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In with a bad crowd : an analysis of criminal decision-making in small groups

Andrew Hochstetler

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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Andrew Hochstetler entitled "In with a bad crowd : an analysis of criminal decision-making in small groups." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Sociology.

Neal Shover, Major Professor

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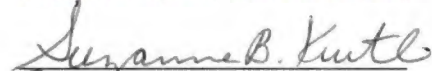
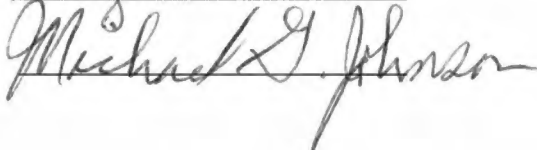
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and recommend its acceptance:



Accepted for the Council:



Associate Vice Chancellor and
Dean of the Graduate School

**In With a Bad Crowd:
An Analysis of Criminal Decision-making in Small Groups**

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Andrew Lee Hochstetler
December 1999

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Beth, the mother of my child.

Her only fault is her taste in men.

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The men whom I interviewed in the study deserve more than they received for participating. They were gentlemanly, informative and cooperative. I also thank Heith Copes and Professors Karen Mason and Judy Van Wyk with whom I have endured graduate school and whose advice and company I have enjoyed. Finally, my wife contributed substantially to this project. Her aid in transcribing, listening, reading and paying the rent will be remembered. Shortcomings, mistakes and errors in this work are mine.

ABSTRACT

The recent turn toward analysis of crime situations is driven in part by core findings in criminal decision-making research. These findings demonstrate that decisions to engage in crime often are spontaneous and based on immediate stimuli. That many crimes are committed with accomplices and that others play an important part in criminals' situational assessment of opportunity and their experience of crime usually is neglected. I use data collected in interviews of 50 adult thieves and 89 student accounts to examine how groups of thieves deliberate over criminal decisions, decide to commit crimes and carry them out. Crime groups assemble in risk-taking contexts. Important effects of these situational and group contexts on criminal choice are identified. Groups move toward crime through successive decisions made by different individuals in them and through manipulations by situationally influential participants. Their composition changes as they approach crime and this further constrains their decisions. I conclude with summary statements of the importance of groups for understanding criminal decisions.

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CHAPTER 1 GROUP CRIME IN THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

In 1997, nearly 12 million property crimes were reported to police in the U.S. (F.B.I. 1998). About 3 million of these were burglaries and robberies. These crimes kept investigatory teams and other police occupied. They arrest half a million burglars and robbers annually. Many citizens choose to engage in costly and potentially dangerous thefts; a persistent subset steals regularly.

Both scholarly and popular explanations of crime often focus on the individuals who commit it. When individual offenders commit crimes, flawed characters, psychological deficiencies or other problems of the criminal are convenient explanations. Character deficiencies are said to lead to amoral decisions, and crime is depicted as an indicator that something is wrong with a person. For example, a recent explication of the characteristics that predispose to crime concludes that impulsiveness and low self control are responsible. Hypothetically, these stable individual traits also contribute to other forms of deviance and risk-taking (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990).

Although it may be true that some individuals are more prone to crime than others, crime is often a social event. A former thief's autobiographical account is instructive. It describes his introduction by others to a new criminal opportunity, burglary. Other people apparently played an important part in his decision to break and enter.

Sometimes I picked up hustling ideas at the 7-Eleven, which was like a criminal union hall: Crapshooters, shoplifters, stickup men and burglars, everybody stopped off at the store from time to time. While hanging up there one day, I ran into Holt, who lived around my way and often swung with the fellas and me. He had a pocketful of cash, even though he had quit school and was unemployed. I asked him, 'Yo, man, what you been into?'

'Me and my partner kick in cribs and make a killin.' You oughta come go with us sometimes.'

Holt had been hanging with a guy called Hillard, who did B&Es, breaking and enterings. They did break-ins in Cavalier Manor during the daytime, when people were away at work. I hooked school one day, went with them, and pulled my first B&E. Before we went to the house, Hillard, a tall, lanky, self-assured guy who kept a .38 pistol tucked into his belt, explained his system: 'Look, man, we gonna split up and go to each house on the street. Knock on the door. If somebody answers, make up a name and act like you at the wrong crib. If nobody answers, we mark it for the hit.'

I asked, 'How we gonna get in?'

'Don't worry 'bout that.' It turned out that he had perfected a special way to kick doors off hinges.

We found a house in no time. Hillard motioned for Holt and me to stand back, then reared back and shot his big foot against the door hinges, knocking the wood door ajar, boooooom! He stood back a moment admiring his work, then we rushed into the house and started plundering. Hillard said we needed to be in and out of there in ten minutes, in case someone called the cops. He directed each of us to search a separate room and look for small, lightweight items that were easy to sell: television sets, stereos, jewelry and guns . . . We sold our merchandise to Hillard's fence and split the loot (McCall 1994).

In crimes where victims come face to face with offenders, multiple offenders are common (Bureau of Justice Statistics 1995). This is true of 46 percent of robbery attempts, for example. Except in murders and rapes without theft, crimes where offenders usually know victims, the majority of offenders commit their offenses with accomplices. Younger offenders, who commit a majority of crimes, are the most likely to co-offend, but most active offenders commit at least some crime with others. For both adults and juveniles, few are exclusively isolates (Suttles 1968; Reiss 1988a; Zimring 1981). Burglary and robbery, the crimes examined in this study, are the most likely crimes to be committed with others for all age groups (Reiss 1988b).

The influence of others on criminal decisions is a cornerstone of research in

sociological criminology. Sutherland's (Sutherland 1937; Sutherland, Cressey and Luckenbill 1992) statement of differential association solidified the friendship group's theoretical importance as the purveyor of a criminal world-view. He argued that crime comes about when definitions in favor of rule violation outweigh conformist definitions communicated to a person by their associates. Learning theorists have continued the tradition by emphasizing the social rewards of crime (Akers 1985). Empirical work has established that friends and associates are important referents in forming perceptions of the risks and rewards of crime (Erikson and Jensen 1977; Grasmick and Green 1980; Rankin and Wells 1983; Silberman 1976). While early socialization has been the focus of most research, contemporary studies show that recent associates and proximate group influences also play a part in criminal decision-making and encouraging crime facilitative attitudes (Johnson, Marcos and Bahr 1987; Warr 1993; Warr and Stafford 1991).

DECISION-MAKING

The lion's share of research on the choice to commit crime is grounded in the deterrence tradition. The fundamental assumption of most deterrence research is that offenders rationally assess the officially imposed penalties of crime against its rewards; when the benefits of illegality outweigh the costs, people will choose crime. According to deterrence theorists, if the costs of crime relative to its rewards are raised crime rates will decrease. Deterrence studies devoted to testing the truth of this assertion generally find supportive evidence for a weak deterrent effect. The costs and benefits of crime play a part in criminal decisions, but the traditionally heavy concentration on aggregate data and state punishment policy in deterrence research does not give much insight into the

processes of criminal choice.

That offenders seek to benefit themselves and that their crimes are the result of reasoned attempts to accomplish their needs and achieve their desires remains the point of departure in most contemporary research on criminal choice and decision-making (Cornish and Clarke 1986). Investigators recently have improved decision-making research by examining how convicted offenders evaluate their options and choose crime. Typical studies examine the components of thieves' decisions and focus on target selection and the weight attributed to various formal and informal costs as well as social and monetary rewards.

Studies of decision-making show that actors intend their decisions to be rational, to minimize costs and maximize rewards. Decisions typically are made using incomplete information, however. They also result from quickly formulated calculations, rather than careful consideration of all possible alternatives. Decisions may also be based on only short-term risks, costs and rewards and neglect consideration of consequences in the distant future. Moreover, decision-makers have incomplete and inconsistent goals, and all are not considered at the same time (March 1994). Recognition that rationality is bounded by context, available knowledge and the desire to make decisions quickly and easily, influenced investigations of criminal decisions.

Growing empirical emphasis on individual, rather than aggregate determinants of decisions led investigators toward a more complex and contextual theoretical understanding of criminal choice (Cornish and Clarke 1986; Lattimore and Witte 1986; Shover 1996; Tunnell 1992). Studies show that offenders usually have little idea of the

exact risks and consequences of their acts, calling into question the notion that minor variation in state imposed costs of crime play a decisive role in choice. Increasingly, it is clear that offenders consider decision alternatives sequentially. They focus on some alternatives and ignore others. Instead of calculating the best possible action, they calculate to achieve immediate criminal goals. Offenders also are able to focus on the rewards of crime and temporarily put potential consequences out of mind. A street-offender explains that a small reward was enough to motivate his crime and that legal obstacles, including the chances of apprehension and punishment were ignored.

when you are out there and on that stuff [crack cocaine] it don't matter to you if that guy in the convenience store has got \$25 dollars or \$2,000. He's got money and you don't, and the way you think is you are going to get it no matter what (Respondent 33).

Other offenders report that the consequences of being caught and charged criminally did not enter their crime-scene calculations. To quote a burglar, "that's just it, we weren't thinking. You aren't thinking about that. If you thought about that, then you wouldn't do these things would you?" (Respondent 40). A study of 133 California Robbers found that half claimed not to have planned their crimes, another third said they made only short-term plans. More than 60 percent said that they did not think of getting caught (Erez 1987).

Despite recognition among offenders that penalties for their crimes may be severe, they often pay them little heed. Some investigators have gone so far as to claim that criminals learn early in life to see the world differently. They claim that as a class

lawbreakers are defective decision-makers and that their defects explain why they engage in behaviors that seem irrational to those who are able to control themselves (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990). We need not accept this argument to recognize that offenders' imperfect knowledge, shortcut calculations, and subjective evaluations of their circumstances are the components of real world decisions.

Economic models of crime increasingly take into account the social and physical contexts where criminal decisions are made and offenders' perceptions of the world around them. A recurring finding is that street-crime is a more attractive option for the down-and-out than for the more fortunate, for example. Offenders' situational perceptions of the potential costs and benefits of crime shape their decisions as do formally prescribed penalties and pecuniary rewards.

Advances have been made in understanding the complexities of criminal choice, but decision-making still is portrayed unambiguously as an individualistic undertaking. When the influence of others is included in models of criminal decisions, it receives little attention in discussion and often is placed at the end of the models (Cornish and Clarke 1986: 168). Mere acknowledgment of groups influence neglects longstanding interests from other areas of criminology on group interaction and peer association. Although speaking from limited evidence, Erikson and Jensen (1977) assert that when it comes to how offenders evaluate the risk of punishment group context is crucial:

[I]n a group context, a host of important variables are probably operating to dilute the effects of individualistic variables, such as perceived certainty [of punishment]. Specifically, peer pressure in a given situation may make

perceived certainty impotent as an explanatory variable (Erikson and Jensen, 1977: 272).

GROUP CRIME AND DECISIONS

A few theorists maintain that criminality is an individual predisposition and that crime groups are insignificant for understanding criminal motivation and choice. Crime groups are portrayed by them as simple aggregations of individuals that cannot control urges or that are driven toward crime by character flaws or circumstances. Those predisposed toward crime, “end up in the company of one another and . . . [t]he individuals in such groups will therefore tend to be delinquent, as will the group itself” (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990: 158). In this individualist view, crime groups do not encourage the commission of crime or teach criminal techniques or motives.

After all, the delinquent group is characterized by weak rather than strong friendship ties, and it has no organizational duties or organized purpose (such as athletic teams or hobby groups). The very existence of such groups is therefore problematic: they clearly do not have the properties ascribed to them by traditional gang theories. On the contrary, they are short-lived, unstable, unorganized collectivities whose members have little regard for one another (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990: 158).

Individualists maintain that the group is of insignificant importance by comparison to the preferences of the individuals that compose it. While their emphasis on predisposed individuals may overstate the case, individuals that compose a group are apparently important. Groups might be transformed from law-abiding to offending by adding or losing participants and the opportunities they embody. Imagine the new potential for

crime brought to a group of street thugs when they meet and become friends with an accomplished jewelry thief, stickup man or con artist. Consider the changes in criminal potential when a crime group that carries out strong arm extortion loses the participant with muscle and his ability to inspire fear.

A variety of studies support the assertion that groups are important for understanding criminal decisions and that group decisions differ from individual decisions. A significant number of offenders say that in their crimes they "got involved primarily because of partners" (Cornish and Clarke 1986:27). Other evidence indicates that the prevention of delinquency through legal punishment can be modified by the variable "groupness" (Rankin and Wells 1983). Interviews with burglars suggest that the presence of others can build confidence for crime, for example (Cromwell, Olson and Avary 1991).

Evidence also indicates that participation in a group shapes criminal events and how they play out and not just the initial decision to break the law. Farrington, Berkowitz and West (1982) used interviews of more than 300 eighteen and nineteen-year-old youths to show that group fights differ from individual fights in both method and motive. Group fights were more likely to contain weapons, to be motivated by gang allegiances or robbery, and to cause injury. In addition, youths who were involved in group fights fought more often and led more socially deviant lifestyles. Their findings led them to the conclusion that, "individual fights are different from group ones . . . [I]n any theory of aggression it is necessary to take into account both the characteristics of the person and the immediate social context."

By observing or measuring changes in individual decision preferences that occur

during group deliberation the influence of the group on decision-making can be determined. Experimental evidence demonstrates that groups exert considerable influence on individual decisions. Decisions are influenced by attributes of groups (leadership, composition, cohesiveness) and by group processes (conformity, polarization, deindividuation).

