

USING ADLERIAN THEORY TO SHED LIGHT ON DRUG DEALER MOTIVATIONS

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Drug dealer motivation is traditionally attributed to individual greed or social structural pressures resulting from poor social conditions or blocked opportunities. To date, few scholars have seriously considered that underlying personality characteristics might shape an individual's decisions to participate in the illegal drug market. This paper builds upon the tenets of Adlerian Individual Psychology in an effort to document stable lifestyle attributes or human personality characteristics in a sample of 100 known drug dealers. Respondent scores on the Basic Adlerian Scales for Interpersonal Success – Adult Form Inventory (BASIS-A) reveal that the drug dealers exhibit lifestyle profiles that differ from those of the normative and other non-criminal samples but approximate those observed in samples of known criminals. A call is made for a broader theoretical approach and empirical research agenda that more fully explores the linkage between developmental and environmental factors that contribute to crime and drug market participation.

Over the last several decades, the United States has pursued a punitive response to drug-related crime. The origins of this sustained commitment can be traced to the ideology of the 1980s conservative politicians who believed that interdiction efforts followed up by incarceration would help stem the tide of drug-related crime. The underlying premise behind the resulting incarceration surge was that stiff sanctions could deter greedy or desperate would-be offenders from making bad choices. Despite this conservative ideology, public endorsement, and corresponding aggressive policy approach,

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the street-level drug market remains a huge problem in the United States, with scores of drug dealers seemingly lining up to supply the staggering number of drug users.

Scholars seeking to explain the attraction of drug dealing in the face of increased certainty and severity of negative consequences routinely point to structural factors such as economic deprivation, poor educational opportunities, high unemployment, gender, and racial inequalities (Dembo, Hughes, Jackson, & Mieczkowski, 1993; Dunlap, Johnson, & Manwar, 1994; Hagedorn, 1994; Lee, 1999; Mieczkowski, 1990, 1992; Morgan & Joe, 1996; Murphy, Waldorf, & Reinerman, 1990; Sommers, Baskin, & Fagan, 1996; Tunnell, 1993; Van Nostrand & Tewksbury, 1999). Intuitively, one can understand why people with limited opportunities to achieve the American Dream might choose drug dealing as a means to obtain that culturally sanctioned end (Messner & Rosenfeld, 2007). Other researchers have focused in on the intangible rewards that go along with dealing drugs. Building on Jack Katz's (1988) premise that there exists a sensual attraction in doing crime, these researchers posit that participation in the drug market may provide dealers with a sense of excitement, power, or social status that they believe would not otherwise be achieved through conventional means (Dunlap, Johnson, & Manwar, 1994; Inciardi, Lockwood & Pottieger, 1993; Jacobs, 1999; Morgan & Joe, 1996; Sommers, Baskin, & Fagan, 1996; VanNostrand & Tewksbury, 1999). Still others hone in on substance abuse as a motivating factor, arguing that street-level dealers tend to ply their trade as a means of feeding their own drug habits (Bennett & Holloway, 2007; Fagan & Chin, 1989; Inciardi, Horowitz, & Pottieger, 1993; Jacobs, 1999; Williams, 1989). Finally, another contingent of criminologists dismiss the importance of criminal motivation and shift their attention instead to cognitive factors such as poor attachment, bonding, or low self-control (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Hirschi, 1969) when seeking to explain criminality, but often these variables are left poorly defined or operationalized.

While principally focused on social factors (e.g., money, status, alienation) and/or alluding to cognitive elements that attract individuals to drug dealing (e.g., addiction), the existing literature

does little to identify specific personal characteristics that might underlie or correlate positively with the attraction and/or provide guidance on how to systematically observe them. As helpful as the above lines of research may be, they neglect the fact that not all people who are exposed to drug dealing through platonic association or kinship gravitate towards drug dealing when the perceived allure tends to be so great. We believe that the tenets of personality theory provide a promising means of advancing our understanding in this regard. Specifically, the present study proposes that certain lifestyle attributes described by Adler (1956) may come into play regarding the lifestyle attributes of known street-level drug dealers. Moreover, through the application of the BASIS-A Inventory, a commonly accepted objective instrument that was designed to tap what Adler deemed the core dimensions of lifestyle development, we seek to demonstrate how drug dealers exhibit personality attributes that mirror those observed in other criminal samples, yet differ from those seen in non-criminal samples. In doing so, we hope to direct researchers toward a theoretical model and corresponding instrument that might advance our understanding of the cognitive and emotive undercurrents of drug-related crime in particular or criminality in general.

Cognitive and Emotive Factors in Criminality

It is undeniable that social forces have profound effects upon individuals and help to shape the personality that in turn drives behavior. People continuously evaluate the social situations that they find themselves in and make judgments accordingly. Similarly, there is growing theoretical and empirical momentum with respect to the genetic or neurological factors that shape criminal propensities (Cloninger, 1987; DiLalla, 2002; Pickens, Svikis, McGue, & LaBuda, 1995; Rhee & Waldman, 2002; Ruiz, Pincus, & Schinka, 2008). These efforts, however, do not preclude the possibility that stable elements within the personality that one has developed during childhood and adolescence might guide his/her cognitions and behavioral responses (Adler, 1956). In her ethnography of drug dealers and smugglers, Patricia Adler (1993) notes that the offenders were attracted to the fast lifestyle that provides a feeling of euphoria via the emulation of “the beautiful people” of the jet set by wearing

expensive adornments and flashy clothing. She posits that drug dealers/smugglers exhibit elevated self-esteem and increased feelings of power, and thus receive ego gratification from perceived elevated social status in the community. Adler observes that dealers tend to go about their business with a sense of invulnerability that allows them to conduct their business despite the inherent risks. Her research begins to sketch out a psychological approach to the problem of drug dealing and provides a potential link to the earlier work of Alfred Adler (1956). Namely, increased feelings of power and elevated social status achieved via the drug dealer lifestyle may tie in with the notions of striving for superiority and decreased social interest among criminals that were articulated by Alfred Adler decades earlier.

In a related vein, Schreiber (1992) reports that adolescent drug dealers in his sample possessed deficits in emotional awareness and decreased empathy towards others. Other researchers suggest that criminals develop an attribution that distorts their sense of interdependence with others (Yochelson & Samenow, 1977), thus supporting Alfred Adler's assertion that criminals possess low levels of social interest.

