as Bourgois (1995) and Anderson (1999) noted, men's willingness to work or stay employed in many service-sector and secondary sector jobs lags behind that of women. On the contrary, women are empowered to achieve more financial independence and become the main or sole breadwinners by demonstrating responsible, risk-averse and stable agency in each of these scenarios.

What do women obtain from supporting addicted men who contribute very little to their relationships or the household? At first glance, it would seem little and that the research cited earlier about men's financial exploitation of them might be correct. However, a closer look suggests numerous benefits for women.

To begin, when women breadwinners (those who both use and do not use drugs) support men's alcohol and drug use and sustenance needs, they secure and retain a companion in an era when men, especially minority men, are becoming a scarce commodity due to increased social control policies. This helps keep them anchored in conventional roles and identities and aids preservation of the family. Such agency, consequently, has utility in both the illicit drug world and in conventional society.

Black feminist scholars including hooks (1981, 1984) and Hill-Collins (1990) have made this point in works that trace the phenomenon back to slavery. While procuring companionship in this way is obviously problematic at one level, at another, it meets a basic human need. Moreover, the degree to which women gain personal capital from managing these relationships may promote their economic independence and enable them to secure more fulfilling relationships in the future. A woman drug user with competence and know-how (i.e. who has been empowered) in achieving economic independence may be better equipped to successfully re-enter conventional society should she be incarcerated for a criminal offense or attempt to terminate a career in drug use.

Women's role in drug-dealing activities

The last dimension of women's power involves their role in drug dealing. Over the past decade, a vigorous debate has been waged about the level and nature of women's participation in drug-dealing activities, these being the most coveted jobs in the illicit drug economy let alone a major concern

of policy makers. The debate centers on structural power: how many women are involved in drug selling, where are they located in the hierarchy and are they gaining ground in relation to men? In criminology, interest in this so-called gender question in the marketing of drugs and in the organization of the drug world has escalated as the level of women's participation in sales has climbed. Women's presence in drug selling has, to date, been the only aspect of economic activity that research has considered.

There is an epistemological fallacy in focusing on structural power only, one that Harding (1986, 1991) previously identified. This focus assumes that gender is relevant only when women are noticeable enough to warrant attention to difference, failing to acknowledge that male-only contexts are gendered as well. Invariably, when I have raised this point with social problems ethnographers or criminologists, I have been told that, 'Yes, you should study the women.' But these same scholars have seldom considered using a gender-oriented framework in their research with male subjects.

Nonetheless, the application of dominance and structural power definitions in understanding the illicit drug world has underestimated gender as an organizational force. For instance, some (Bourgois and Dunlap, 1993; Wilson, 1993; Fagan, 1995; Sommers et al., 1996, 2000) have argued that the illicit drug world, especially the crack market of the 1980s and 1990s, has become an equal opportunity employer where women comprise a formidable portion of drug sellers. But, these scholars argue, women's liberation into drug sales ultimately harms them in considerable ways. This is both a modern-day extension of both Adler's (1975) and Simon's (1975) classic statements on women and crime and of the pathology and powerlessness narrative.

Another body of work (Maher and Daly, 1996; Maher, 1997; Sterk, 1999) disputes the 'liberation' point, arguing that while the 'equity' premise in drug dealing is a possibility, women have yet to realize it. This work shows no significant structural presence of women drug sellers in urban drug markets because male drug dealers employ numerous physical and rhetorical techniques, consistent with hyper-masculinity, to keep women out. Thus, women's exploitation by men and their powerlessness continue in the illicit drug world despite their progress in the mainstream economy.

Common to both literatures, though, is a tendency to focus only on structural forms of power as the leading 'narrative' for describing how gender operates. While I do not dispute that men dominate drug sales or that women occupy lower status positions in the organizational structure, attention should also be paid to the style women employ in these activities that demonstrates empowerment and agency and results in capital accumulation of all types. Again, this style can be characterized as displaying responsibility (to oneself and others), risk-avoidance and stability. I use two examples to illustrate my point, and to counter the focus on women's

pathology and powerlessness that currently dominates sociological discourse and social policy.

'Style' and empowerment

Recent scholarship has shown that women bring a unique style to drug dealing that rewards them with respectable and stable social and financial capital. Research (Dunlap et al., 1997; Jacobs and Miller, 1998) has revealed that women are more cautious than men in their drug-dealing activities. While many business models would propose such an approach would limit profits, at least two benefits—reducing the threat of arrest and victimization—lead one to conclude just the opposite.