People naturally conform to those around them and are more likely to choose behaviors that they believe are acceptable to proximate others. Asch (1951) and his followers showed that participants in a group often will conform to the majority opinion of their group even when they know it is incorrect. The path of least resistance for each participant is to assess other participants preferences and agree to the group's stance. Early on, conformity was sketched as a compromise with all participants exercising equal influence on group choices. Individual decisions were transformed in the group context by the need to accommodate others and come to a group decision, but essentially they represented equally each participant's preferences before group deliberation. Hepburn (1973) found that in order to maintain ties with a group, an individual must deal successfully with threats to the identity established and expected by the group, maintain accountability in accordance with group norms and respond appropriately to claims or directives for action. Individuals strive to fit into their groups and are encouraged to do so.

Understanding of group decisions was complicated when investigators demonstrated that decisions made by groups often bear little resemblance to the combined decision preferences of individual participants. Groups do not only combine individual

decision preferences and arrive at a happy medium. They exert pressure to conform, but some participants are better able to influence their groups than others.

Investigations of risk-taking and decisions were the first to show that the differences between individual and group decisions cannot be swept under the rug as conformity to the majority or as a simple combination of individual preferences. Few groups are egalitarian or democratic in their deliberations. Instead, group interaction polarizes group participants' assessments toward extremes. The outcome of a decision made in a group is often more extreme than the position of its individual participants. This polarization may occur because extreme participants in a group are adamant about their stance and force others to accommodate them through persuasion and tenacity. Groups that are in general agreement about how they should proceed often give deference to those holding relatively extreme opinions. For example, if most participants in a group prefer to make a risky choice rather than a conservative choice, then those most in favor of risk will be given more authority over the group's decisions. Extreme members exert especially powerful influence when they have no direct opposition. If a group's overall preference is perceived by its participants to be risk avoidance, then the most conservative persons will have more influence. Those with extreme positions hold unequal sway in group decisions especially when they are unopposed or have supporters. It is not always a single participant who exerts disproportionate influence on a group. A vocal or committed minority also can sway group opinions resulting in outcomes different from both the majority and combined individual positions (Kitayama and Burnstein 1994; Levine and Russo 1987; Maas, West and Cialdini 1987).

Group decisions also differ from individual decisions because where multiple people deliberate some lead while others follow. Leadership is defined as having a greater influence on group decisions than other participants; most groups have leaders. Despite a long academic quest looking for the traits that determine leadership and effective leadership in groups, a small part of leadership derives from consistent qualities of individuals. Influence is determined instead by assets and expertise needed for the task at hand (Kirschler and Davis 1986). As groups move from situation to situation, changing requirements and environmental demands can lead to a shift in leadership. Groups assign leadership based on their knowledge and perception of a person's task-relevant experience and ability. Although leadership is almost certain to have some influence on decisions in crime groups, it is largely unexamined.

Cohesiveness is "all the forces acting on members to remain in a group" (Festinger 1950:274). It has been called "the quintessential group process" (Klein 1995). The level of group cohesiveness is determined by the duration and intensity of ties between members, external threats to the group, past successful performance, belief that the group is beneficial, and alternatives available to participants. Some investigators of youth gangs assert that high cohesiveness leads to crime (Short 1971; 1995). They suggest that when a group is tied closely some participants in it can put pressure on others to break the law. Others claim that low cohesiveness causes groups to commit crimes in an effort to solidify their participants into a single clearly demarcated unit (Jansyn 1966).

Groups also may change individuals' perceptions of accountability. Students of collective violence have long known that people are capable of greater violence in

anonymous groups than they are alone (McPhail 1991). When the participants in a group perceive a lack of individual accountability caused by the anonymity of a crowd, they are more likely to engage in violence or other deviant behavior. Group cohesiveness, collective activity, an outward focus of attention and other factors in groups purportedly cause individuals to become less aware of themselves as individuals and more likely to violate the law (Diener 1980). Lack of self-awareness created by participation in a group “produces a disregard for personal and societal standards of appropriate conduct and produces a responsiveness to disinhibitory environmental cues” (Prentice-Dunn and Rogers 1989). These effects are captured by the term deindividuation. Something akin to it, has been called groupthink in business school studies of irresponsible decisions (Janis, 1982). In groups, no single member may think that the group’s behavior is in her control. Each participant claims only a minor part in the overall activity of the group. Thus, no participant need accept responsibility for their group’s course.

The objective of most studies of crime groups is to describe a specific type of collaborative criminal undertaking more than the internal interactions that characterize the group’s decision to commit crime. These studies overwhelmingly concentrate on persistent criminal task groups and organized gangs that together compose a small percentage of all crime groups (Miller 1980). Group structure is said to reflect the demands of a crime or the lifestyles of those who typically commit it. A case in point is when drug dealers cultivate network density and closure because they believe that this particular type of friendship group and criminal conspiracy minimizes their chance of arrest (Eckland-Olson, Lieb and Zucher 1984:175).

Descriptive studies of criminal task groups show that crime groups vary organizationally on many dimensions. They vary in size, cohesiveness, objectives, leadership styles, and degrees of conflict. They also vary on the formalization of roles and responsibilities. These variables have been mapped for typical crime-groups ranging from burglars, to drug dealers, to fraudsters and gamblers (Best and Luckenbill 1994; Cromwell, Olson and Avary 1991; Decker and Van Winkle 1996; Fagan 1989; Jackson 1994; Lemert 1953; Rengert and Wasilcheck 1985; Reuter 1983; Shover 1973; Wright and Decker 1994; 1997).

Most descriptive studies of crime groups largely set aside the issue of motivation to focus on describing structure and division of labor, but it is implicit in some that particular forms are conducive to committing certain crimes. Group participation changes individual assessments of risk and reward by making criminal success more feasible. The organization of a crime group can contribute to the crime it chooses and its initial decision to commit crime. Not only are specific crimes likely to exhibit certain organizational forms, but also certain organizational forms may facilitate commission of crimes. Some sophisticated crimes are only available to those groups that have previously established a minimum size and level of organization, for example.

Interactionists studies of crime have documented that interaction between offenders and between offenders and their victims is relevant to understanding the decision to commit crime (see Athens 1997; Best 1982; Luckenbill 1977; 1980; Maurer 1964; Polk 1994; Wolfgang 1958). When investigating group crimes, interactionists examine participant's behaviors and communication that contribute to the decision. They are

interested in the details of the face-to-face encounters that lead to crime. Matza's classic *Delinquency and Drift* (1964:52) asserts, for example, that group participation can create an "acute mutual dependence" wherein "concrete verbal directives, hints, sentiments, directives and activities" are misinterpreted as unanimous agreement that delinquency is the preferred course. Juveniles move easily, he contends, from conventional to delinquent activities. These shifts are largely the products mutual construction of a situation as delinquent that is based in part on assessments of others criminal willingness. Delinquency is likely to happen when challenges are issued in a context already defined by participants as delinquent and those present think that they must meet the call.

Interactionist approaches portray potential offenders as individual actors engaged in continuous back-and-forth interpretative communication. Although they may act in concert, they do not necessarily achieve consensus on plans of action. Rather, each participant has their own agenda and participants play off others in attempts to fulfill them. This complex gaming has the potential of turning a group toward crime without unanimous, majority or sometimes even minority agreement that crime is appropriate at the outset of interaction. In Matza's (1964) view, no person need be committed to the commission of a crime for one to occur. Crime often results from misunderstanding and a "veneer of consensus." Communication styles rich with bravado used to proclaim toughness among young men can lead groups of them to misinterpret signals from others as willingness, challenge or aspiration to commit crime.

Gang researchers recognized decades ago that, "their analytic separation of criminal groups from typical forms of interaction in the generic peer group ignored a

strong foundation of existing research and distorted their perspective on gangs” (Sherif and Sherif 1964). Short and Strodtbeck’s (1965) research on Chicago gangs concluded that gang participation and membership structured the choices and interaction of highly involved gang members. Delinquent events and crimes were shown to result from the desire to create or invigorate group loyalty by key members (Decker and Van Winkle 1996; Short and Strodtbeck 1965). Recognizing that the larger environment structures interaction and status construction in the ghetto, Short and Strodtbeck (1965) state that for the gang boys they studied interpersonal interaction was a significant source of criminal motivation:

the existence of the gang is crucial to understanding of the manner in which status management is carried out by gang boys regardless of whether the threat originated from within or outside the group. The gang provides the audience for much of the acting out that occurs in group situations involving elements external to the group, and it is the most immediate system of rewards and punishments to which members are responsive much of the time. It is the stimulation of relationships within the gang, or in any case involving other gang members, which most often precipitates delinquent episodes . . . [D]elinquent behavior, arises in the course of patterns of interaction in the pursuit of in-process rewards of such interaction. The latter, it is apparent, often involve status concerns of gang boys, status within the gang and with respect to objects and activities valued by the gang.

Interactionists examine group processes as the outcome of communication and action of individuals with each other and their environment. They portray groups as aggregates of individuals but assert that group participants are under the continual influence of other participants. Decisions are made by individuals, but other people and the expected responses and actions they will take are primary considerations in these

decisions. As Lonnie Athens (1997:25) put it in his study of interaction and violent crime, “[t]he proper model of human beings is one that sees them as acting units, or actors who organize their actions to fit the situations that confront them.”

Recently, several scholars have suggested that game theory has substantial promise for understanding the decision to commit crime (Bueno De Mesquita and Cohen 1995; McCarthy, Hagan and Cohen 1998; Tsebelis 1989; Villa and Cohen 1993). Game theorists study interactive decision-making using strategic games and logical behavior during them as a metaphor for other forms of human interaction. Game theorists, like interactionists, assume that people are instrumental rationalists and that their behavioral choices reflect their personal preferences and their subjective assessments of the probabilities associated with those interests. Game theorists explicitly recognize that wherever multiple people are present the calculations they make are contingent on their assessments and predictions of what others will do and on the *moves* that others make. They also assume that: 1) people are motivated by well-defined stable preferences, and 2) that they act strategically to meet their objectives. In developing their personal strategies, actors predict that those around them will behave rationally to achieve ends ascribed to them. This allows actors to think ahead and plan future moves. Of course, no one is ever sure what another actor will do, but they can make reasonable assessments based on the rules of the game that they think they are playing, their knowledge of others’ strategic preferences, and on what they would do faced with a similar choice. In examining crime as gaming, we should examine why street offenders co-offend, what people expect to get out of it and at what cost. We

also should examine how their expectations of this utility influence behavior and at how others' actions and their assessments of them influence criminal behavior and strategy.

Considerable evidence drawn both from studies of decision-making groups and crime groups suggests that the group context affects criminal decision-making.

Sensitizing concepts from these diverse bodies of research shaped this study, but it primarily is a study of group histories and interactions that eventuate in criminal decisions. I now turn to description of the data used to investigate group crime and the novice and experienced thieves who generously told me about themselves and their crimes.

CHAPTER 2 PROBLEM AND METHOD

Criminal decisions are not made by precisely calculating pecuniary reward against the chances of arrest and sentencing tables. Considerations in making a criminal decision are complex and often include the actions, influence and intentions of others. Burglars, whose acquisitive motivations are apparent, report that they have greater levels of arousal and evaluate opportunities more optimistically during crimes they commit with others, for example (Cromwell, Olson and Avary 1991). Yet, there are few studies that examine in-depth typical crime groups and how they come together and reach criminal decisions. This research is designed to fill the gap. I examine crime groups by focusing on their participants and the relationships and interactions between them. Particularly, I examine the decision to commit a crime and the role a group and its history played in it.

Criminal behavior can be explained at three levels of explanation: the individual, the macrosocial and the microsocal. These ways of looking at crime differ on their proximity to the act, their level of abstraction and the size of organizations, processes or groups attributed influence (Short 1997). Individual-level explanations use psychological and biological traits centered within persons and personalities to explain crime. An individual-level explanation of theft might point to the thief's low self-control, or to a biological need for stimulation provided by crime. Individual-level explanations purport that individuals carry their predispositions or aversions toward crime from situation to situation wherever they go. Criminality is a quality of persons.

Macro-level explanations emphasize the form of organizations, communities, social

systems, social structures and cultures or some other aggregate that produce different rates of their dependent variable of interest (Short 1997). They have yielded considerable return for understanding the spatial and temporal distribution of crime. A macrosocial explanation of theft might explain that high *rates* of it occur in *neighborhoods* with many young adults, low levels of adult supervision, high rates of drug-use, poverty or inequality.

Microsocial explanations focus on an event or sequence of behavior with an outcome of theoretical or empirical interest. They overlap substantially with the interactionist approaches discussed in the previous chapter. If aggregate location, individual predisposition and bountiful criminal opportunities are fairly constant, why do offenders abstain from crime in some instances and offend in others? Acknowledging that offenders might be individually predisposed people in places where crime is likely to occur, micro-level investigators examine the interactional settings and group contexts that lead to crime. Microsocial investigators study how human activity unfolds, whoever is involved (the individual level) or whatever the nature of the macro-level setting (Short 1997). They pay particular attention to the foreground of criminal events including the immediate, situational and experiential context of crime and interaction during it (Birkbeck and Lafree 1993). Micro-level studies of theft, or some other behavioral outcome, might examine the history of relationships between those present and the events and actions preceding and during the incident. Did the event result from a dare, a threat to someone's status, mutual encouragement, careful deliberation or carelessness, or a debate over the target's appeal? Katz (1988: 53) suggests that students of crime ask, "what are criminals trying to do." He proposes that the rewards of crime include expressive interpersonal

experiences where the attraction of doing bad is exhibiting situational mastery to others. Other advocates of microsocial explanations cite the spontaneity of most criminal decisions as evidence of the importance of their approach. Many planned offenses committed during adolescence are quickly “planned with the object of having a good time, getting excitement, or relieving boredom” (Short 1997: 110). Paul Tracy's (1987) analysis of a Philadelphia cohort shows “the remarkably high proportion of all crime committed on the spur of the moment.”