While researchers are beginning to uncover cognitive factors such as an entrenched need for ego gratification and lack of empathy development that are positively correlated with involvement in the drug dealing lifestyle, cognitive and emotive factors remain sorely neglected or underdeveloped in research with criminals in general and drug dealers in particular. On one level, scholars are beginning to explore the link between personality and criminality. However, these efforts are limited by incomplete theoretical models and/or unreliable measures. To this end, we introduce the tenets of Individual Psychology and its corresponding instrumentation as vehicles through which researchers may more precisely articulate and operationalize the link between cognitive factors and criminal pursuits such as drug dealing.

Individual Psychology and Criminal Behavior

Throughout early development, individuals make up rules about the world as a means to overcome feelings of inferiority.

According to Alfred Adler (1956), feelings of inferiority are overcome via compensatory mechanisms designed to enhance self-esteem. He posits that people develop fictional goals that are used to increase one's sense of pleasure and level of perceived power. For example, children who grow up feeling powerless may find a means, via a fictional goal (deviant or otherwise), to overcome that feeling. The goal is said to be "fictional" because the perception of powerlessness is a subjective phenomenon. Adler contends that, early in life, children feel inferior as a natural consequence of the high level of dependence they have upon adults. The social context within which the child finds him or herself thus has profound effects upon his or her development.

Adler (1956) felt strongly that children learn about cooperation first through interaction with their mother. Over time, children develop a feeling of social interest as they observe others around them. He used the term "social interest" or "community feeling" to describe a child's evaluative attitude towards life wherein the child develops a sense of empathy that leads to a high level of cooperation with others. Adler's (1956) tripartite theory of crime proposes that criminals more often displayed high activity levels in their youth and were often subject to parental pampering such as overindulgence or overprotectiveness. Additionally, he maintained that some children develop a lifestyle attribute lacking in social interest as a result of failing to overcome feelings of inferiority. Adler believed that high activity levels in childhood, parental pampering, and a lack of social interest are the hallmarks of delinquency. He labeled criminals "failures" since they lack social interest and approach problems of occupation, friendship, and sex without the confidence they need in solving such problems via cooperation.

His judgmental language aside, we submit that Alfred Adler's theory may be useful in understanding factors leading to a criminal lifestyle. Adler's concept of the lifestyle has come to be measured by objective instruments such as the BASIS-A Inventory. The BASIS-A Inventory is comprised of five main scales and five subscales. Extensive validation efforts confirm that the five main scales tap what are described as Adler's core dimensions of lifestyle

development (Curlette, Wheeler, & Kern, 1997). Using this instrument, it is possible to test the hypothesis that personality differences exist between criminal and noncriminal respondents.

The BASIS-A Inventory “W” Pattern

Emerging research using the BASIS-A Inventory with forensic populations has shown promise in empirically differentiating criminals from non-criminals. For instance, Slaton (1999) compared BASIS-A Inventory profiles of inmates (i.e., criminals), corrections officers (i.e., non-criminals), and the normative sample (i.e., non-criminals) and found inmates to be more aggressive, rebellious, influential, assertive, forceful, and more sensitive to nonverbal cues than were members of the other two noncriminal samples. BASIS-A Inventory profiles for the inmate sample displayed a “Tilted W” (scores alternating from high to low) profile rather than the “flat” (straight line along the 50th percentile for all five scales) profile found in the normative sample on the five main themes or scales of Belonging Social Interest (BSI), Going Along (GA), Taking Charge (TC), Wanting Recognition (WR), and Being Cautious (BC) (Slaton, Kern, & Curlette, 2000) (see Figure 1, next page). This profile is formed when each of the main scales form a respective point on each of the letter’s five points creating a profile in the shape of the letter “W.” In the case of the study by Slaton et al. (2000), the upper left point (Belonging Social Interest) of the “W” in the inmate sample was found to be lower than the middle and upper right points of the letter, giving the appearance that the “W” is tilting to the left (Profile A, Figure 1). Even though finding these characteristics among inmates was not surprising, the fact that an objective instrument could differentiate criminals from non-criminals was deemed significant. Subsequently, other researchers using the BASIS-A Inventory found a “W” profile among aggressive adolescents (Smith, Kern, Curlette, & Mullis, 2001; see Profile B in Figure 1) and other criminals (McGreevy, Newbauer, & Carich, 2001; see Profile C in Figure 1). In a more recent study, Highland (2008) found a similar “W” profile among nonviolent drug offenders on parole (see Profile D in Figure 1). Collectively, these findings suggest that an objective instrument based on Adler’s theory may be useful in identifying a criminal lifestyle profile. The present study seeks to validate the usefulness of

the BASIS-A Inventory in a new criminal subpopulation (i.e., drug dealers) and thus broaden the debate on the modus operandi of criminal offenders vis a vis personality theory.