Perhaps the clearest and most recent example of this point can be found in the work of Jacobs and Miller (1998). Their ethnography in St Louis, Missouri, detailed the risk-avoidant strategies women drug dealers used to protect themselves from arrest (thus enhancing their ability to remain in the community and available, to some extent, to family) and to reduce their victimization and that of others (an example of stabilizing often volatile drug sales).

The first tactic involves conveying a sense of normalcy in both their demeanor and physical appearance during drug transactions. This runs counter to the hyper-masculine self-image that male dealers sometimes like to convey. Jacobs and Miller (1998) found that women drug sellers often rejected the blatant form of dealing that their male counterparts favored. They reduced their risk of arrest this way by not calling attention to themselves as dealers. As such, they were able to operate undetected for a considerable period of time. Furthermore, assuming such a posture likely endeared them to others concerned about the many risks associated with drug purchasing. Jacobs and Miller observed: 'Perhaps because they face less pressure to conform to the "flash" of the street culture, females also may be more successful in channeling available discretionary income to rent and bills' (1998: 563).

Three other risk-avoidant tactics concern where and when women would sell drugs and what they often did with their supplies. First, women dealers attempted to adhere to less risky, more conventional business hours—often preferring to sell drugs during 'normal' business hours and not at all hours of the day. Doing so not only protected them from law enforcement (which is distributed differently over the course of the day/month), it also made them more available for other responsibilities (e.g. family, legitimate work, etc.). Second, women often integrate drug selling into their routine activities so as to, once again, divert law enforcement attention. For example, women in Jacobs and Miller's study (1998) often sold drugs at picnics, in parks or at other social activities. They were aware of the risk associated with open drug dealing on street corners and, consequently, shifted their venues of business. Finally, women demonstrated competence in hiding

drugs in locations undetectable by others, for example on their person or at their homes.

The growing literature on female gangs is consistent with these observations and supports some of this article's major claims. For example, work by Brotherton (1996) and Kontos et al. (2003) shows that 'independent' female gangs are tightly bonded entities that exercise relational power in taking care of each other and their families. Principles of community and equity characterize their drug selling and other illegal activities. Adoption of a 'smartness' ethic in doing business, similar to the tactics described by Jacobs and Miller (1998), enables them to avoid confrontation, detection and social control.

The positions women hold

A second illustration of women's empowerment and agency in drug sales pertains to their excelling in the roles of drug-purchasing middle-women (e.g. steerers or tout; see Furst et al., 2001). Fagan (1993, 1995), Maher (1997), Sommers et al. (2000) and Furst et al. (2001) found that when women are involved in drug dealing, they are most often middle-women. It is currently not possible to estimate how many middle-men and women currently operate in illicit drug markets or what proportion of them are women. Despite the extent of their presence, however, the middle-woman represents another important dimension of women's economic power.

To begin, middle-women are usually drug users/abusers, indigenous to inner-city drug markets, making a living and financing their drug use by purchasing drugs for less knowledgeable customers, novices or outsiders. In short, middle-men and women purchase drugs for others not familiar with the market. Their fees for this risky activity range from 25–100 percent of the base purchase or a portion of the drugs. The middle-man or woman position epitomizes the ethic of relational power discussed here insofar as agency is exerted on behalf of both the self and others.

The value of middle-men and women to the vitality of the illicit drug market cannot be over-stated. First, they play a direct role in expanding the profits of the market by ushering in new revenues and safely negotiating transactions. This produces new and stable financial capital into the illicit drug economy. Thus, they contribute in a fashion similar to the female sex worker. Second, they help neutralize the violence that can often accompany sales by replacing transactions that would otherwise be fraught with suspicion, fear and ineptitude with familiarity and competence. This earns them considerable social capital among dealers, users and even community members who are not involved in drug activities.

Furthermore, possessing confidence, knowledge and skill (i.e. personal capital) in navigating an illicit market, while eluding arrest and victimization, comprises the essence of what McCarthy and Hagan (2001) called 'criminal success'. While such capital may not be recognized in the conven-

tional economy, it is likely to empower women and men who are situated within the inner-city's illicit drug market in varied ways.

Transferring drug world power and capital into conventional activities

A premise repeatedly communicated in this article is that calling attention to these dimensions of women's power in the illicit drug economy could aid efforts to contain drug-related social problems. In this section, I elaborate on a few general ideas that support this point. My focus is on the utility of the empowerment and agency argument to social policy, not on specific types of interventions that could redress drug-related problems.