The criminal foreground is the primary level of analysis here. Group deliberation over criminal decisions, evaluation of criminal opportunities and choice to engage in crime is examined. Interaction between people, however, is affected by the contextual background of interaction and personal qualities of individual participants. The macro level is antecedent to and works through micro level situations. It comes into play when I discuss abstract and overarching contexts that influence interaction in criminal groups. Criminal groups may take on a character suitable to the places where they spend much of their time, for example. I also refer to the individual level to understand how group interaction is mediated and structured by the faculties and characteristics of participating persons.

Groups are the subject of this research, but individuals are the unit of analysis. All participants in a crime have their own view of the sequential unfolding of situations leading to it and what went on during it. When the focus of group research is the individual's perception of a group and its influence on his behavior, the individual is the appropriate unit of analysis. My subjects represent only parts of whole criminal groups.

The resources available for this project precluded tracking down multiple participants in criminal groups. For two of the groups I studied, I was able to talk informally to other participants in the crime. A shortcoming of most investigations of criminal decisions is failure to include multiple or all participants in examined crimes. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that in most cases, the information on the groups examined comes from only one participant whose view of the group's activities undoubtedly does not correlate perfectly with what other participants would say if they were interviewed.

From individual level data, we can gain insight into the contribution of individual members to the structure and functioning of the group as a whole, the experience of belonging to a group and the impact of group participation on action and on personal life (Hoyle and Crawford 1994). I examine crime groups, as they are remembered by participants, from their formation to dissolution. Several specific issues are investigated: 1) the experience of events culminating in a group crime including relationships with and perceptions of associates, 2) conversations, debates and resolutions undertaken before and after offending, 3) structure and division of labor and leadership, and 4) the influence of task and environment.

Most of us rarely witness crime and even fewer witness the deliberations that lead to it. Criminal situations and motivation, therefore, are best understood by talking to offenders. Qualitative methods are useful for discovering the meanings that individuals assign to experiences and for understanding emotions, motivations, symbols and their meanings, empathy and other subjective aspects associated with naturally evolving lives of individuals and groups (Berg 1995). Qualitative interviewing is appropriate when a topic

demands in-depth understanding of the respondents' experience that is best communicated through detailed examples and rich narratives (McCracken 1988; Rubin and Rubin 1995). Interviews are especially useful for bringing new light to puzzling questions and for unraveling complicated events. Two sources of qualitative data are used in this study: 1) written student accounts of criminal participation, and 2) convicted offenders' accounts gathered from interviews and validated by official records of their crimes. Convicted offenders' first-hand accounts are the primary source of information while student data are supplemental.

STUDENT SAMPLE

University undergraduates enrolled in introductory sociology and criminology courses were the first source of data. Potential student participants were solicited during their classes. Students were asked to describe a time when they committed a crime in a group or when one or more persons asked them to go along with a crime and they decided against it. Student volunteers then had one week to compose and submit a written open-ended description of a group crime event.

They were provided with some suggestions designed to add structure to their responses. The instructions asked them to describe their relationships to other participants in the event. They were asked to include any past crimes committed together, the motives of those around them, and to articulate whether or not they had control over their group's actions. They were asked how the crime was to be carried off, the consequences of it, and what they experienced during the episode. By requesting these details, I encouraged

students to address questions of interest and made their accounts comparable. Students' crimes often are petty, and students are criminally inexperienced and from a higher socio-economic background than other street criminals. Of the 89 student accounts collected, only a few student crimes were comparable to the burglaries and robberies of the convicted sample in the study, but 14 described crimes that could have resulted in serious felony convictions including aggravated assaults, burglary and car-jacking. The expanded variation added by their accounts was useful for understanding general patterns and experiences shared across crime groups. It also allowed me to examine, albeit unscientifically, differences and similarities between student crime groups and those of convicted criminals. I allude to data from students only occasionally to better establish a general point about crime or in quoting students whose crimes were similar to those of convicted offenders.

CONVICT SAMPLE

The primary source of data was a sample of 50 adult (age 18 or over), male offenders on Tennessee state parole or probation in Knox County for committing burglary or robbery with a group. These offenders provide a diverse sampling frame of group crime participants with easily accessible records. Including both parolees and probationers, in the sample a widens the range of criminal experience. At the same time, restricting the analysis to street-thieves kept the scope of the study manageable.

I sampled convicted offenders based on the crime for which they were serving their current period of parole or probation. All convicted offenders were on parole or

probation for an acquisitive offense: burglary or robbery. Offenders were selected with an aim toward maximizing variation in their criminal experience and the number of crimes committed in their last group. I also looked for offenders from groups of varying size - ranging from two to five participants. This figure was located either in various places in offenders' files that identify co-defendants. A larger number of groups small in number were included because crime-groups usually are small; the mean number of offenders per index crime is between 1.5 and three (Reiss 1988). Interviews and ethnographic studies of crime have been aimed, with few exceptions, at experienced and dedicated offenders. Because multiple convictions were not a necessary requirement for inclusion, my sample is likely to include offenders less experienced and specialized than other studies.

Although many offenders met the basic criterion for selection, only a sample of these was selected and participated in an interview. Offenders who met the requirements for inclusion were chosen from case files and their participation was solicited in a letter given them by parole/probation officers at their regular appointments. Officers did not know who chose to participate. Two hundred letters were delivered to offenders inviting them to participate in the study. A sub-sample of 50 consented, showed up for the interview and were paid \$15 dollars for their time. Offhand, it seems that correction officers' enthusiasm about the project was one of the strongest predictors of participation. Every offender on some officers' caseload that fit the criteria participated and for other officers no one did. Some officers probably conveyed that they knew me and that there was little risk to participating, whereas others only handed an invitation envelope and letter to naturally suspicious and bewildered clients. The offenders that did participate had

committed crimes that covered the full range of experience and severity. The procedures for contacting them caused few problems, although a few were surprised to find out that their records were public.

Interviews were conducted at a location and time of mutual convenience. Most took place at the parole or probation office. The loosely-structured interviews focused on the licit and criminal backgrounds of participants and their activities before during and after their last group crime. A popular technique in studies of managerial and elite decision-making, is to apply small-group research and its concepts to real-world decisions (t'hart, Stern and Sundelius 1997). Taking a similar approach, I draw on studies of small groups to guide the questions I ask in trying to understand criminal groups, and how their effects are experienced by members. Scholars of political decisions advocate "a six-step research procedure as an aid to diagnosing group decision-making" in historical cases. I follow their suggestion (Stern and Sundelius 1997). The specific suggestions are to investigate: 1) the extragroup setting, 2) the intragroup setting, 3) group leadership practices, 4) the type and level of cohesion in the group, 5) type and level of rivalry or conflict in the group, and 6) the process and interaction patterns.

I structured conversation in interviews with an interview guide (Appendix 1), and tried to keep offenders focused on a particular crime or string of crimes committed with the same crew. As interviews progressed, and the initial fascination with all aspects of subjects' stories that threatens to overwhelm those new to qualitative research resided, I became a better listener and conversational guide. I monitored the conversations for unexplainable or other inaccuracies, became more skeptical of some stories and began to

recognize the ring of truth in things that came up repeatedly. As I progressed through the interviews, I became more interested in and more adept at asking questions about a specific criminal event rather than the criminal lifestyle, and the content of interviews, especially the last 12-15, reflects this refinement. Because areas of interest and inquiry were modified slightly and promising avenues to pursue became clearer as the study progressed, not all offenders had the opportunity to comment on all questions. Interviews varied in length, but almost all lasted between one and two hours. The fact that responses to interview questions became repetitious indicated sufficient topical covering although this could be an artifact of the sampling design. The sample's purposive design prevents making the claim that I have achieved theoretical saturation.

Interviews were audio-taped. Taping allowed a precise record of the interviews. Detail and careful record of the respondents' perceptions are crucial to analyzing interaction. Qualitative research demands that successive interviews be modified to incorporate emerging ideas and questions (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Mishler 1986). By working back and forth between data and interpretation, inquiry can be reformulated to reflect emerging patterns in interviews.

Both students' written accounts and parolees' and probationers' taped accounts were transcribed and analyzed using the Ethnograph (Ethnograph 4.0) a computer program designed to organize and analyze text-based data. Accounts were coded to identify the places in interviews where subjects referred to a particular crime and the people with whom they committed it. Passages that spoke to group offending and the experience of crime also were selected. Sensitizing concepts derived from small group

and decision-making literature were kept in mind while selecting and examining relevant passages. As I worked through the accounts, some clear patterns materialized and new working hypotheses emerged. I kept note of these and checked them against other data in the study until I could confidently interpret them.

Convicted offenders' verbal accounts were supplemented with official records. These were used to select the sample of offenders, obtain their arrest and incarceration histories, develop offender categories for use in analysis and validate offenders' stories. Data collected from official documents are: age, race, employment, income, education, marital status, criminal record, sentences and where mentioned relationship to co-offenders. This information was acquired from presentence investigations (PSIs) and arrest history documents. PSIs are reports issued by probation officers to sentencing judges. Arrest histories are criminal records provided by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and state courts to judges and corrections officials.

A NOTE ON TRUTH AND RATIONALIZATION

The truthfulness and honesty of respondents whose answers might pose them risk can always be called into question. As others have noted, "interviewees are people with considerable potential for sabotaging the attempt to research them" (Oakley 1981:56). Offenders have reason to worry since, "every researcher could be a cop" (Yablonsky 1956: vii). An additional concern is that some may have been too drunk when they committed their crime to remember details (Fleisher 1995: 80). Despite these problems, many researchers have found serious street offenders to be receptive, informative and

honest in interviews. This may be because they would like to “right a wrong” or “help someone else out” (Becker 1986; Polsky 1967). Many of the offenders I interviewed said that their primary motive for participating was the desire to help the researcher with his schoolwork and to help others who might benefit from their stories. Many subjects also were appreciative. Offenders have few opportunities to discuss their lives and activities with someone else (Jacobs and Wright 1999:153). They may have skills and knowledge that researchers lack and enjoy talking about them (Berk and Adams 1970:107). More importantly, few people are interested in listening to their side of the events that caused the state to prosecute them.

The most worrisome problem with interviewing offenders about crimes they committed in groups is how they position their role in the crime relative to others who do not have a voice in the study. That others participated in their crimes and may have been the most motivated offenders in their group is a convenient rationalization. I was able to check accounts against official records in the parole files of participating subjects and to probe logical inconsistencies in claims. It is highly doubtful, for example, that an offender who has been participating in armed robberies for all of his adult life did not recognize that the group he was with was intent on committing his last robbery. Prosecutors’ treatment of crime also may give some imprecise insight into an offender’s role in a crime. While there are many and arbitrary considerations to plea agreements, the claim of being a follower is more credible for an offender who is allowed to plea to a much lesser offense than his partners than for one who the state singles out for relatively severe punishment.

Almost all offenders readily accepted responsibility for their crime, or at least for

getting themselves in a criminal situation. Blaming their crime completely on others was a convenient rationalization that none took. Offenders had little to gain by consenting to an interview and denying any responsibility or knowledge of a crime. Offenders' portrayals of crime are retrospective and are of their experience as they now see them. Of course, there are many explanations for how they cast themselves. Experienced offenders were likely to portray themselves as playing a decisive leadership role, for example. Depictions of a crime, although perhaps refined only in retrospective reflection, are likely to play some part in how offenders rationalized, conceived and carried out their crime

The following chapters offer qualitative data and findings on offenders' perceptions of crime groups and their decisions. This is an inductive theory-generating study. Hypothesis are neither confirmed nor denied in the research, though evidence for and against some theoretical assertions is presented. Offenders portrayals of their group's criminal decision are examined with an eye toward the influence of group context on individual criminal choice.

CHAPTER 3
ASSEMBLY: SOCIAL AND PHYSICAL SETTINGS OF
CRIME-GROUP FORMATION

Crime is more likely to occur in some times and places than others. Poorly organized and loose-knit neighborhoods are amenable to crime, for example. To measure and investigate this, dilapidation of buildings, homogeneity, stability, and socioeconomic well-being of areas have been correlated with crime rates. One recent investigation suggests that although certain neighborhoods encourage crime, this is because in these neighborhoods many young unsupervised males congregate in the streets (Sampson and Groves 1989). The presence of these young men largely explains the effect of neighborhoods on crime rates. To understand the setting for crime, we must examine not only the background environment but also the foreground.

PEOPLE

The offenders in my interview sample in most ways are very much like offenders in other investigations of street crime. They are poor; they are uneducated, and unemployed or employed at low paying jobs. At least one person and usually most people in each crime group were poor. Many of those I interviewed were making their only income illegally. Some exceptions are notable. A young armed robber I interviewed was from a wealthy and prominent family, although at the time of his crime they ostracized him from them. A few others were lower middle class men, who either had regular work and good paying jobs or were living with their parents who had steady employment. These better-off exceptions are worthy of mention so that I can generalize accurately about the sample.

The offenders' average age at time of interview was 32. Average age at offense was 25. Juveniles were not included in the study than half the convicted sample had spent time in prison. Some formerly imprisoned offenders had lengthy sentences. The average length of time served on the last sentence was approximately 4 years, although the sentence lengths were much longer for some offenders who had committed many or very serious crimes. The longest time served without additional criminal conviction was sixteen years.