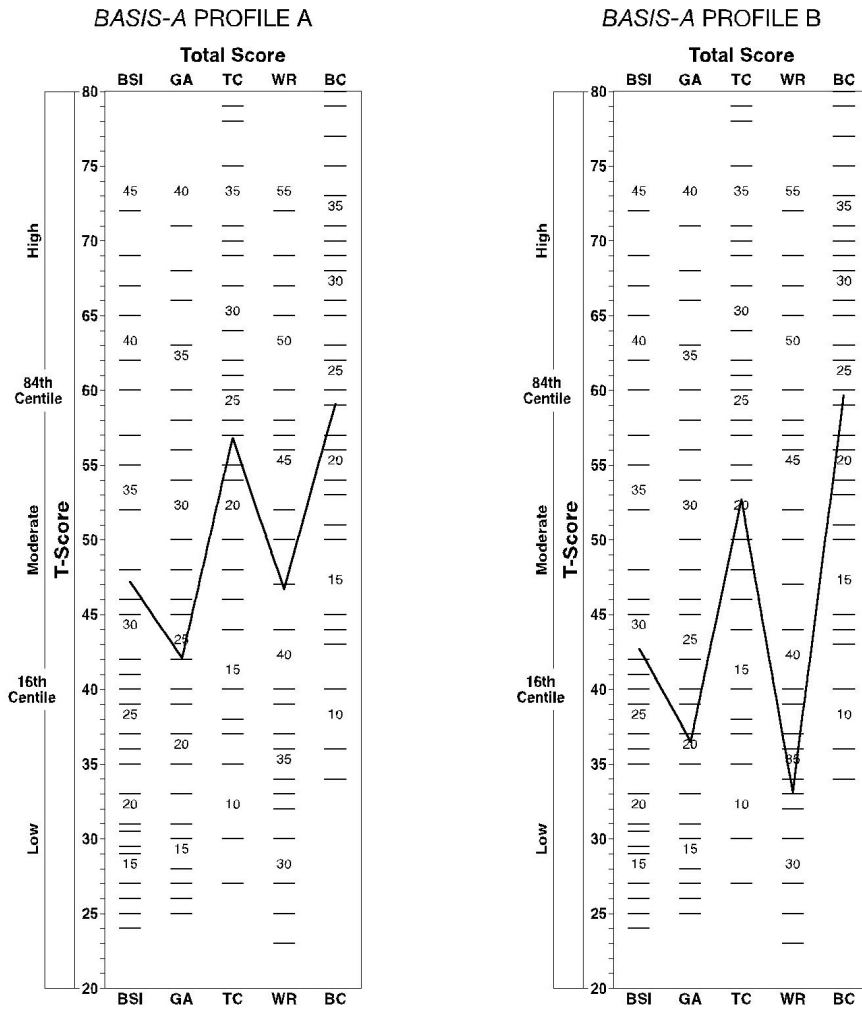


Figure 1. Comparison of BASIS-A Inventory profiles from A) prison inmates (Slaton et al., 2000), B) aggressive adolescents (Smith et al., 2001), C) adult criminals (McGreevy et al., 2001), and D) nonviolent drug offenders (Highland, 2008).

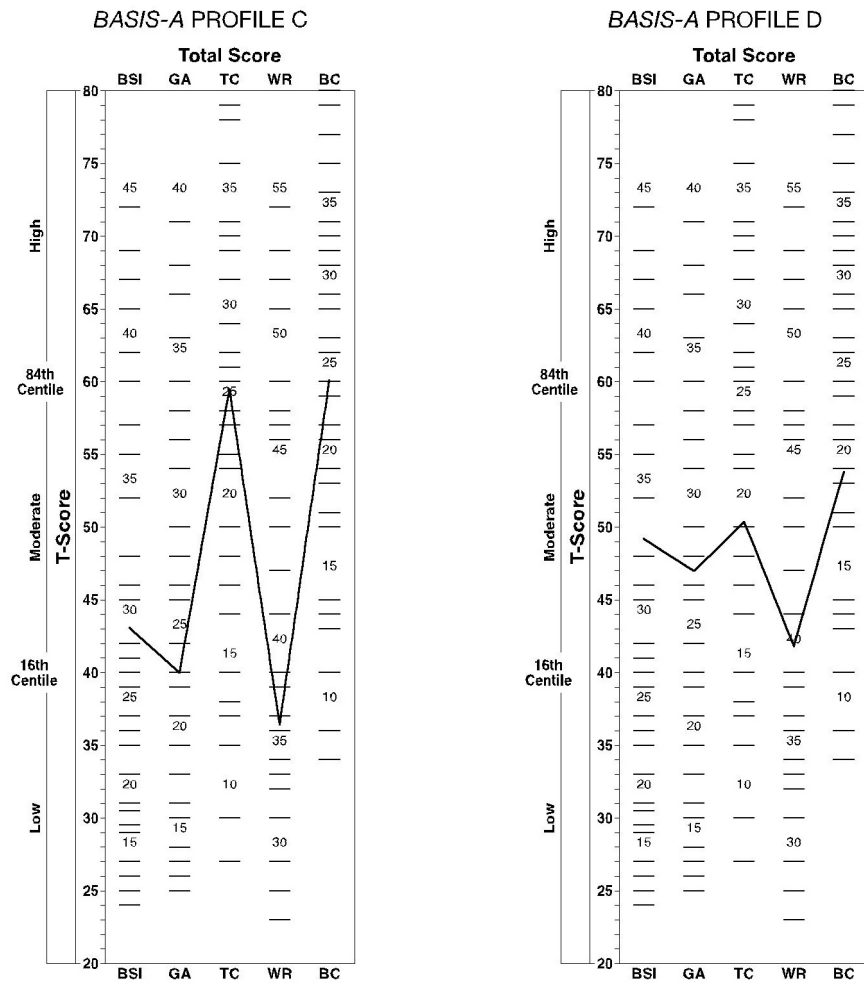


Figure 1 (continued). Comparison of BASIS-A Inventory profiles from A) prison inmates (Slaton et al., 2000), B) aggressive adolescents (Smith et al., 2001), C) adult criminals (McGreevy et al., 2001), and D) nonviolent drug offenders (Highland, 2008).

Research Hypotheses

The current study is intended to determine if convicted drug dealers differ from non-criminals yet resemble other criminals using an instrument designed to measure lifestyle attributes

described by Adler's theory of Individual Psychology. In particular, we test four hypotheses: 1) drug dealers will score lower than the normative sample on Belonging Social Interest, Going Along, and Wanting Recognition scales of the BASIS-A Inventory; 2) drug dealers will score higher than the normative sample on the Taking Charge and Being Cautious scales of the BASIS-A Inventory; 3) a "W" lifestyle profile will emerge from aggregate BASIS-A scores obtained from the drug dealer sample; and 4) the "W" lifestyle profile and corresponding major thematic scale scores from the drug dealer sample will approximate those observed in other forensic samples of known criminals.

METHOD

Participants

Our study relies on data collected from a convenience sample of 100 convicted drug dealers who attended a court-mandated program for drug dealers at a private mental health center located in a suburban area adjacent to a large Southeastern U.S. city. The participants were court referrals who were previously evaluated at the center and admitted to the drug dealer program. Participants were either on probation or parole, had been convicted of drug trafficking, possession with intent to distribute, or drug possession, and must have admitted to drug dealing during initial screening at the mental health center. Respondents were solicited by the researcher from a pool of clients who had been referred to a drug dealer education group by a mental health professional. A research assistant described the study to each weekly class meeting of a Drug Dealer Intervention group. Group members chose to participate in the study via a self-selection process.