First, by employing a 'power-to' definition instead of a 'power-over' one, we learn that empowerment and agency are about transformation (i.e. the essence of offender re-entry). When women demonstrate empowerment and agency, they are putting into practice a bringing about of change. As a result, they may be more comfortable with the transformation idea when presented with strategies to desist from drug use and criminal activity. Focusing on power-over forms, on the other hand, leaves them pre-occupied with possession and loss and may disadvantage them in embracing 'change' opportunities encountered in the community and in institutions (e.g. prison). Criminal justice interventions should, therefore, acknowledge the different orientations and experiences with power and agency that men and women have experienced because of gender, and work to channel their agency into more conventional activities.

Second, the notion that illicit drug world participation and work could translate into valuable forms of capital in the conventional world or even improve the chances of escaping negative pursuits seems implausible, given the dominant narrative and current discourse. Nevertheless, I have argued that this connection exists and is important to understand. For example, women's role in providing housing not only helps organize the drug world and allows for more consistent financial capital accumulation by dealers (especially males), but it contributes to individual and family survival possibly for generations to come.

Experience and success in economically based activities, even illicit ones, furnish women with personal capital for future conventional pursuits, such as providing for themselves and their children and, perhaps, enabling them to secure more fulfilling, non-abusive relationships. Also, women's competence as breadwinners can help ease poverty in low income families where a second income is often absent. Consequently, cutbacks in treatment programs and social supports (e.g. cash assistance, women's shelters and violence prevention programs) and continued punitive responses (e.g. turns only toward incarceration) may impede the realization of these more pro-social goals. An approach favoring increased social support combined with

treatment programs that are part of alternatives to incarceration might be a wiser course of action.

Then, too, women's identities as mothers often anchor drug users into mainstream society and provide a source of empowerment outside of drugs. Because inner-city, drug-using and -selling males are often absent in parenting and lag behind women in employment in the secondary labor market, they have fewer resources for empowerment outside of the illicit drug world. This gendered link between illegal and conventional worlds not only impacts people's lives today but, again, promises to influence the next generation.

For example, Pyke (1996) has noted that girls learn roles from watching their mothers, while boys must learn their roles from rules that structure the life of an absent male figure. This is especially relevant for poor inner-city neighborhoods fraught with illicit drug markets. Drugs, gangs and the code of the streets act as a surrogate fatherhood for detached males (Anderson, 1999). Therefore while girls can identify with a concrete example, even if it is a drug-abusing female present in their daily lives, boys embrace ideals that may or may not be present in real males.⁹ Thus, girls learn roles with more interpersonal and relational skills, while males become disconnected due to identification with abstract cultural stereotypes and masculine fictions. Therefore, women's continued commitment to the family, children and household is not only critically important to the social and economic organization of the drug world, but also to future generations' well-being in the conventional world. Criminal justice efforts should be designed to preserve this for women and encourage it for males.

Third, while women gain empowerment and capital from doing for others, too often they are pressured to channel their energies into others' benefit. For example, many intervention programs seek to restore women as effective mothers or to prepare them to become effective mothers in the future. This denies women a more complete self-fulfillment or existence outside of the family. We must be careful not to channel all of women's agency and sense of empowerment into the benefit of others (fostering, perhaps, co-dependency). So many women drug users I have interviewed over the years have told me drug use was a way for them to secure something for themselves, that is, to be independent, absent any real hobbies or friends they could enjoy. Interventions should, therefore, help them find ways to use their empowerment and agency for their own fulfillment outside the world of drugs.

Discussion

Many influential ethnographic texts on the drug world (Jankowski, 1991; Bourgois, 1996; Anderson, 1999 to name a few) feature story lines about men's resistance to mainstream endeavors via the dangerous, yet socially

valuable expression of hyper-masculinity and dominance in the accumulation of money and sexual conquest. This power-over narrative perpetuates the idea of women's pathology and powerlessness. More importantly, however, such accounts obscure the mundane actions of people in the illicit drug world.

Simultaneously, some of the same works have taught us that markets in the informal economy (e.g. illicit drugs, criminal enterprises and street vending) are entities with operating principles (language, norms and roles) designed to preserve order and facilitate stable business practices for all involved. Instability and turmoil are undesirable. While scholarship has articulated the role men play in negotiating this order (showing that they are the most central actors and possess the most power and control), there has been less understanding about the roles women play. When we add to this the failure to use a gender framework to comprehend these phenomena, both epistemological realities and improved social policy are hindered.

I have insisted on three major theoretical points about illicit drug world organization. First, the accumulation of structural forms of power (more often held by men) requires empowerment and agency by others. Since the illicit drug world is patriarchally organized, it is no surprise that men continue to dominate the marketing hierarchy. However, undoubtedly, men's ability to exercise this dominance depends greatly on women's empowerment and agency. The illicit drug market is best characterized as a web of social, financial and interpersonal relationships between men and women, focusing on the exchange of illicit goods. As such, drug world organization is fundamentally gendered. Future discourse and policy would be well advised to incorporate this point.