Interviewed subjects' criminal records varied from those of novices to career offenders. Some have no previous arrests and others have rap sheets that are pages in length and reflect years of persistent offending. Two of the burglars had received life sentences on their last charge under habitual offender statutes. Crimes in offenders' records ranged in severity from driving under the influence and marijuana possession to rape and second degree murder. This was the first felonious property crime or violent crime conviction for 15 of the offenders and many of these had committed a variety of offenses. Most interviewed subjects had at least a misdemeanor criminal record prior to the arrest that I used to sample. Some young offenders appeared to have no record, but most of these mentioned that they had been arrested for crimes as juveniles.

Probationers had much less experience in crime than parolees. The parolees sometimes had charges in prison or parole violations added to their record and had accumulated more crimes before their last sentence. Ten parolees had served at least one other prison sentence. No probationers had been to prison, but some had served long or multiple jail sentences. Alcohol and drug problems were mentioned in 17 of the parole

files, but probationers' files were much less likely to record these problems. Parole files are more likely to record drug problems because they include prison records and because parolees have had more intensive contact with the criminal justice system and treatment programs.

Because there is turnover in crime groups, determining when one group ends and another begins is difficult. In the event that culminated in arrest, however, there was an average of 2.7 participants. While larger than the number of offenders participating in typical crimes, this is because lone offenders are excluded from the study. Represented groups also had diverse histories of offending together. For a majority of groups, this was not the first crime they had committed together. Table 1 describes characteristics of interviewed offenders. Table 2 describes characteristics of represented groups.

PLACES

The vast majority of property crime groups are formed in two foreground and sometimes overlapping contexts: street corner situations and parties. The former made up only a small minority of the crimes in my sample, while the latter were much more common. Groups that are not formed on street corners or at parties, come about in more deliberative situations where a pressing need for money is shared and a proposal for a promising scheme for getting it is made to close associates. Despite the exceptionally careful planning invested in these crimes by offenders, many are not strangers to drinking, drug use and life on the hustle.

**TABLE 1
DESCRIPTION OF OFFENDER SAMPLE**

Mean Age at Interview	32
Mean Age at Offense	25
Recall (mean years since crime)	6
Robbery	22
Burglary	28
Probation	16
Parole	34
Previous Prison Sentence	10
Approximate Parolee Prison-Time Served Last Conviction	4 years
Previous Property or Violent Crime Conviction	35
Non-white	10
White	40

N=50

**TABLE 2
GROUP CHARACTERISTICS AT OFFENSE**

SIZE	NUMBER
2	26
3	15
4-5	9
Avg. Size	2.7
ESTABLISHED*	28
NEW	22

*Two or more participants committed robbery or burglary together more than 24 hours prior to the last offense.

The street corner occupies a prominent place in sociological and criminological studies. For decades street corners and other public places where primarily poor men congregate have intrigued scholars (e.g. Anderson 1978; Bourgois 1995; Macleod 1987; Whyte 1955). Many of the crimes of those I interviewed were conceived of or happened in these places. That few crimes of the men I interviewed began in pubs or nightclubs suggests the limited resources available to most offenders and their style of partying. They do not typically do their drinking in places where alcohol is expensive and where the rules of the house, like no illicit drug use and a calm demeanor, may be too restrictive. They are not patrons of bars inhabited by polite society and prefer to frequent local dives and taverns. A greater number of offenders ended up in drinking establishments after stealing than began their exploits there. More crimes in my sample were conceived on street-corners, in a parking lots or in similar gathering places for impoverished or working-class drinkers and dopers. Skid-row drinking hangouts also are a common setting for crime, perhaps because they are places that some robbers find attractive and where they spend a good deal of time. One second offense armed robber explained his routine at 32 years of age:

I mean I didn't take time for nothing else. I just would go to the blood-bank and get me enough for a fifth [of wine] and hit the [railroad] tracks. And that's where we always hung out at . . . We drank and just ride around and not you know cause no trouble. I mean we'd argue and fight and with different guys here and there. Sometimes go to a bar and kick it. But as far as getting out and running around looking for trouble or a place to rob or anything like that, it wasn't ever like that you know (Respondent 6).

Another younger respondent sporting a punk-rock look currently in vogue among street kids describes the setting for his bloody aggravated assault and robbery:

It was just this old abandoned house where we were staying to drink, all boarded up. See I was homeless at the time. Well, not really homeless just sort of between places you might say. I could go to my parents if I wanted to, wasn't living under no bridge or nothing. Anyways, it was just this old house and all run down and everything and me and some others I knew, we was always going there to drink and shit. Pretty nasty really. There was just people come and go and get messed up, mostly kids . . . I slept there a few times. Some boys was there that I had been locked up with (Respondent 41).

A particularly likely street setting for robberies to occur is in areas informally designated for use in drug transactions. These crimes may result from customers robbing dealers or from dealers robbing customers or other passers-by. An attempted robbery is sometimes turned on the perpetrators. Robberies may start as fights and turn to robberies only after one side has enough advantage to humiliate their opponents by "going in their pockets" or grabbing their wallets and jewelry. This purportedly was the case in two of the crimes described to me by drug dealers in interviews. Two robbers described scenes in which barbs were exchanged with other young men while dealing drugs. They report that there was an understanding among several participants in the exchanges that when a fight ensued it would be a robbery.

In one account, an innocent pedestrian wanders behind a convenience store where he crosses paths with two groups of young drug dealers from different neighborhoods that have narrowly averted a potentially lethal fight. The interviewed subject was carrying a pistol. The account is related at length since it bears on several important points that will

be elaborated later.

We was at a minute mart when it went down. We met some dudes we didn't know. So they acted . . . Words was exchanged . . . one of them said something to us, something to my friend. So my friend got out the car and said, 'what's up with ya'll niggahs'. And soon as my friend got out the car, automatically I'm with him. Cause I am going to go down with him, so I jump out 'what up?' . . . one of the dudes say, 'ah man we thought you was somebody else.' It just stopped right there and then he told them who his family was and it was 'yeah we know you. We know your cousin' or something like that. We were just sitting there chilling and I asked one of the guys do he got a cigarette, cause I don't have no I.D. on me and they have somebody in the store buying them cigarettes. About this time he says 'nah', and he says, 'but I bet you this dude's got one coming down the street', so I went over there and you know asked the dude for a cigarette. About that time I asked him for a cigarette, one of them dudes came running across the parking lot and hit him - just Boom! So when he hit him, hit the ground and just immediately we started kicking him, just beat him. While they was beating him others was going in his pocket, getting everything he got and then it was funny seeing somebody yelling out, 'hey, hey, hey what ya'll doing'. So we got in the car and pulled out. I didn't know the one dude that attacked him. That's how it happened . . . Man, it seemed like these dudes must do that all the time (Respondent 27).

Robberies sometimes are conceived at more conventional social gatherings. These parties typically are held at places where a party is usually going. Like skid row fires and alleyways, these are designated party spots for some small group of welcome people. For lack of a better term, they may be called drug-dens. The image evoked by drug-dens is of crack-houses on back streets, filled with needles and junkies lying in a state of dismal intoxication. More typical drug-dens are simply the places where a small group of people congregate to indulge their legal or illegal drug habits and enjoy fellowship regularly. They often congregate at the same places repeatedly, usually because it is the most

convenient and pleasant place to party and because it is understood that drug use and drinking are acceptable and always welcome there. Among a group of regular associates it is known as the place where the party is, and it is a place for a group of friends and associates to go when looking for "something to do." Many active offenders reported that they maintained associations with people in several dependable party spots.

Younger offenders, and young people overall, often choose their preferred party places because there they can escape older adults' restrictive supervision. They party at a friend's home who has his own place whether house, mobile-home, motel or apartment. An older friend often occupies this residence. Sometimes they gather at the street-corner or at places where disapproving parents and spouses are absent. One burglary group started their parties at a chop-shop. They liked to spend their evenings drinking and watching other thieves deliver sporty cars. Older offenders also party where their style of drug use and drinking is tolerated, and this and their limited resources restrict them to certain homes, whether middle-class ranchers or backwoods trailers, and gathering places in the streets. When asked why his place had become the place that people were congregated to consume drugs, one parolee whose wife was in jail at the time responded, "[y]ou know, I don't know how that happened. We was at my house and I think that they lived with their sister and mother, something like that" (Respondent 10).

Crimes may be conceived around other people who are not even aware that some of those around them are looking for and talking about criminal opportunity. In robberies the victim is sometimes present at parties, and although less common, the same may be true of burglaries. One burglar related a story in which he and his accomplice were

visiting a buddy's rural home after a day out drinking at the lake. According to him, they knew immediately upon entry that they would come back and burglarize it later. The possibility of committing a crime to make more drinking money had been a topic of an earlier short conversation in the car. They "sat there for a while." They enjoyed their future victim's company and had a few beers. As soon as they left the get-together, the burglar's accomplice turned to him and asked, "Did you see all of them guns up in there?" (Respondent 37). Of course, he had. They then went to the end of the road and waited in their car for their friend to leave. The drunken twosome returned to steal a cabinet full of shotguns and rifles. After taking the guns, the men went to a pay phone and called other friends who they thought would be interested in buying bargain-priced weapons. As he put it, "there really wasn't nothing to it."

Another common setting for the conception of a plan to burgle or to rob is an automobile. Many offenders claim that they did not plan to commit a crime or only had a loose notion that one might occur when they got in the car that carried them to a crime scene. These offenders left the house just to "ride around" or were "out getting high." One burglar explains how he and his brother came to break in a bar and steal the public address system only to be caught trying to pawn it nearby the next morning in an attempt to get quick money for crack cocaine.

PI: Whose idea was it?

R25: Ah, I guess it was kinda both of us. He started talking about it and then we both started talking about it and then we just ended up doing it . . . I mean we just happened to be driving by, and you know, just going somewhere else.

And you know happened to mention it so.

PI: What did he say?

R25: He knew that they had a good system [stereo] in there and I think he just said that and let's go get it. So he pulled up behind there and we did.

An armed robber recently out of prison reports how he and an eighteen-year-old co-offender worked up to the crime that got his parole violated for robbing a convenience store. They did not plan the crime and he was not informed beforehand that it would be committed. He portrays himself as having minimal input into this crime and considering his lengthy criminal record this jibes with his generous treatment by prosecutors.

On the last one, yeah. Well, it more or less started out like most of them do. Getting high with my buddy there and riding around drinking, stopped off to get a few Valiums, and we was just riding around here and there. You know stopped at a buddy's here. It was an all day thing, you know drinking and driving, driving and drinking and stopped off and got these Valiums and the whole thing there . . . I was in and out . . . I would get so drunk, he would drive and then he would get so drunk I would drive while he was sleeping and just more or less the whole day went on like that (Respondent 6).

Sometimes, the car arrives at what is to be the criminal target unbeknownst to some passengers. Several offenders reported that the positioning of the automobile in which they were passengers was their first clue that a crime was going to be committed. As the robber quoted above succinctly worded it, "I knowed something was up when we pulled up and he parked like down the street and behind this wall, off to the side" (Respondent 6).

A burglar who interrupted an out-of-state drug run to commit a burglary reports

that he and his friend pulled over by chance but immediately and simultaneously recognized the criminal opportunity in their situation. These thieves were caught because they had to request the assistance of a suspicious neighbor to push their car out of the snow covered driveway of the vacation home that they were burglarizing. The burglary is remembered as a surreal scene during a long drug trip.

We were coming from Colorado where we went to buy this drugs, what they call red-phosphorus krank. I was all high on that stuff and seeing tracers and blown away. A big snow come up and we pulled into this cul-de-sac to stop. There was this hunting lodge or a big house, like an A-frame, and it was sure there was nobody home in there. I don't think nothing was even said. I don't know if he said something or I did, we were high and just talking jibberish like in rhymes. We just ran up there and busted in a window. I went through cause I was smaller and ran around and let him in (Respondent 50)

Even when offenders have stolen together before or have already conceived a plan to steal, the target often is not selected beforehand, but is discovered while out exploring, partying and looking for something to steal. One armed robber reports of his later crimes with a group, "I just sat around the house, we started smoking some dope and then we just got out and started looking for a place to rob" (Respondent 1).

An opiate addict and longtime burglar reports a similar approach:

The day of the crime. Okay, I woke up in the morning and . . . me and a friend of mine, we were beginning to use stealing as a job. Okay, it was a thing where we woke up of a morning and went and stole and took the merchandise to the nearest dope, drug man to get drugs. That's what I did. I did drugs . . . that morning I had already done a Dilaudid. I shot it and he shot dope also. Then we were out and in the process, you know we had already got over the sickness, that's the reason we done it . . . so we had already done us a pill and

we went out to drive around and look for us something to steal (Respondent 4).

Group crimes emerge out of diverse settings. The settings share some characteristics, however. They are places where many societal expectations of decorum, especially where it concerns drug and alcohol use are cast aside temporarily. Only those who are accepting of heavy drinking and doping, either through choice or force of circumstance, are allowed and made to feel welcome in these settings. Often petty crimes like drug dealing, theft and trading in stolen property, and drug use are ongoing in these party spots. The places where burglaries and robberies are conceived are often already outside the law. Offenders usually can be confident that those with whom they party will not run to police and tell what they know without provocation. Just as use of harder drugs does not become a topic of conversation around those thought not to at least indulge in milder substances, the topic of theft is rarely broached in the company of those who might inform on them. If it is, thieves give no detail.

The settings for criminal planning also exhibit the unstructured way that many offenders spend the days on which they steal. Only 28 interviewed offenders were employed steadily. Others worked only occasionally. Those with the most sporadic employment worked off the books doing errands, at unskilled construction or farm labor, hauling things for people or at similar jobs paying small amounts of cash. Some scrapped metal and old cars or picked up items off construction sites and the backs of pick-ups for a living. Only a few offenders worked on the day that they committed their crimes. These often took care to note that they were employed when they did their crime and contrasted

this with how their co-offenders spent their days. A few subjects were holding down steady jobs and stealing every day, usually to supplement their legitimate income with monies needed to keep up their habits. For those offenders who worked at steady jobs, however, crimes often came about when they were not expected to be at work or did not plan on going. Only one offender reported abandoning his crime group because he had to be at work in the morning. He reports that he went along with his crew only because he had been consuming their cocaine when they decided to commit a robbery. He knew that he would not be around to enjoy the next batch because he had to work, but rode along on the robbery anyway.