Instruments

A criminal motivations and background survey was developed for this study to gauge behavioral, emotive, and cognitive aspects of drug dealers and has advantages and disadvantages regarding questionnaires described by Heppner et al., (1999). It was comprised of several sections wherein various open-ended and fixed response formatted questions were designed to tap into drug deal-

ing history, motivation, cost/benefit, and addiction as a cause for dealing. For example, included items queried the self-concept of the drug dealers, the volume and types of drugs sold, the amount of time spent dealing, involvement in solo or group-oriented selling, motivations for dealing, economic rewards, pitfalls to dealing, and feelings associated with dealing. This instrument also included a number of descriptive demographic items.

Each member of the study group was administered the Basic Adlerian Scales for Interpersonal Success—Adult Form (BASIS-A Inventory); a self-report instrument designed to measure personality variables that can be helpful in understanding one's approach to life (Wheeler, Kern, & Curlette, 1993). According to its authors:

The purpose of the BASIS-A Inventory is to help to identify how one's individual life-style, based on one's perceptions and beliefs of early childhood experiences, contributes to how the individual solves problems related to the tasks of work, social, and intimate relationships. (Kern, Wheeler, and Curlette, 1997, p.1)

The BASIS-A Inventory consists of 65 fixed-response questions. Responses are subject to a standardized scoring procedure (Wheeler, Kern, & Curlette, 1993). For scoring and interpretation purposes, questions are collapsed into the five scales detailed below (Belonging-Social Interest, Going Along, Taking Charge, Wanting Recognition, and Being Cautious). The BASIS-A Inventory began development in 1978 as a research instrument entitled the Life Style Personality Inventory (LSPI) based on Mosak's typologies and Adlerian lifestyles. The final instrument was developed using several factor analyses and was subjected to many tests for validity and reliability (Curlette, Wheeler, & Kern, 1997). In the 1990s, the BASIS-A Inventory was normed on a sample ($n = 1083$) of non-criminal respondents that included college students, graduate students, clinical patients, teachers, and other occupations drawn from a larger pool of persons located in the southeastern United States (Curlette, Wheeler, & Kern, 1997). The normative data serve as a benchmark against which researchers can compare data obtained from disparate groups of respondents. By comparing the scores from

a normative sample to known drug dealers, one is able to demarcate noticeable differences in lifestyle attributes and, by extension, human personality (lifestyle) characteristics.

Each scale is comprised of 8 to 10 questions and the resulting scores are arrayed graphically next to one another to yield a BASIS-A profile (see Figure 1 above). Kern (1998) summarizes the instrument's five major thematic scales as follows. The Belonging Social Interest (BSI) scale measures one's level of social interest or community feeling. Persons scoring high (i.e., above the 84th percentile) on this scale exhibit characteristics that are accepting, cooperative, and empathetic in nature. Those scoring low (i.e., below the 16th percentile) on this scale may be discouraged and feel a sense of alienation and/or loneliness. The Going Along (GA) scale measures conformity versus rebelliousness. People scoring high on this scale tend to be rule-focused, prefer structure, and feel most comfortable with routine. Those scoring low on this scale tend to be argumentative, intolerant of routine, and act rebellious. The Taking Charge (TC) scale measures leadership qualities. High scores on this scale indicate controlling or domineering attributes; the person may have problems with others as s/he struggles for power and control. Those who score low on this scale do not feel the need to assert themselves and tend to follow the lead of others. The Wanting Recognition (WR) scale measures a person's level of need for approval and sensitivity to social situations. High scorers on the Wanting Recognition scale seek approval from others. In addition, these individuals tend to be success-oriented and achievement-focused. Those scoring low on this scale do not feel the need for approval of others. The Being Cautious (BC) scale measures uncertainty within the family of origin and its effects upon self-worth. Respondents scoring high on the Being Cautious scale exhibit lifestyle attributes that may be 1) overly cautious and mistrusting, 2) impulsive and perceived by others as less responsible, or 3) a combination of 1 and 2. Individuals scoring low on this scale may be viewed as trusting, flexible, and accepting. In addition, low scorers are socially skilled and are able to deal with ambiguity and confusing life events.

Each of our study participants was also asked to complete the Substance Abuse Subtle Screening Inventory (SASSI-3; Miller, 1997), a well-respected substance dependence measure used frequently in the field of addictions assessment. This is a self-administered multi-scaled instrument comprised of 93 fixed-response questions. Items are organized into nine scales that yield a profile and score indicating a high or low probability for substance dependence. The SASSI-3 also contains several sub-scales that provide further insight into the substance abuse status of the respondents. For example, the Family vs. Control (FAM) scale is a provisional scale used to identify people with characteristics that are common among families of substance-dependent persons (Miller, Roberts, Brooks, & Lazowski, 1997). The SASSI-3 is reported to be 94% accurate in correctly identifying persons with a substance dependence disorder (Miller, Roberts, Brooks, & Lazowski, 1997). This instrument was employed to assist the researchers in determining if substance dependence is a significant variable in a dealer's desire to sell drugs.

Procedure

Data collection was performed by using a self-administered, pencil and paper delivery format that included three distinct instruments: criminal motivation and background survey, the BASIS-A Inventory (Wheeler, Kern, & Curlette, 1993), and the Substance Abuse Subtle Screening Inventory (SASSI-3; Miller, 1997). Each prospective respondent was given a description of the testing process, explained the informed consent, and offered \$5 as a token of appreciation for their participation. Signed consent and full participation was obtained from each of the 100 drug dealers that were recruited. Survey and test order was systematically varied to prevent test order bias. Professional counseling graduate students were trained to administer the testing materials and collected data in small group format. It is noted that one participant used a random answering pattern on their BASIS-A and SASSI-3 (i.e., the proverbial Christmas tree pattern), and, therefore, data from these instruments were removed from the overall analysis.

The data from the criminal motivations and background history survey were cleaned and coded, and descriptive statistics were

generated for the various measures. A similar data entry and scoring procedure was performed on the data from the SASSI-3 materials. Finally, the participant scores (means) of the five major scales (Belonging Social Interest, Going Along, Taking Charge, Wanting Recognition, and Being Cautious) from the BASIS-A Inventory (Wheeler, Kern, & Curlette, 1993) were scored according to the existing protocol, with the scores being compared with the normative scores (means) of that instrument by using two-tailed t-tests.