Second, the view of women as pathological, powerless and sexualized objects denies their experience both in general and, in particular, within the drug world organization. This point should raise new questions about other possible contributions of women. Here, I have focused almost exclusively on the economic side of drug-marketing activities. However, there are many other issues about experience in the drug world that could benefit from a more feminist-empowered viewpoint. These issues include questioning how women and men learn to stabilize their lives around drug use and selling; how drugs become routinized in people's lives; what benefits and consequences are entailed for those involved in and outside the drug world; and how structural power as opposed to emphases on empowerment and agency affects using careers and cessation efforts. Finally, more research needs to be done on how these different forms of power function to aid or hinder family and intimate relations where exposure to drugs and related problems are involved.

Third, I have argued that several activities routinely performed by women (providing housing, purchasing and selling drugs and subsidizing male dependency) are both fundamental to the social and economic organization of the illicit drug world and earn them various forms of

capital that can aid future conventional pursuits. This crucial point is rarely made in pathology and powerlessness-oriented debates about women's involvement in the illicit drug economy. Here, alternatively, I have attempted both to 'center' women in a discussion of drug world economic and social organization and to demonstrate the value of utilizing a gender-oriented framework to study this world.

While I have not denied that women suffer numerous personal and social consequences from interaction in the illicit drug world, I have also tried to show that they accumulate important forms of capital that may serve them well in future, more legitimate pursuits. Allowing this dimension of women's economic power in the drug world broadens our understanding of women's experience beyond notions of pathology and powerlessness and helps to articulate a link between legal and illegal social worlds or deviant and mainstream contexts.

Notes

1. Empowerment and agency can and often do have a reciprocal relationship with each other. For example, task performance and other forms of agency or action are made possible by feelings and perceptions of ability and competence. Agency can also generate increased perceptions, by self and others, of empowerment. This article uses the term 'empowerment' to describe feelings and perceptions of ability and competence, whereas agency is used to define actions. Taken together, the terms allow for a broader conception of power that is seldom employed in drugs and crime research.
2. The argument I put forth here emanates from a critical review of current and past research on women and substance abuse. The four activities reviewed emerged from my reading of this and other literatures. I used such an approach in previous papers that offered theoretical contributions to the drugs debate (see Anderson, 1995, 1998). Like my previous work, this study does not utilize quotes from published studies. Pulling quotes selectively from published studies to support the argument I make here might be construed as a form of bias. In other words, selective use of pre-published quotes about women and drugs might compromise their authenticity due to removing them from the social context in which they were offered and reported on in their original reports. Thus, findings from extant research are incorporated here rather than re-printing selected quotes.
3. The value of women's provisions of a stable residence to the drug trade and the criminal success of its interactants was discussed by Wilson (1993) and raised again later by Maher (1997). Wilson claimed that 'the mesh between women's provision of a home base and their lack of mobility and men's lack of a home base but high mobility may be a combination that works well for a sexually integrated drug network' (1993: 188). Wilson argued that women's control of the household contributed to their criminal involve-

- ment, enabling them to reach parity with men. Thus, Wilson located the provision of housing within the traditional discourse on women deviants. Maher (1997) challenged this by showing that women have yet to reach parity with men in the drug world.
4. The literature on vacant housing, residential transition and illicit activity is considerable and is located within numerous disciplines (e.g. sociology, criminology, urban studies, etc.). It is too large to reference here.
 5. US residents are estimated to have spent about \$63.8 billion on illicit drugs in 2000. Approximately \$400 billion per year, a significant portion of the GDP, including the United States and other countries enters the legitimate economy via the illicit drug trade (see ABT Associates, 2001).
 6. This is a good example of the reciprocal nature between empowerment and agency.
 7. A recent study reported that when work is exchanged for drugs instead of cash, men and women do it with equal frequency.
 8. Jacobs' (1999) ethnography in St Louis, Missouri indicates, however, that most young male drug dealers (including crack) use drugs (i.e. often blunts (marijuana soaked in PCP, crack, etc.)) and may become more addicted to crack than they are willing to admit. Anderson and Levy's work in Chicago with older drug addicts (Anderson and Levy, 2003; Levy and Anderson, 2005) revealed that most males had commenced drug-dealing careers by not using their own supplies but that over time, they became addicted, which damaged their dealing careers.
 9. The absence of fathers in the inner city is, to some extent, filled by godfathers and other positive male role models who often exact a positive influence on younger individuals. While their contributions are powerful and central, primary fatherhood remains problematic and lacking.

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