A majority of offenders apparently had little to do on the days and nights that they ended up committing crimes. It is easy to understand why some had trouble holding down jobs. They were drunk or high often, had criminal records, and some would steal at any chance. Instead of work, active offenders' days were filled with play and passing time, with occasional work or continuous hustling for a dollar. Several offenders occupied themselves leisurely selling dope to their associates or to strangers on the corner. Six made their living in styles ranging from meager to mildly extravagant through drug sales. Two were dealers in stolen property. One was an auto thief.

RELATIONSHIPS IN CRIME GROUPS

Most criminal groups in my sample were composed of friends. Friends are people who one knows personally and enjoys being around. Friendship is an informal and voluntary relationship. Although their relationships may have begun at work or through

family or neighborhood connections, most friends enjoy leisure and play pursuits together. Friendship also implies willingness to help each other, or reciprocal obligation. These obligations include willingness to “stand up for”, “to have someone’s back” and to “take up slack” where others may need help. Friendship is common in crime groups, but crimes also are committed with friends of friends. Friendship, due in part to the liberal use of the word in the United States, was the most common linkage used to describe offenders’ relationships with others in their group. Many relationships described to me as friendships might better be called mates because there was never a deep sense of obligation or dependence on a dyadic relationship. The word “associate” or “buddy” was sometimes used to express the notion of mateship. Mates come together in groups to drink or play and one mate absent in a group may not be sorely missed.

Friendship is voluntary, but it is a highly structured and surprisingly constrained endeavor (Allan 1989). In fact, a person’s friends usually are very much like them. This is true regarding race, age and class and for malleable traits like political opinions and preferred leisurely pursuits (Lazarsfeld and Merton 1954; Hess 1972; Fischer 1982). Because of the way social and economic divisions pervade every aspect of life, people of similar backgrounds and with similar characteristics are more likely to meet and to become friends (Allan 1989). People are not poor alone, for example, they are poor with family and with friends. Moreover, those who share similar positions in the economic and social structure are likely to have more in common than those who do not. Their lifestyles are usually compatible, and their experiences are more likely to be similar (Rosow 1970; Jackson 1977). In the following dialogue, a young thief describes a similarity that many

street criminals have in common, economic deprivation. Poverty lead he and his partner toward similar criminal interests.

R23: I don't know. One day we was tired of being poor and we saw this one house and we went in and burglarized it and that was it. Just kept on and started doing different houses and stuff like that. Just kept on.

PI: Did you talk about being poor like, "[I]'m tired of being poor, man, how about you"?

R23: No, we just um needed money or something like that and we said, he said, "how can we get some money and what can we do to get some money?" and just different things like that. And then, the next thing you know we just started breaking into houses.

Despite claims that property crime groups are likely to be unstable and relationships in them volatile (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990), I found that many relationships between the offenders are enduring. It is not uncommon for offenders to describe those they were with as good or best friends (Giordano, Cernkovich and Pugh 1986). A burglar and robber involved in a two-day crime spree explains of his partners,

Yeah, at the time I thought I was best friends with them. I would give them money . . . I was the one that worked. And they would come over drunk and I would let them crash at my house or whatever. I thought we were best friends. . . well more or less all we had in common was that we just liked to get out and party (Respondent 31).

When asked how he knew his partner, a burglar explained:

We was good friends. We was off and on friends while we was locked up (for

previous juvenile offenses) at Ridgeview, we was locked up together and I already knew mostly his whole family on up here. And I got out and he contacted me and then we both just went in together (Respondent 23).

Another offender described the multidimensional relationships common to many offending groups. He emphasizes that a number of factors contributed to his close ties with his co-offenders, including legitimate interests, locales, shared friends and fascination with the thug life.

The high school that I went to, a guy that I knew introduced me to them, and it turns out that one of them lived close to me and the other one lived just out past Mt. Hermitage, I can't even remember the name of it. It was only a half hour drive from my house, but us three started hanging out together and they were all right, we listened to the same kind of music and we were all into cars and stuff and neither one of them had a car at the time. They didn't exhibit any behavior like this really and then they just I don't know, there was this movie that came out that was called *Menace to Society* and we absolutely loved that movie and you know when people are young they want to emulate characters that they look up to in films. Well, that film was full of nothing but a bunch of thugs, and I don't know, I don't know if we were trying to live that lifestyle or what, you know, you would think they were and I wasn't a whole lot better . . . I mean they were just the ones that came along, but maybe we had common interests and some of their interests I wasn't into but I could put up with them (Respondent 49).

Many men reported that they had spent a great deal of time with the person(s) with whom they did crime, especially in the days before they offended. Five offending groups had at least one pair in them that was living together at the time of the crime. Some had simply been partying or wandering from party to party together for several days or weeks. Homeless offenders spent considerable time together on the streets, for example. Some of these offenders were in a state of semi-homelessness that is common among street thieves.

Wright and Decker found that 22 of 32 active robbers that they asked, "seldom slept at the same address for more than a few nights in a row, preferring to move from place to place as the mood struck them" (1997: 38). Similar arrangements were common, although not as common, among the experienced and inexperienced robbers and burglars in my sample. Many alternated between couches of friends and family, cheap hotels, abandoned buildings and charitable institutions but had no stable place to live and sleep. This condition of semi-homelessness is often shared with small groups of street people and others in similar circumstances who may take turns coming up with a place to "crash."

Obviously, proximity is required to form associations and friendships. We do not become friends based only on class, gender and age. We choose friends also from those with whom we come in regular contact. Similar to the working class generally, the friendship ties within property offending groups often are based on neighborhood, and family. Kinship relations are common in crime groups. Of the 50 offenders that I interviewed, 11 of them had a person with them that they considered to be family during their last crime. Several more mentioned stealing with family members on other crimes or in relating a reason that they started their careers in crime. Sometimes kinship ties are extremely close, while others were distant or through marriage. Twenty-five of 136 people participating in the sampled crimes were kin to someone else in their group.

Family ties were usually between two people of similar ages. Brothers, cousins, uncles or relations through marriage that are not separated by a great many years steal together. In an exception a crime group was composed of a severely schizophrenic mother, her son and his best friend. Four interviewed offenders had their spouse or

girlfriend with them when they committed their last crime. Six groups had at least one romantically involved couple in them. Family participants make crime groups more stable. All but two of the groups with two or more family members in them participated in multiple crimes together in a short time. All the family crime group participants that I interviewed still were in contact with their familial co-offenders. Family ties were only one dimension of the relationship between kin in a group and they were usually linked by the same party pursuits that bind non familial offending groups together.

PI: So you and these guys had been out together many times?

R1: Yeah, yeah. See me and the other charge partners was um family. And I had married into this family, in-laws. We hung out a lot, just hung out together and friends and stuff . . . just hanging out and getting high and stuff . . . they [his in-laws] introduced me to my first one [armed robbery]. They was about me and my wife's age.

Street criminals often are young, poor and do not have access to reliable transportation. In these circumstances, friendship ties develop with others in similar circumstances. Friends are made on street corners, school buses, front porch stoops, in laundromats and parking lots and outside convenience stores. Offenders often know each other from the neighborhood. For a small minority of offenders, these neighborhood ties ran deep and offenders in the same group had known each other over a period of years. A few offenders also noted that they were from areas of town where seemingly everyone was stealing, hustling or spending considerable time getting high. Their friends were nearly always drawn from these hustlers. Those who are spending time on the streets

come to know each other and sometimes steal or otherwise make money and pass time together. The adversity of the streets and the recognition that others have shared similar circumstances and may be counted as allies fosters these relationships. As one offender who had been on the street corner selling crack cocaine since age eleven put it of his charge partner, "we were tight . . . see we *came up together* in the neighborhood" (Respondent 27). Understandably, a friend who "has your back" on the street-corner before adolescence and who has come up in similar circumstances is valued.

A robber reports that he knew his older co-offender by neighborhood street reputation long before they committed a crime together. He remembers observing his future rappie's exploits before he started his own youthful venture into drug addiction and crime. This offender and his partner knew of each other because both had professional parents who shared a rare level of financial success in their traditionally poor African-American neighborhood, but they did not consort until they had street-life in common.

Oh well, everybody knows that this particular guy does this type of thing [robbery]. He and his brothers are very good at it. It's just see, well actually we kind of grew up together in the same neighborhood. And you know because our parents knew each other. He did certain things and we did certain things and you hear. But anyway, I knew so to speak that he did these things. Word's out in the street (Respondent 3).

The criminal justice system may be a significant source of bringing together thieving groups. Four interviewed offenders knew some of their last charge partners from previous incarcerations or previous contacts with the criminal justice system. Two met their partners during periods of juvenile confinement, one in a court mandated narcotics

anonymous program and one was on escape from jail with his crime partner during a string of burglaries. A few more mentioned, without being asked, that they had done other crimes with people they knew from jail or prison. Two thieves recalled other crimes where they had intentionally sought out friends from prison to bring them in on a promising criminal opportunity because they needed someone trustworthy. The burglar who met his last partner at drug rehabilitation remembered that after telling his newfound friend of the construction credit scam he had been running the man reciprocated with an idea, a sure-fire burglary that he failed to mention was of his elderly parent's home.

I had run into him in prison before, see his girlfriend just lived right down the street from where my parents lived at the time, so we got fairly well acquainted. Plus we went to the same narcotics anonymous meeting, that's a stipulation of parole. We started getting high and going to the meetings together . . . and he threw this idea at me you know (Respondent 16).

Legitimate and illegitimate work also brings together offenders. Two burglars reported that they worked in legitimate jobs with their charge partners. Both of these also were family with the same partners. One of the burglary groups in my sample was composed of several young men who also worked in a car theft conspiracy that was responsible for the theft and parting out of hundreds of vehicles. At the top, this was an extremely organized national criminal organization. The garage owner received life in prison for his crime. To the offender who stole the cars, his job seemed very much like most low-level property crimes. He spent his nights out drinking and looking for cars to steal and giving accomplices rides to parking lots of shopping centers and apartments with

plentiful suitable targets. His burglary was an alcohol induced lark that netted them some cigarettes and a little money. In the interviewed offender's opinion, there was little to fear about doing a burglary since he was already going to prison for motor vehicle theft (Respondent 42). Several offenders noted that they and their friends worked together in the same informally organized distribution network dealing drugs. Co-offenders are often introduced through drug deals. A nineteen-year-old burglar, who had been arrested more than ten times in two years, reported that his drug dealing activities kept him so busy that it was the primary way that he met and maintained relationships. His choice of running buddies also made good financial sense.

PI: Was most everyone you were hanging around stealing?

R15: Not everyone but a lot. Yeah, I sold drugs to them. I would buy sheets [LSD] and I would sell sheets to them, mainly I would buy sheets and then I would front them and then I would say like \$250 dollars and you can pay me after you make your money. So I charged them like \$250. So then I would front them and when you done that you got to hang around them a lot. *Got to hang around to make sure you get your money* (emphasis added).

Shared unconventional lifestyles cemented the relationships between participants in crime groups although they build them on foundations similar to conventional relationships. It is not everyone who is capable or willing to make the necessary sacrifices to participate in the fast lifestyle and dangerous pursuits that are common to many thieves. Persistent thieves cannot and do not hang out with just anyone. As is true of friendship circles generally, offenders hang or associate with those with whom they have something in common. A long time heroin junkie explained that understanding how thieves establish

relationships is not difficult, “there are plenty of people out there who have stole all their life. If you are doing it, you just meet them” (Respondent 29).

The stigma associated with their lifestyle virtually ensures that many thieves friendship choices are constrained. A repeat armed robber explains that his close friends and charge partners were devoted to an extreme type of drug use that set them apart from more typical users. Their fascination with cocaine also constrained the choice of crimes that would allow them to pursue their interest. Casual drug dealing and petty hustles could not keep up the supply of drugs they needed.

PI: Nobody in this group was selling cocaine?

R8: No, hell no. We couldn't. We wasn't selling it. There was no need to sell it. We all just wanted to do it all the time you know. I'm talking 12 grams a day. That was a piece [each]. Twelve for me, twelve for him, twelve for him and twelve for him. I was doing sometimes four eight-balls [1/2 ounce] by myself a day and everybody else was ranging from two to four. I bought a quarter once a day just for me. Shit no, you can't get high selling it, the only way to get high is to do it.

Another subject explained that his drug habit set him apart from the other young men and women in his area of town. When living life in the fast lane, relating to those on a slower and less erratic trajectory is difficult.

I live out in the country part of town, see. Most people I knew was into marijuana and that's about the only thing. It was like I got off into this by myself. Or *we did*. . . It was just us though. That was it. If we ever brought any girls over, we would take them to a hotel or something, you know with too much coke around you can never be too careful (emphasis added Respondent 18).

Others noted that they did not have much in common with those who were not involved in a life of drugs and crime. A robber explained that there were always those people in his neighborhood that were not on the street corners or selling dope. He did not fit in or feel comfortable with them or with the world of low paying thankless work he associated with them.

There were clean guys in the neighborhood, but I can't see myself you know staying home. Basically, I'd rather have fun, hang out. I see that on the corner, you know they have fun you know. They got everything they need you know. Wild. You know I got that mentality, why sit here and do nothing. I ain't never been to school, so I ain't gonna have a good job. The only kind of job that will hire me is construction. Damn man, I ain't lifting them heavy bricks [laughs] (Respondent 27).