RESULTS

The demographics of the sample paralleled those observed in past studies of street-level drug dealers (Jacobs, 1999; Mieczkowski, 1992; Tunnel, 1993; VonNostrand & Tewksbury, 1999). Referring to Table 1 [next page], note that participants varied in age from 18 to 67 years, with a mean of 28.2 years. The vast majority (95%) were men, and only 25% indicated that they had ever been married. A modest number of respondents (16)¹ self-identified as Caucasian, while the vast majority of the participants chose a response category indicating membership in a minority race/ethnic group: 78 African Americans, 2 Asians, 1 Latino, and 1 Native American.² A full 60% reported successfully completing high school, and 19% had successfully completed at least one year of college education. We also note that the respondent's labor force status varied significantly, with 11 claiming no legitimate income and 25% reporting a weekly income before taxes of \$500 or more.

Given that participants in this study came to the intervention program by way of a court referral, they all occupied an active criminal justice status at the time of data collection. Referring to Table 2 [page 123], note that the majority of participants (54) arrived in the program as part of a parole requirement. An additional 41 were serving probation, 3 persons were serving terms of probation and parole concurrently, and 2 were referred to the program as part of a pretrial diversion program. There was little evidence of probation or parole violations, as 67% reported clean records in this regard.

Table 1
Participant Demographics (N=100)

<i>Variable</i>	<i>N*</i>	<i>%**</i>
Age		
18-24	23	26.7
25-34	43	50.0
35-44	15	17.4
45 or older	5	5.8
Sex		
Male	95	95.0
Female	5	5.0
Marital Status		
Single	62	63.3
Married	14	14.3
Divorced	11	11.2
Other	11	11.2
Race		
African American	78	79.6
Caucasian	16	16.3
Asian	2	2.1
Latino	1	1.0
Native American	1	1.0
Educational Attainment		
Less than high school	3	3.0
Some high school	18	18.0
High school degree	60	60.0
Some college	19	19.0

* Where missing data exists, raw numbers do not add to 100.

** Percentages are calculated based on number of respondents for each item and rounded to one decimal point.

Study participants exhibited pronounced criminal histories (Table 2, next page). A full 78% of the respondents reported more than one prior conviction, with 28% claiming to have been adjudicated guilty at least six times in the past. Nearly six in ten had been convicted of more than one type of drug-defined offense. A total of 550

drug related convictions were reported by the sample respondents, with a range of 0 to 55 represented. The offense specific data depict a sample comprised largely of lower-level dealers, as drug possession charges accounted for the bulk of the reported convictions and only 34 respondents reported a past conviction for drug trafficking.

Table 2
Respondent Contacts with the Criminal Justice System (N=100)

<i>Variable</i>	<i>N*</i>	<i>%**</i>
Current Criminal Justice Status		
Probation	41	41.0
Parole	54	54.0
Probation and Parole	3	3.0
Pretrial Diversion	2	2.0
Prior felony arrests		
One	41	42.3
Two to five	46	47.4
Six to ten	6	6.2
Eleven or more	4	4.1
Prior felony convictions		
One	21	21.2
Two to five	50	50.5
Six to ten	18	18.2
Eleven or more	10	10.1
Drug convictions (550 total responses)		
Possession	223	--
Possession with intent to distribute	66	--
Trafficking	34	--
Ga. Controlled Substance Act violation	121	--
Other	106	--

* Where missing data exists, raw numbers do not add to 100.

** Percentages are calculated based on number of respondents for each item and rounded to the nearest whole number.

Drug convictions far outstripped other forms of crimes. For example, a total of 129 non-drug related convictions were reported by sample respondents: 39 prior violent crime convictions, 28

property crime convictions, and 59 convictions on “other” offense types.³ Clearly, these individuals internalized their criminal roles. When asked, “Have you ever thought of yourself as a drug dealer?” all respondents answered in the affirmative.

Table 3 [below] provides insight regarding the drug dealing behaviors of the 100 study participants. When asked about the types

Table 3
Participant Drug Dealing Behaviors (N=100)

<i>Variable</i>	<i>N*</i>	<i>%**</i>
Types of drugs sold (226 total responses)		
Marijuana	73	--
Crack cocaine	62	--
Powder cocaine	45	--
Ecstasy	20	--
Methamphetamine	17	--
Heroin	5	--
Other	4	--
Average income from dealing per week		
Less than \$500	35	38.0
\$500-\$999	17	18.5
\$1,000-\$2,499	17	18.5
\$2,500-\$4,999	10	10.9
\$5,000 or more	13	14.1
Average spent dealing per week		
Less than 20 hours	22	23.9
20-39 hours	28	30.4
40 or more hours	42	45.7
Drug dealing motivation (135 responses)		
Personal/family sustenance	60	--
Reputation/Status	32	--
Fast lifestyle	24	--
Thrill/excitement	10	--
Support an addiction	9	--

* Due to missing data or multiple responses per dealer, raw numbers do not add to 100.

** Percentages are calculated based on number of respondents for each item and rounded to the nearest whole number.

of drugs that they had sold in the past, 73% reported experience with marijuana, 62% with crack cocaine, 45% with powder cocaine, 20% with ecstasy or other pills, 17% with methamphetamines, and 5% with heroin.⁴ Seventy-three percent of the respondents claimed that drug dealing was their primary source of income, with sizable weekly income amounts attached to their selling activities. Most respondents reported spending considerable amounts of time dealing drugs, with the average “workweek” reported to be 46 hours. These high levels of activity notwithstanding, only 32% of the sample reported membership in a street-level “crew,” thus suggesting low levels of organization among highly active dealers. Respondents were asked to write down their top three reasons for dealing drugs. A content analysis of their responses revealed that the desire to earn money for necessities (60 persons) emerged as the dominant theme. Other frequently cited reasons for dealing included enhanced street credibility or status (32), funding various aspects of a fast lifestyle (24), excitement (10), and the support of an addiction (9).