Another robber who was twenty when he went to prison explained,

Drugs, alcohol. You pick people that are like you. I consider myself wild, so I hung with wild people. Didn't many people, you know you couldn't hang out with school kids that didn't drink, didn't do drugs, cause they would make fun of you. So I hung out with those that drank and those that did drugs . . . I been to all the juvenile facilities - Smith, Spencer, Taft, Balderbrook Homes. I grew up in Balder (Respondent 9)

For some offenders, the origins of discomfort when among people who earn money and live more conventionally is not difficult to locate in their biography. Many have been committing crime regularly for most of their life. A thief who had been shot by an angry homeowner during his last crime wryly responded when I asked about his past

criminal experiences, “[B]rother, how long a tape you got in there?” (Respondent 14).

Another armed robber who eventually earned two prison terms sums up his healthy accumulation of early experience.

My dad kicked me out when I was thirteen and I started smoking weed and drinking not too much before I turned twelve . . . I got kicked out at thirteen and lived on the streets for two years, before I ever got caught. They put me in foster homes, group homes, and jail - juvenile jail. I think it was just a little burglary and stealing at that time. I was stealing every day. I finally made my big trip to the boy’s camp when I was almost seventeen. I had to do eight months there for breaking into city hall. I got out of there three days before I turned eighteen and went through programs and all of that. By nineteen I was still drinking and smoking dope heavy and went down to Florida and went to jail for six months for receiving stolen property. After that, I caught my first prison sentence (Respondent 32).

Another offender’s history placed in his file by an apparently sympathetic prison official leaves little mystery at how his life trajectory placed him in the company of thieves. He currently is on parole for a life sentence as a habitual offender, but has never, according to official records, harmed anyone in his crimes. The wording and some specifics of the description have been altered slightly.

At age 26, this offender is serving his third sentence in the state. He related a social history characterized by extreme deprivation. His mother had a ‘nervous breakdown’ when she was determined to be an unfit mother by the welfare department and the home was broken. From the age of nine to thirteen the subject was raised in an orphanage. He was placed at Pleasant Ridge at the age of thirteen. He was released into the custody of a brother who currently is serving his fourth burglary sentence in the state system. He was sent back to Pleasant Ridge three times as a juvenile. Subject states that, ‘I spent my eighteenth birthday in the county jail waiting to come to the main prison.’ He has served two previous adult sentences. He is currently charged with third

degree burglary and being an habitual criminal, for which he was sentenced to life in prison. He should be encouraged in his realistic goals for educational and vocational future (Diagnostic Report, Tennessee Department of Correction).

Several authors have discussed the closed and tenuous friendship networks and isolation from conventional others that characterizes many offenders' lives (Cordilia 1986; Roebuck and Johnson 1962). Active criminals sometimes have broken available avenues for building networks of legitimate contacts. Some want no one to depend on them. Men who have been in trouble with the law often frequent the places and pubs where trouble is common and where they are comfortable (Clinard 1962; Prus 1983; Anderson 1994). A 20-year-old interviewee contends those who did not share in his party pursuits could not have even realized or did not care about his state at the time of his crime.

My mom didn't even notice. I came home one night and I was streaming blood out of both my nostrils and she was just . . . It didn't click. I lost a bunch of weight. Nobody noticed. I was pretty much out and about all the time. Nobody saw me enough to know how I was living except the boys I was into the robberies with (Respondents 18).

MIND-SET

The Justice Department reports that between 30 and 60 percent of offenders in prison were drinking alcohol when they committed the crime that placed them there (Cordilia 1986). Interviews done with street offenders show that regular drug and alcohol use are common and especially common during crime (Cromwell, Olson and Avary 1991; Shover 1996). Of the 50 offenders I interviewed, 42 reported that they were drinking or

drunk when they committed their last property crime and 30 were using at least one other type of controlled substance. A few also were using drugs without drink. Within most of the groups represented, participants were all using the same substances and approximately the same amounts on the days and nights that they committed their crime. Some offenders did report that they avoided the "harder" drugs that their partners used in addition to what they were using. This was not so they would be more competent thieves but because they had an aversion to some drugs or needles. The percentage of drug and alcohol users in my sample of only group offenders was higher than some previous studies of offenders (Akerstrom 1983; Bennet and Wright 1984; Repetto 1974) and similar to others (Cromwell, Olson and Avary 1991). It may be that the high levels of drug and alcohol use during crime by my informants is because group offenders are more likely to use before crime (Honaker 1990). The high percentage of users may also reflect drug and alcohol abuse by offenders is on the rise. The Drug Use Forecasting System (NIJ 1989) showed that between 54% and 90% of male arrestees tested in 21 cities in a 2-month period showed evidence of recent drug use. The NIJ data also suggested that the percentage of drug using offenders was increasing steadily.

Some offenders reported obvious signs of physical addiction including extravagantly costly habits and severe withdrawal symptoms upon arrest. These habits sometimes cost hundreds of dollars a day, although many respondents noted that reported intake varied dramatically and that they often provided drugs for others. A heroin addict whose body showed the toll of longtime addiction, including scarred arms and severe liver damage, remembered that he and his regular crime partners injected at 9:30 a.m. every

morning so that they could manage to steal (Respondent 30). A cocaine mainliner reports that he stayed so high for so long on the drug that his fence would supply him with free depressants to bring on the rare sleep that he needed to “work” (Respondent 14). One recidivist offender reminded me that for him drug use was no insignificant or incidental part of life:

Drinking always accented everything . . . that was my situation . . . I always, always used marijuana. That was something that I always tried to keep and I used cocaine or whatever else was available. I wasn't the kind of addict who ran around and looked for cocaine specifically. But, like I said I always smoked pot and drank. That was my drug of choice. You know any time that I ever committed a crime or did anything like that it was directly related to the situation that I caused as a result of drinking or doing drugs. [This crime] it was alcohol and Meprogan, if you know anything about drugs, Meprogan and alcohol will wipe you out (Respondent 19).

Even for people who drank and used other drugs regularly, as most of the offenders I interviewed did, the amounts that they consumed on the day of the crime they describe were atypical. A burglar said,

R25: All day and all night. That day and that night. I had been smoking crack all day. We probably went through a thousand dollars worth, man.

PI: Was that kind of use unusual at the time?

R25: Well that was his paycheck and my paycheck together and a little borrowed money too. Yeah, it was the highest I ever been on it.

Some recalled some impressive amounts of consumption. One offender reported to me that during the day that he pulled an early morning robbery of a convenience store

he had consumed beer, whiskey, marijuana, cocaine, LSD and dabbled in powdered methamphetamine for the first time. Prosecutors went soft on him. His lawyer successfully argued diminished capacity and was able to produce a videotape of the robbery that shows the crook inadvertently knocking over a cigarette stand and stumbling around the store while his partner holds a gun to the clerk's head. He says that before entering the market, as best he can remember, his partner aided him in strapping an assault rifle to his back because he could not manage to hold onto it himself. Our protagonist barely made it through the door by the time the robbery was over. After terrorizing the clerk and getting a small amount of cash from the register, these two heavily armed and intoxicated men pulled over their car at the first phone booth they came to after the robbery to answer a 3 a.m. beeper call. Being one of the few cars on the road in the area, they were apprehended while talking on the phone with people at a party they planned to attend. They had masks, rifles and money in the car. A middle-aged armed robber echoes the pattern of consumption that leads to such mistakes. "Yeah, I drank a lot. After I got my divorce I drank a lot, but on that day [day of robbery] I drank more. We was drinking a *whole lot* on that day" (Respondent 34).

Another offender who participated in the late-night beating and robbery of two street-corner crack customers in a downtown public park reports his chemical condition at the time of the crime. Although no novice to drug use, he admits that he jokingly calls the months surrounding this crime his Valium period because he only has spotty memories of them. During this time, he was prone to senseless violence that he knows about only second-hand from friends' recollections of his combat stories. The day of the crime stands

out over his usual consumption. He had been drinking and doping since 11:00 a.m. that morning while selling rocks of cocaine in an unfamiliar "fiend" neighborhood - a neighborhood known as a place to buy and sell drugs.

PI: Was there anything unusual about the day that you did these robberies?

R9: Yeah, I got in a fresh order of Valiums. Fresh ones - and they are a lot more powerful when they are fresh. So, I had ate about twenty yellow Valiums that day and we drank about half a gallon of whiskey. I was pretty well pumped. Yeah, oh yeah. We both was, we had been out there all day drinking and selling ready-rock.

The robber, and by vocation cocaine dealer, who committed the beating and robbery of the passerby behind the store recalled how he arrived at the corner-market to drink quarts of beer and purchase cigarettes in the first place.

See it was me and a group of boys. It was about four days after my birthday. We were still partying. Still partying. Me and some girls met up with some friends of mine and went to the store to buy beer . . . yeah we still celebrating (Respondent 27).

Offenders often see crime and especially the crime that got them caught, as the culmination of a binge of drinking and drug use. They were not just casually consuming drugs and alcohol, but had single-mindedly focused on partying and consuming as much dope as they could. Sometimes these benders lasted for days without a break and sometimes for weeks or months with only a little time out to rest or earn some money. The proceeds of crime are often used to contribute to a desperate party, where

conspicuous consumption drowns out all responsibilities and consequences from previous episodes of shirking them. Crime also is committed during these parties. An inexperienced armed robber explains how he used the dividends of crime to buy drugs to maintain a state of intoxication that had already made him carefree and bold.

We split the cash and then we went and got what drugs we needed. More alcohol. We had been partying all day for probably a week straight. Just partying, not really sleeping. You know I don't know if you've ever done any cocaine or whatever, but you don't sleep on cocaine. It don't let you sleep . . . I am not no dope addict. But, I was too damned high to care. I could have got shot. That man [the victim] could have shot me and I was just kinda rolling along (Respondent 10).

Many offenders set out to consume dramatic amounts of drugs and alcohol on the days that they committed their crimes. They convened with their associates knowing that they were out to do something unusual, if only it was partying extra hard. These nights do not often begin with the idea of having a few beers and going home, but of going all out. The parties are extreme demonstrations of self indulgence.

Consumptive patterns that are easily understood as showing off often precede crimes. Without going into a treatise on culture and consumption, it is easy to acknowledge that the ability to party hard and consume without fear of repercussions is admired in many circles. This admiration stems from the ability to show off that one is accustomed to partying, and is willing to take risks with the capacity to think clearly and with the body. The ability to hold drink or handle other intoxicants is admired among some groups of college students and street criminals (Brooks 1981). Once a bender is

started, it may be difficult to stop. When a tipping point in consumption is reached , there is no reason to stop until physical exhaustion and intoxication preclude going any farther. Part of the momentum of these parties comes from offenders' realization that coming down off of them is not enjoyable and may lead to recognition of the damage that was done during them. Of course, purely physical pleasures of the disorientation brought on by drugs and alcohol are desired, but drug use also is a social event.

The proceeds from crime are also used to impress with drugs and alcohol. After committing their crime and collecting the proceeds, offenders do not hoard them away. Tales of generosity with other people's money are common. Some of these may be fictionalized, but stories of generosity are so common that it is sure that many offenders buy things for friends and people "in need" with stolen money. As the money is often designated to be blown, it does not matter how it is wasted. Thieves make impressive gifts and loans and they often return to parties with large stashes of drugs that they are happy to share. Thieves do not seem to mind terribly that they have put themselves at greater risk than some of those who will enjoy the proceeds of their crime. Many male crooks are generous in the presence of women. A show is made of the ease that line after line of cocaine can be laid out without concern. One group returned from a robbery mission with money and drugs. They received an enthusiastic reception, "[T]hey were happy as could be. Slapping high-fives and laughing. They knew what we had done and they didn't care. They were going to get high off it too" (Respondent 10). Some offenders have built up substantial followings of those who are eager to take what they have to offer. A heroin addict who was an extremely active thief explained his halcyon

days of burglary,

[I]t feels good, to have on some jewelry, have some money and have a pocket full of pills. You never know how many friends you have until you've got a pocket full of pills. They come out of the woodwork . . . Yeah, I miss it, sometimes I do (Respondent 4).

Others have noted the importance of the context of drug consumption for understanding theft. Cordelia (1986) used criminal histories of 32 alcoholic prison inmates and interviews with 67 men imprisoned for robbery to document how a group drinking together can transform into a band of robbers. Her analysis showed that drinkers rarely entered the drinking situation with any plans of committing robbery but that crimes occurred on either the spur of the moment or the intent arose while drinking. After giving examples of the quick and spontaneous decisions that lead many group drinkers into robbery situations, she concludes that alcohol magnifies the significance of situational factors contributing to robbery. It is especially important to examine these factors in crimes where drugs and alcohol play a part. Many thieves that I interviewed agree with the view that alcohol and drugs increase the importance of the most immediate causes of crime by diminishing the capacity to think long range or about extra-situational costs of crime, "[y]ou just don't care you know. You get the attitude that, hey, whatever happens happens, I'm not gonna worry about that until it happens, and that's basically the frame of mind you're in" (Respondent 19).

Crimes were not isolated events in the convicted thieves' lives. They could not describe them without detailing the backdrop of preceding events that lead to their crime

commission and ultimate arrest. Their parties were not rare events. Most offenders had lived through many like them. Many of those I interviewed had trouble focusing on and remembering the details of a single criminal event. For very active offenders, they all run together. They had stolen so often that they referred more easily to a pattern of offending than any single event. The crime that I focused on seemed trivial and incidental compared with other things that some interviewees had not cleared up when arrested. For others, removing a criminal event from the larger trajectory that their life was on at the time of its commission is difficult. Discussing criminal periods in their life or times when they were stealing was easier for thieves than detailing a single event. Arrest was seen as the culmination of a series of events. It was attributed to "living hard" or the "fast lane" or continuous "screwing up." In the following account, notice how the respondent shifts easily from talking about a particular incident to his standard method of stealing.

And so we had already done us a pill and we were out looking for something to steal. And well, he most of the time always fount the houses. You know, he was more experienced than I was. So we just looked for a house. He'd say looks good to me and I would be with him. We would go in and take people's guns and jewelry and money to get drugs . . . I like them big old houses and he did too (Respondent 4).

Crimes are likely to be committed in strings, one right after another or in short bursts of activity. Typically, criminal events do not occur in the middle of periods of otherwise in control and carefully managed lives. Based on interviews with 658 newly convicted male offenders in Nebraska, the investigators concluded that local life circumstances are strong predictors of offending (Horney, Marshall and Osgood 1995).

They had offenders recreate their calendars of offending and other activity in one month units. During months of drug use, the odds of committing a property crime increased by 54 percent. Heavy drinking periods were more strongly related to property offending than was illegal drug use. Living with a wife was found to decrease the likelihood and frequency of offending. These results, “forcefully demonstrate that social events during adulthood are related to crime and that they do not result solely from entrenched predisposition (Horney, Marshall and Osgood 1995).”

In my interviews, traumatic experiences were volunteered by some as significant precipitating events for crime. These often were related to drinking and drug use, but offenders usually could not articulate whether their problems were the cause or result of their lifestyles. Recent violence victimization, problems with child and family services, divorce and custody disputes, breakups, loss of jobs, and ongoing legal proceedings were all mentioned as stresses that contributed to the chaotic lifestyles of offenders and were a result of them at the time that they were participating in crime(s).

The pace of the criminal lifestyle not only is hard on the body and financial resources but also is hard on social resources and relationships. Many offenders were estranged from their families and many friends at the time they committed their crimes.

One reports,

I went home you know, but home I basically never stayed. I stayed at a lot of peoples' houses and motel rooms and shit like that. I live with my momma and she knows what I'm doing; she don't approve of it you know. I could go home any time, but she knew what I was doing and she always tells me to quit so I stay out of the house, try not to bring drugs in the house and stuff like

that. Sometimes on Friday I give my mom some money and pay a bill now and then (Respondent 27).

Directly before their crimes, convicted offenders had missed or quit work; they had borrowed or stolen money. Others were wanted for other crimes, had jumped bail, missed court appointments or were on escape. Long and impressive lists of offenses that they must answer for often await at the courthouse when active offenders are finally arrested and interrogated. Debts to drug dealers and others often worry them. Two were on the run because of illegitimate business transactions gone bad. Three owed large amounts of money to lawyers. One was suspected as a snitch in a burglary ring, isolating him from many of his contacts and friends and eventually leading to his arrest on an anonymous tip.

As one car burglar and thief told me, “[I] was on the run. I was looking to get busted any time. Only after I sobered up, I had time to think about it” (Respondent 19). Another parolee remembered the situation that led to his final week-long crime spree that ended with an invasion robbery at knife point:

what had happened was I had basically done some things at home and I couldn't stay at home . . . well, the background situation was I had been married and everything like that and my wife and I went through a separation and I done some like stupid stuff. I never done nothing crazy. Steady shoplifting and anything like that and I had written some checks . . . on my mother and actually none outside the family circle. I done some things at home and my mother was like, 'if you going to be doing that stuff then get somewhere else'. 'Okay fine, I can get somewhere.' I had gotten into a situation with some drug dealers right and so I was basically on the move . . . I don't like to shoot people. This person had walked up and stuck a pistol in my face, but anyway so them last days I started doing really stupid stuff at night

time. Most time in the day time I stayed inside. One thing I can say was I walked up to this place and said, 'well, I have a gun in my pocket' and they gave me the money (Respondent 3).

A drug dealer new to theft explains that the day of his crime started off hectic and became even more so. He describes the busy evening that he committed his last crime:

I had been partying for four days and real hard that day. Actually since three o'clock the previous morning. I take that back I was working for UPS when I did this. I sure was. Eleven at night till three in the morning. I went in wired and came out wired. I remember to my girlfriend's house. She was moving that day and that's why we got the truck to move her things and go get my things out of a storage unit, cause I hadn't paid my bill in two or three months and wanted to get my shit while I could. We went to her house at four or five o'clock that morning. At about nine o'clock we went to her old place, she was getting thrown out of her apartment. I said, 'let's go get a truck.' The only reason I got the truck was I was the only one with a license. I went and got this truck and come back and moved her to a storage unit and put a pad-lock on it. Then we take off and at five o'clock that evening we went to my storage unit and we had been partying really the whole time. There was no planning, one guy cut a lock and we started (Respondent 24).

Troublesome events and persistent problems are routine for many street-offenders and trouble seemingly is far from over for many. Three had pending charges awaiting them when I interviewed them. One reportedly had narrowly averted arrest on an illegal weapons and domestic violence charge the night before our interview. Another was arrested for a burglary the same day. One tested positive for drug use and his parole was violated the day of the interview. At least three interviewed subjects' records had accompanied them back to prison within six months of their interview.

Numerous thieves remembered thinking or knowing that their life was out of

control or threatened to escape their control. But, the belief that there was little they could do about their circumstances accompanied this realization. They recognized that they had already made many decisions moving them along a chaotic track of behavior. They thought it unlikely that they could get a grasp on things or get things back in perspective easily. Two interviewees used the same metaphor to describe the successive events and problems leading up to crime(s) and their perception of these events.

My charge partner was so far gone, I mean he already was a big-time addict. I wasn't strung out like them, but I was caught up in a *whirlwind of shit*, my wife is in jail and I had not hardly eaten anything and had hardly slept for a week, a week (Respondent 10).

When I first got out I got *thrown into a whirlwind*. I thought I was going to be one place . . . I thought I was going to a halfway house. It seems as soon as I walked through the door, they kicked me out. And there I was, I didn't have nowheres to go. I'm not from here. I didn't have no friends here. I had nothing, so I had to stay down to the Salvation Army for about two weeks. I finally got my own apartment after about two weeks and went from there. I was real close to getting back in trouble. I could feel it coming (Respondent 15).

The whirlwind is a telling metaphor of the experience of living as a criminal or heavy drug user. The whirlwind is an external force. It has a momentum of its own. This momentum builds. It picks up things and carries them with it. The whirlwind's path is difficult to predict and even more difficult to control. Once in a whirlwind with building momentum the outcome and landing place are unknown. Problems become overwhelming and the best way to deal with them is to avoid them or to go with the flow and see what happens.

The solution to one problem is the cause of another. Eventually people faced with these circumstances adapt a devil-may-care approach to life and live in the moment rather than let problems overtake them. Some “roll along” and let things happen without planning or forethought. One recidivist commented that with experience a crook learns that problems of the type common to offenders are inevitable once the decision to live as a heavy drug user is made. He explains that he absconded on his last parole period to live on the streets because he knew from experience that he could not keep up the lifestyle to which he had grown accustomed and please criminal justice officialdom. He decided to flee, and take his chances with inevitable impending arrest:

I was unemployed at the time. Parole is a pretty strict regimen, at times. When you have to check in and like I was getting high for twenty years and when you are getting high and drinking and doing your thing, it isn't conducive to parole. Eventually they will put a piss test on you and pop you. I was going to bars and different things and eventually its going to catch up to you so at that point in my life I was living, not going with the parole. I was doing my own thing (Respondent 19).

A residential burglar explains his attitude and the circumstances surrounding his last crime.

PI: Was there anything unusual about this period in your life? I mean that's several charges in just a couple of months.

R28: Right. I mean I honestly got aggravated vandalism (for destroying a girlfriend's car with a tire iron), which see I am diagnosed with explosive temper disorder . . . and I basically ended up getting in a couple of fights over it . . . and I had an incident with a girlfriend who brought some guy over to help her move out and I got my gun and told him, 'hey you come inside and I

am going to kill you . . . whoever you are dude if you step across that door frame, I am going to shoot you'. I said, 'this is no joke' and put the gun on him and that was my aggravated assault . . . and the added stress from the court-load and everything and not understanding what was going on with the future of my life, kind of put me in the state of mind, it's hard to explain, that it was done anyway. I mean I was gonna be a felon, I was going to jail, I wasn't going to be able to get all these jobs. I was gonna be looked at as, well you know I just thought it was done. Who cares, you know? . . . And I just didn't have much to worry about what came about.

The burglar, who committed a theft from storage units, explained that by the point he committed his crime he had adopted a similar fatalism.

No, hell no, I didn't care. Wasn't nobody going to stop us. If the police had come in I really believed they would have had to kill us. I had a gun and I know myself, I wouldn't have stopped, you'd have had to kill me. It was the whole lifestyle I was living at the time. I was in the fast-lane and it just ran wide open (Respondent 24).

A longtime parole officer responsible for absconders explained his interpretation of this adaptive technique, "These guys they don't look around them. To them, yesterday didn't happen and tomorrow never will." (Personal Interview October, 1998). One interpretation of this outlook is that it is a way of coping with the sense that events have become out of control. Based on the number of times I heard the phrases in interviews, the thieves' slogan could well be, "I didn't give a damn" or more basely, "I just more or less didn't give a shit. I said fuck it" (Respondent 34).

Some offenders lives are not so much more tumultuous than others their age and in similar circumstances. But, for the offenders living most conventionally, the time surrounding their crime is often portrayed as a foray into the out-of-control or as a lesson

learned about hanging with the wrong crowd. The situations that lead to crimes are times where the effects of actions and careful consideration are suspended and replaced with an exploratory approach. Street criminals are testing the fates, and to some, the consequences seem inevitable.

CHOICE AND ASSOCIATION

It is not only neighborhood, family ties and shared mind-sets that shape choice of associates. There is always an element of choice. Choice is no less a defining element of joining a group in crime than it is of friendship groups generally. Many offenders noted that they consciously chose to associate with their crime partners due to similar interests. This lends some limited weight to the individualist argument that crime groups might not motivate crime so much as reflect the choices similarly motivated individuals to come together.

Crime springs from settings that have been entered because they potentially provide action and wild times. Scenes that precede crimes have an element of spontaneity to them. The bounds of the activity are unstructured and largely decided by the actors in them. Several people pitch in on building criminal momentum. A robber struggled to communicate the loose and continually changing structure of the party that lead up to his last crime.

PI: Were you partying with Willie [his co-defendant]?

R3: To an extent. To an extent you know because you go from one place to another place. I'd been like that you know for some time. You have a car or

he has a car and that's the situation, then this situation turns into a better situation and then you get high some more. Its kind of like a balance, who's going to do something last. Who is doing things just kind of shift back and forth. I understand that to an extent. I guess most people who have been doing it understand.

Crime is improvisational. This spontaneity and movement is characteristic of long mobile parties. The question of who will provide for the continuance of the party adds to action, excitement and tension experienced by participants. Part of the sense of action derives from the belief that the scene could be easily transformed into one that is very consequential or from the knowledge that it is probably going to be transformed. Placing oneself in a potentially criminal group can be exciting and this excitement can be attractive. Action is,

to be found wherever the individual knowingly takes consequential chances perceived as avoidable. Ordinarily, action will not be found during the weekday work routine at home or on the job. For here, chance-takings tend to be organized out, and as such as remain obviously are not voluntary (Goffman 1969: 145).

Sometimes nothing illegal comes of situations that look very much like situations that precede crime, Everyone gets happily or unhappily high and drunk and goes on their way. On the street-corner, drug deals come off smoothly, no one is victimized, and innocent victims do not walk into a crime most of the time. The potential is there and offenders recognize and often enjoy the circumstances where it is a potentiality.

Edgework (Lyng 1990) is flirting with danger by willingly putting oneself in a situation that could become threatening if circumstances develop so. The thrill of

edgework derives from potentially severe consequences that could happen even where the odds are long that they will. Hangdivers, repellers and skydivers are legitimate examples of edgeworkers. These are activities where nothing is likely to go wrong, but the fact that it might gives sufficient thrill to most. Others must take these activities to extremes, repelling into dark pits, gliding off untrod mountains or jumping off buildings to push things closer to the thrilling edge. Working without a net and without slowing down to plan increases the rush of playing at the edge.

Although crime has many attractions, it is edgework. The thrill of associating with people that are prone to find action is impetus for some to seek out risk-taking associates. Edgework begins when some groups assemble, therefore. Several offenders complimented their co-offenders by citing exciting times that they had together before committing a serious crime. One recounted a fight that he and his soon to be robbery partners narrowly avoided at a public street festival when a drunk spit on his car.

They were trying to get out their guns. I was like earlier, why in the hell would you want to carry a gun down here for no reason. We are in my car and these drunks are yelling at us and stuff from this van beside my car. I was just ignoring them, but they [his partners] wanted to get out their guns. Then this idiot spits on my car. I was just, 'yeah, go ahead get out the guns.' You should have seen the look on those old guy's faces when they saw those guns pointed at them. They were apt to do stuff like that (Respondent 49).

Similar stories were common when I asked for descriptions of crime partners. They were sketched as "crazy", "wild" or "dangerous". One offender described his uncle and crime partner in what seemingly was a derogatory fashion.

He was filthy. He is always dirty, don't never take a bath. His beard is dirty. He is dirty. Always shoplifting. His clothes is dirty. He is drinking all the time. I mean I drink too, but he is always drinking whiskey and all the time. He is always having whores with him, spends all his money on prostitutes.