The criminal motivations and background history survey included several items designed to assess the respondent’s level of addiction. Seventy-eight percent of the participants answered in the negative when asked, “Have you ever become addicted to a drug or alcohol?” When participants were asked, “Did you ever sell drugs so you could use drugs yourself?” 77% responded negatively. Data from the Substance Abuse Subtle Screening Inventory (SASSI-3) produced a different picture on the addiction front, with a full 64% of the study participants meeting the scoring threshold for current dependence upon one or more mood-altering substances. It was noted above that the SASSI-3 instrument contains several sub-scales that provide further insight into substance abuse situations of the drug dealer sample. Aggregate respondent scores on the Family vs. Control (FAM) sub-scale were at the 15th percentile ($M = 7.48$, $SD = 1.85$), indicating that drug dealers in this sample do not seem to come from families with high levels of substance dependency. There was nothing noteworthy in the scores for the remaining SASSI-3 sub-scales.

Collectively, the above data paint an all-too-common behavioral portrait of the street level drug dealer: constantly in trouble with the law, from a meager upbringing, and self-interested. While substance abuse appears to be prevalent within the sample, self-report data refute the claim that addiction serves as the primary motivator for the respondent's drug dealing behaviors.

Turning to the BASIS-A results (see Table 4, below), a comparison of the major theme mean scores using a *t*-test (Mason, 1982) reveal that drug dealers scored significantly lower than the normative sample on the Going Along ($M = 25.99$ vs. 29.01) and Wanting Recognition ($M = 39.01$ vs. 43.69) scales, respectively. These values suggest that drug dealers react negatively to authority, see themselves as independent, are unconcerned with the opinions of others, and do not rely on approval from other people. Unexpectedly, the drug dealers posted higher scores on the Belonging Social Interest scale compared to the normative sample, suggesting parallel levels of social interest or community feeling. It is worth noting, however, the mean differences were negligible ($M = 33.71$ vs. 33.33) and thus not statistically significant. Given that two of the three posited differences are observed, we deem only partial support for Hypothesis 1.

Table 4
T-Test Comparisons of BASIS-A Normative Means with Drug Dealer Group Means

BASIS-A Scale	Normative Group (n = 1083)		Drug Dealers (n = 99)		t-value	p
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
BSI	33.33	6.15	33.71	6.11	-0.592	ns
GA	29.01	5.75	25.99	5.60	5.125	<.01
TC	20.09	5.99	21.22	6.43	-1.683	ns
WR	43.69	5.32	39.01	6.04	7.450	<.01
BC	17.90	6.55	17.62	5.76	0.457	ns

Note: BSI = Belonging Social Interest; GA = Going Along; TC = Taking Charge; WR = Wanting Recognition; BC = Being Cautious. One data set withdrawn from analysis due to participant manipulation.

Comparison of major theme mean scores on the remaining two scales reveals that drug dealers scored higher on the Taking Charge scale ($M = 21.22$ vs. 20.09) and slightly lower on the Being Cautious scale ($M = 17.62$ vs. 17.90) of the BASIS-A than the normative sample, respectively. In both cases, the differences were modest and not statistically significant. Since we had predicted that the drug dealers would post statistically higher mean scores on both of these scales, the data do not lend support to Hypothesis 2.

An array of aggregate scores of the five scales of the BASIS-A Inventory (BASIS-A; Wheeler, Kern, & Curlette, 1993) from our drug dealer sample revealed a “W” lifestyle profile (see Profile E in Figure 2, next page). This profile is consistent with those observed in other samples of known criminals (see Profiles A-D in Figure 1) (Highland, 2008; McGreevy, Newbauer, & Carich, 2001; Slaton, 1999; Smith, Kern, Curlette, & Mullis, 2001). The BASIS-A profile that is observed in our sample of convicted drug dealers departs dramatically from the “flat” (straight line along the 50th percentile for all five scales) profile found in the normative sample, thus providing full support for our third research hypothesis.

Comparisons of BASIS-A primary scale scores between our sample of convicted drug dealers and prior research involving forensic samples of known criminals reveal mixed findings. Specifically, the data in Table 5 indicates that the Belonging Social Interest scores in our drug dealer sample are commensurate with those observed in Slaton’s (1999) sample of prison inmates and also Highland’s (2008) sample comprised primarily of drug users. Referring to the t-tests involving the Taking Charge scale of the BASIS-A, we note statistical similarities between our sample of drug dealers and those exhibited in the Slaton et al. (2001) sample of prison inmates, the Smith et al. (2001) sample of aggressive adolescents, and the Highland (2008) sample of drug users. Turning to the other BASIS-A scale scores, we observe patterns consistent with a Tilted W profile but statistically different average scores (especially in the case of the Going Along, Wanting Recognition, and Being Cautious scales) when we compare the drug dealer sample to the other samples of known offenders. Looking more globally to the data presented in Table 5, one

notes modest scale score differences between the drug dealer sample and the samples of inmates, aggressive adolescents, and adult criminals but very similar scale scores between the sample of drug dealers and drug users. Collectively, while the data in Figures 1 and 2 and Table 5 [next page] do not allow us to reject the null hypothesis for

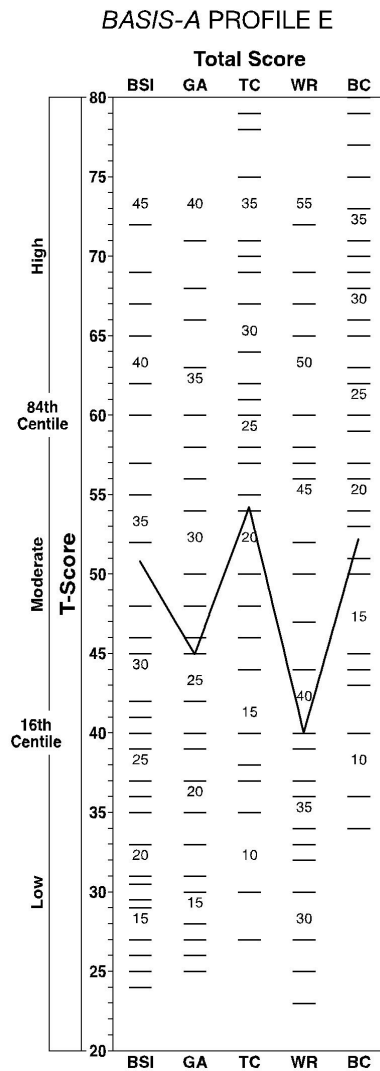


Figure 2. BASIS-A Inventory profiles from the sample of adjudicated drug dealers.

Hypothesis 4 based on statistical significance levels, the close approximations in the observed profiles and underlying BASIS-A scale scores among criminal samples and concomitant difference with respect to the normative sample raise intriguing possibilities about the potential to identify stable personality characteristics in criminals.

Table 5
T-Test Comparisons of BASIS-A Primary Scale Scores of Drug Dealers with Inmates, Aggressive Adolescents, Adult Criminals, and Nonviolent Offenders

	Drug Dealers (n = 99)	Inmates (n=101) (Slaton et al.)	Aggressive Adolescents (n=20) (Smith et al.)	Adult Criminals (n=25) (McGreevy et al.)	Nonviolent Offenders (n=76) (Highland)
Basis-A Scale	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)
BSI	33.71 (6.11)	32.64 (6.23)	29.35* (6.02)	29.56** (4.33)	33.26 (5.81)
GA	25.99 (5.60)	24.09* (5.79)	20.50** (4.78)	23.00** (4.39)	27.50 (6.93)
TC	21.22 (6.43)	22.86 (6.35)	20.35 (3.54)	25.48** (4.16)	19.30 (6.55)
WR	39.01 (6.04)	41.91** (5.68)	33.10** (4.87)	36.44* (5.56)	39.86 (5.06)
BC	17.62 (5.76)	23.05** (7.14)	23.65** (5.36)	25.12** (6.67)	18.80 (7.72)

Note: BSI = Belonging Social Interest; GA = Going Along; TC = Taking Charge; WR = Wanting Recognition; BC = Being Cautious. *p < .05, **p < .01, others ns.

While the discussion above provides modest support for our general contention that members of the drug dealer sample will exhibit similar profiles when compared to a sample of drug users and a different personality profile when compared to the normative sample of non-criminals, the rudimentary nature of our analysis precludes any definitive conclusions in this regard. Intervening factors such as a dealer’s drug addiction might also undercut the

legitimacy of our model. In an effort to control for this possibility, we conducted a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) test on the major BASIS-A scales using SASSI-3 data as the fixed factor (see Table 6, below) to better determine the role that substance abuse plays in the equation. Those drug dealers who were at the time of data collection deemed to be substance dependent scored significantly lower on the Going Along scale ($M = 24.75$, $SD = 5.40$) and higher on the Being Cautious scale ($M = 19.00$, $SD = 5.90$) than their non-dependent counterparts. These findings suggest that there exist aspects of the drug dealer personality profile that are not impacted by one's substance abuse status.

Table 6
Comparison of BASIS-A Means Between Drug Dealers Deemed Substance Dependent and Nondependent Using the SASSI-3

BASIS-A Scale	Substance Dependent (n = 64)		Nondependent (n = 31)		df	F	p
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
BSI	33.23	6.25	35.06	6.01	2	1.358	.262
GA	24.75	5.40	28.61	5.29	2	5.436	.006
TC	21.86	6.24	20.10	7.04	2	.892	.413
WR	38.59	6.18	39.87	5.98	2	.461	.632
BC	19.00	5.90	14.55	4.53	2	7.281	.001

Note: BSI = Belonging Social Interest; GA = Going Along; TC = Taking Charge; WR = Wanting Recognition; BC = Being Cautious. Four SASSI tests were invalid.

DISCUSSION

Overview

This study draws upon the tenets of Adlerian Individual Psychology as a means of advancing our theoretical and empirical understanding of criminality. In particular, we sought to establish 1) that drug dealers exhibit personality characteristics that differ from those observed in a normative sample of non-criminals, 2)

that this personality profile approximates that of other samples of known criminals, and 3) that individuals seem to be motivated to sell drugs by factors other than greed, status, or a simple desire to feed a drug habit.

On the first point, the BASIS-A Inventory data that we gathered from our sample of known drug dealers add to a growing body of psychometric evidence that empirically differentiates the lifestyle attributes of criminals and non-criminals. Predicted differences on the Going Along and Wanting Recognition scales were observed across the drug dealer and normative samples. Hypothesized differences on the Belonging Social Interest, Taking Charge, and Being Cautious scales were not observed across the criminal and non-criminal sample. On a more encouraging note, peaks on the Belonging Social Interest, Taking Charge, and Being Cautious scales in the presence of lower scores on Going Along and Wanting Recognition produced a “W” profile that is substantially different from the aggregate profiles observed in samples of law abiding citizens.

Utilizing the aggregate profile data found in this sample along with the BASIS-A Inventory Interpretive Key and Guide for Clinicians (Kern, 1998), a researcher could reasonably conclude that this sample would demonstrate characteristics such that the drug dealers in this sample would be described as follows:

Viewed by others as individualistic and independent...
also perceived as aggressive when stressed...probably
outgoing, persuasive and influential...focused and task
oriented...others may view [him/her] as assertive and
forceful...[and] unlikely to rely upon the approval of
others. (Kern, 1998)

This description seems to fit the entrepreneur-like nature of the crack cocaine dealer. Since most crack dealers conduct business in inner cities, it makes sense that people with certain lifestyle characteristics would take the lead as a means to escape structural blocks to achieving the American Dream. Those people with an unusual combination of nonconformist and rebellious traits mixed

with a carefree attitude towards approval along with strong leadership skills may be the potential drug dealers of tomorrow.

The second goal of this project was to compare the BASIS-A data from our sample of known drug dealers to those gathered from other criminal samples. The Slaton (1999) study stands as the first and most important comparison group in this regard. The researcher administered the BASIS-A Inventory to 101 prison inmates and found that they scored significantly lower on Going Along and Wanting Recognition scales while scoring higher on Taking Charge and Being Cautious scales when compared to the instrument's normative sample. Slaton observed a similar pattern when he compared the scores of an inmate sample to that of a sample of correctional officers. Our drug dealer sample appeared to match Slaton's data on the Belonging Social Interest and Taking Charge scales but did not reach a statistically significant comparison on the three remaining scales. Comparisons of BASIS-A Inventory primary scales between the drug dealer sample and other forensic samples indicate mixed results. Even though small sample sizes may be a factor here, especially with the McGreevy et al. (2001) and Smith et al. (2001) studies, one should also note similarities and differences among samples from the entire range of prior research in this area. For instance, our drug dealer sample was comprised of parolees and probationers while the nonviolent drug offender sample (Highland, 2008) was comprised strictly of parolees. The Slaton sample of inmates included nonviolent and violent criminals including murderers that may confound findings along some scales on the BASIS-A. Despite these differences, it should be noted that a "W" profile did emerge from the data, and it very closely resembles the profile from Slaton et al. (2000). As noted above, there exist several other instances where the BASIS-A instrument was administered to forensic populations of known deviants and the "W" profile characteristic of criminals did emerge (Highland, 2008; McGreevy, Newbauer, & Carich, 2001; Smith, Kern, Curlette, & Mullis, 2001). Current research and present findings indicate that the BASIS-A Inventory appears to be relatively stable across several diverse forensic populations.

It seems reasonable that the BASIS-A Inventory can be used as a means to measure lifestyle attributes or cognitive schemata in a sample of drug dealers. This is consistent with previous research with the BASIS-A showing that prison inmates differ from the normative sample on several scales of the instrument resulting in idiographic aggregate profiles by group. Similar “W” profiles have been found among criminal offenders. This indicates the potential for the BASIS-A to generate a generic personality profile for criminal offenders and also to discriminate criminal types from the mainstream population.

The third and final goal of the present study was to make the case that personality characteristics exist above and beyond external factors such as greed and status or internal factors such as addiction that serve to shape drug dealing decision making. Our data reveal considerable levels of problematic drug use among the respondents, much of which can be linked directly to their involvement in the illegal drug market. Several questions on the criminal motivations and background history survey serve to shed some light on the link between respondents’ drug dealing and drug use behaviors. These items reveal considerable evidence of illicit drug use among the respondents, with nearly half of the sample acknowledging past use. Yet, group differences on the Going Along scale of the BASIS-A reveal that substance dependent drug dealers may be even more rebellious and aggressive than their nondependent counterpart. On the surface, this offers mixed support for the idea that stand-alone personality characteristics are evident in this sample of drug dealers. However, a recent meta-analysis revealed high rates of co-occurrence for antisocial personality disorder and substance abuse disorder (Ruiz et al., 2008) in clinical and community-based samples. While only two of the five scales of the BASIS-A Inventory (Going Along and Being Cautious) exhibit significant differences across the substance-abusing and non-substance-abusing drug dealers in our sample, it is plausible that the above mentioned co-occurrence phenomenon speaks to stable personality constellation in both drug dealers and drug users.

On the whole, while we are able to provide only qualified results to support each of these claims, the analyses presented here do suggest that the conceptual tenets of Adlerian Individual Psychology and its corresponding psychometric instrument (BASIS-A Inventory) warrant more close consideration within a criminological context. This assertion is driven in part by the theoretical potential of Adlerian Individual Psychology.

Theoretical Observations

Given that the BASIS-A Inventory uses a unique method of recall of childhood experiences rather than measuring present functioning, it may become a very useful tool to assess for criminality in a subtle and non-threatening manner. Other instruments currently in use in the forensic arena such as the MMPI-2 or CPI tend to suffer from tautological problems since individual test items are derived from the same population that is later tested (Akers, 2000). Moreover, considerable expense and controversy routinely surrounds clinical trials aimed at isolating genetic linkages to anti-social behavior. The BASIS-A Inventory avoids such problems in that it is less intrusive and readily accessible. It was also designed with the theory of Individual Psychology in mind, rather than criminality, and quite accidentally shows promise as a means to assess for a criminal mentality.

Alfred Adler (1956) believed that criminals lack social interest or a positive feeling towards their communities. This study seems to support the notion that an objective measure based on Adler's theory of Individual Psychology may be able to identify people at risk of harming others or the community at large via criminal activity. In a broader sense, this study suggests that crime and deviance researchers should delve more deeply into the cognitive processes or lifestyle traits that form at a very early age and become expressed as individuals face increasing stress, hardship, or structural blocks in their pursuit of success.

Study Limitations and Future Directions

Our findings must be viewed in light of a number of study limitations. One caveat to include here is the possibility that forensic populations tend to have higher levels of drug and alcohol addiction

than the general population; hence this factor may be a confounding variable in forensic research where the “W” profile was found using the BASIS-A Inventory.

It is also noteworthy that the convenience sample studied herein included only 100 people who were admitted to a single mental health center for treatment. We also note the usual reliability and validity issues that go along with a reliance on a sample of individuals in an active criminal justice status (Berg, 1998). These were individuals on probation or parole for drug dealing, many of whom had significant dependencies on drugs, who were being asked to reply openly about criminal conduct that might jeopardize their personal freedom. It is obvious that the generalizability of the findings here remain to be replicated.

Additionally, we acknowledge that these self-report data were obtained via a cross-sectional design and thus raise legitimate validity and temporal ordering concerns. For example, we are unable to determine key issues such as the veracity of reported drug dealing and drug using. Nonetheless, we submit that these findings raise interesting possibilities about the link between the cognitive underpinnings of criminal behavior.

Finally, this study indicates that criminal profiles of convicted drug dealers on the BASIS-A Inventory differ from those of the general population. Troubled adolescents and adults who display the “W” profile may be counseled using Adlerian techniques to help them identify guiding fictions and core schemata as a means to help them effect change and lead more productive lives in greater cooperation with others. Pragmatic applications for using the BASIS-A Inventory with forensic populations include the ability to identify individuals who are at higher risk for adopting a criminal lifestyle. Early detection of at-risk criminal profiles among the nation’s youth would help criminologists, forensic counselors, and other professionals assess for deviance and intervene in the lives of those individuals who are at most risk for criminal behavior.

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ENDNOTES

1. Given a sample size of 100, we use raw numbers and percentages interchangeably when discussing the results of the study. To avoid confusion, instances of missing data are noted accordingly.
2. One individual chose "other" as a race designation, and one did not respond to the question.
3. These other convictions encompass firearm offenses, failure to appear offenses, and various public order crimes.
4. One person reported selling LSD, two reported illegal distribution of prescription medications, and one circled the response choice "other" but provided no further details.

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