He later continued, "I admired the hell out of him . . . he had been doing stuff like this for years down in Florida" (Respondent 34).

Unpredictable and rule-breaking people can be alluring. Several offenders acknowledged that they had seen their crime partners engage in extremely violent behavior in the past. In one instance, witnessing a cold-blooded shooting did not deter continued association with a co-offender although the witness reportedly was incapable of such violence. Dangerous people are the material of wild times and noteworthy stories. Offenders may end up in the places that inspire crime because they are going where the action makers are. They are attracted, not unlike criminologists and ethnographers, to the characters that inhabit criminal situations.

To see that crime conducive situations have a special excitement associated with them, one need only look at the conditions that often lead up to a crime. Extreme intoxication is one condition that many offenders claim distinguishes crime events from events that did not turn out that way. Interviewees also report that a driving and cumulative momentum of mistakes and consequences built continuously until their arrest. This momentum made it increasingly difficult for them to turn away from a criminal situation and crime groups that were composed near exclusively of people in similar situations, and diminished the extent to which they cared to do so.

Periods of active criminality and the life that accompany it can cement ties between thieves in several ways. Cut off from many of the relationships that are primary considerations in most people's lives, thieves look for companionship in the few contexts where they are comfortable. They find fellowship in drinking and drug use groups and enjoy the company of those who are unlikely to condemn them or report them for indulgence. They choose to associate with people who have had similar experiences and have similar current interests. They make the best of the problems and enjoy the potential for action that characterizes street life. As Cordelia states of drunken robbers, "owing to their lack of other social ties, they are motivated to enhance their links with the drinking group (Cordelia 1986)." A respondent makes the same point, "[I] mean at the time, I was at a real down and out point and when you are down and out you kinda cling to people that can't judge you and yeah, I saw them as real close friends" (Respondent 13).

CHAPTER 4

EVENTS AND MOTIVATIONS: CARRYING THROUGH WITH IT

Before turning to a description of the motives and experiences of committing serious acquisitive crimes, placing these crimes in social context is necessary. Crime is part of a style of living that is not unique to each criminal; they share it with others. This lifestyle is an established way of living that contains a shared aesthetic and interpretation of the world. By examining the social space where many offenders carry out their crimes, we can better understand their motives, their experiences and how they do street crime.

DELIBERATIVE AND SPONTANEOUS CRIMES

All of the crimes represented in this study can be grouped into *deliberative* and *spontaneous* categories based on the style and rapidity of the successive decisions that lead to them. The most deliberative crime groups decide whether they should commit a crime and then mobilize and proceed to the target. Spontaneous crime groups decide to commit a crime in the presence of a target. In deliberative crimes, the intent to commit crime often is voiced or obviously hinted at before coming into the last contact with the target. Planning in deliberative crime groups need not be meticulous and usually is not, but the length of time between conception and initiation of criminal acts distinguishes them. Deliberative crimes are very likely to begin at parties with conversations and usually require travel. Robberies of stores and burglaries are often deliberative crimes, but are not always. Mugging style robberies are less likely to be deliberative but may be.

The time span between the conception and initiation of crime is much shorter in spontaneous crimes. Groups committing spontaneous crimes do not go to the scene intent

on stealing. Nor do they discuss the advantages or risks of crime extensively or directly. A division of labor in spontaneous groups emerges on the spot, usually according to who takes the lead in committing a crime. Scant discussion of who will do what precedes these crimes. Spontaneous crime groups usually happen upon a target and act immediately. Robberies are more likely to be spontaneous crimes than burglaries, but spontaneous burglaries are not rare. Spontaneous crimes are usually born of street scenes in public places or while offenders are out drinking and driving around. Communication precedes spontaneous crimes, but it is quick, minimal and less verbal by comparison to deliberative crimes where offenders weigh risks and rewards in conversation. The distinction between deliberative and spontaneous crimes is important because decision-making research usually neglects differences in the paths that result in crime. It places too large an emphasis on the most deliberative and carefully planned crimes. The distinction between deliberative and spontaneous crimes admittedly will be blurred by the end of this work, but it also will prove useful in describing interviewees' crimes and decisions.

STREET CULTURE: PLAYERS AND VICS

Many of those interviewed were engaged in fast-paced, self-indulgent, and out-of-control lifestyles when they committed their crimes. This lifestyle often attracted them to parties and to the street-corner. Individuals' choices shape the lifestyle of the streets, but it also is a social world that encourages an outlook where living fast is admirable. Clearly, most offenders are not alone in their choice of style of living. They know others that live similarly and they understand that they were participants in an unconventional lifestyle

when they were stealing. This probably explains why acquisitive offenders often make generalizations to other offenders when describing the time and style of life surrounding their crime(s). Those who have been to prison are especially likely to see the similarities between their own lives and others they met there. They also enjoy pontificating on life in the streets. They describe not only how they got by, but how junkies, thieves or users behave usually.

Street culture has been the focus of several recent discussions of foreground factors in the etiology of street crime (Baron and Hartnagel 1997; Fleisher 1995; Hagan and McCarthy 1992; 1997; Jacobs and Wright 1999). Street culture puts an emphasis on spontaneity and dismisses careful planning and thinking about tomorrow in favor of “enjoying the moment” (Shover and Honaker 1992; 283). It encourages the hedonistic pursuit of sensory stimulation, lack of future orientation, and neglect of responsibility (Fleisher 1995: 213-214).

Conspicuous consumption of drugs and alcohol and dropping money on other trivial pursuits are hallmarks of street-life and indicators of the ability to excel in it. Living life in the fast lane can cost an exorbitant amount of money (Gibbs and Shelley 1982). Offenders spend without thinking in an attempt to create an “impression of affluence” (Wright and Decker 1994). On the streets, the image projected is critical. People living street-life categorize each other into those who can make it and those who are incapable of getting by on their own. The latter are often seen as passive rubes and victims. Where people are divided into those who are capable of providing for their own indulgent lifestyles by standing on their own and victims, it is of benefit to be viewed as the former.

An aggravated robber hardened beyond his age explained, "those people I took from, they just victims, now I know I ain't no vic" (Respondent 27). Some offenders see those who have reached the most desperate stages of addiction as losers and victims; they are incapable of showing heart because of their slavery to drugs. It is odd to hear armed robbers who steal for party money speak disparagingly of "fiends" and "crack-heads" that they select as victims. Of course, the extent that offenders are caught up in and enamored with street culture varies. Some are more enmeshed in street culture than others and the degree of participation in streetlife changes over time. Making it on the streets also takes an admirable situationally specific savvy, and ability to navigate the culture and to recognize and create opportunity where resources and discipline are scarce. This is known as being streetwise.

HUSTLING

There are many types of thieves and endless ways of categorizing them. To see how street life is lived to its fullest, however, looking to the thieves who make their living from illicit activity may be useful. The lifestyles of those who are the masters of this cultural niche are informative. Hustlers are the ideal typical street characters. They are streetwise players that gain recognition and deference in their world. They have considerable experience and often have been stealing and scamming for most of their life. Several offenders reported that they had been around crime in their neighborhoods and families since childhood and some started serious and busy criminal careers as early as age eleven. Although other character types inhabit the streets, none embody the traits of the

life and how to live properly like the hustler. They are on the lookout constantly for the fast dollar. They work hard at making an illicit living and will turn a dollar any way they can. A practiced thief recalled, "back then that is all I ever thought about" (Respondent 1). Hustlers also have disdain for those who scratch out a living at work that they consider to be submission to disciplined slave like conditions. The most successful thief in my study epitomized the hustler. A lifetime dope shooter with blown-out veins, he made his living from stealing between the ages of sixteen and thirty-five. At this age, he went to prison for the first time. This success was managed by taking care to select only safe targets and by supplementing his income with shoplifting, stealing firewood, burglarizing garages, taking copper from abandoned electrical transformers, pimping his girlfriend and other creative money making schemes. His forte was crimes where prison usually is avoided even when caught. His close friends knew him also to be a capable burglar, booster and robber and admired him for being able to "put together" crimes. This thief dabbled in burglary and more rarely robberies when he thought they were promising. He had been to jail often and was well-known by police. In one of his prize burglaries, he and two hired neighborhood youths burglarized a home deep in the woods that they knew from a tip would be vacant for a week. They took everything including aluminum siding that they stripped from the dwelling. In another, he and friends burglarized the store that he lived above on Saturday night. They sold all the stolen property by Monday when the police came to interrogate him and search his apartment. He is now on parole for burglary and stealing soda machine keys. The keys provided a steady income from illegally opened pop machines. He worked the machines in a large area much like the legitimate delivery

man. Change from the machines kept his friends, whom he depicts as freeloaders, generously supplied with heroin for months. Cola from the machines was sold to flea market dealers. He stole with many accomplices that were more or less experienced and is one of the few offenders who said he moved from crew to crew because he assembled accomplices according to what was needed for each crime. This accomplished thief described how to recognize a real crook or hustler:

It's easy to know somebody that knows what they are doing, it's the way that they look at a place. Besides it is not easy to make a living at this. If they are out there making a living for a while and not working you know they are good (Respondent 29).

STREET PLAY

Many observers have noticed that street-life is playful (Wade 1990 ; Matza 1967; Rose 1987). It is not subject to rigorous discipline and hierarchy of authority like work. Well-worn improvisational games often seen on the streets demonstrate the playful manipulations enjoyed by hustlers. They delight in "borrowing" five dollars from the intimidated even when they are not short of cash just to see if they can. They take money to go get drugs with no intention of returning and promise nonexistent stolen goods against a small amount of gas money needed to retrieve them. They take drugs "on the front" and disappear, challenging dealers to do something about it. As Rose (1987: 102) observed of the hustlers he observed in his study of black American street-life, "they always tried to shift the burden of repayment to the lender, usually through fictive means." Another common game of the streets is to play on the weaknesses of others by insulting

them to the point of anger. The same impression of dominance can be created by challenging others to a game of one-upmanship with feats of daring. It is fun to play on the uninitiated and to demonstrate familiarity with the flow of the streets and willingness to embrace it. This play contributes to the construction of an image of toughness and criminal potential.

Similar plays are a common style of initiating street robbery. Robbers approach victims and catch them off guard with requests for a loan, money, or drugs. This allows the robber to approach and gives him a little time to read victims' familiarity with the game and to estimate their ability to handle themselves in a confrontation.

Simultaneously, he is challenging those with him to come along and checking their allegiance and willingness to commit a crime. Robbery is an intimidation game. The same assessment can be accomplished by beginning an exchange of insults that the robber knows has the potential of turning into an assault and robbery. Four robbers mentioned running one of these scripted games on victims.

Part of being able to make it on the streets is being able to use resources, which include other people and sometimes close friends to advantage. Some street offenders take great pride in their ability to hustle with the best of them. They make quick use of those who demonstrate by their ineptness, lack of street-smarts or backbone that they have no place on the streets. In the hustlers' game, to be taken is to deserve it. This element of street culture is familiar to students of the prison where it is intensified by increased scarcity of goods. Here, one's ability to "make it" or stand-up is everything and is usually put to the test. An unrepentant thief told me that he victimized others in prison by stealing

and explained, “[I]f they don’t have backbone to stand up for themselves, then I am going to take from them. It’s either that cause if I don’t then the blacks are going to and I get sick of seeing them get everything” (Respondent 42). Of course, respect also is gained by the ability to play the hustler’s game, to be wise to it and unintimidated by it. The capacity to “hang” with a hustler and be unshaken by his games or by dangerous people is impressive and builds status.

Of course, even for hustlers, keeping up contacts on the streets is important both for carrying out crimes and for discovering criminal opportunities. It makes sense to share the wealth at times. Street life is brutal. Those most caught up in street-life have little empathy for the weak. As one longtime offender said of the man that tipped him off to a profitable robbery in hopes of reward but would not come along, “[F]uck him, I didn’t give him nothing. As far as he was concerned, it could have been somebody else that did that robbery” (Respondent 32).

HONOR AMONG THIEVES?

The proceeds of crime go quickly. Offenders often share them probably as a means of showing off, helping others and in the hopes that they will reciprocate. Because the rewards of crime are not gained through labor, they are easy to share. To be miserly with the proceeds from crime defeats the purpose of having something extra. Thus, junkies, hustlers and thieves often help each other out especially when it comes to the provision of drugs and alcohol. Through cooperation junkies can get their next fix and other offenders can get by from day to day.

Observers who are surprised to find any at all easily exaggerate camaraderie in the streets, however. The streets also are dog-eat-dog. Several offenders closest to street-life noticed a paradox. Although they were close to the men that they committed their crimes with they also realized that street-life placed a strain on all relationships. Thieves report that, "you ain't got no friends out here" and, "I don't have no friends, just associates," and "your only friends are on the back of a dollar" (Respondents 27; 48). Those with arrest experience and who have spent time in prison were often wary of co-offenders from the start. One thief told me that there is a saying in prison that "you do things alone cause if somebody else knows there's somebody to tell" (Respondent 34). In my sample of apprehended offenders, only a few groups protected one or more participants in their group with sealed lips. Those that did, soon realized that they received nothing in return. Experienced offenders realize that even family ties and close friendship obligations often break down in the interrogation room.

Some thieves said of their crime partners that they did not trust or respect them because they were criminal. One thief whose relatives had looked down on his marrying into their family said that he lost respect for them when he found out that they were into robberies. He asked, "how could I respect them, looking to me like I had a problem and they were into worse stuff than me (Respondent 1). The sentiment was common, "how could I trust them, I knew what they did." (Respondent 49) Another said,

You're living that kind of life. You don't have real close friends. Because you're not honest and you can't have a relationship in that frame of mind. I wasn't honest to anyone. I wouldn't draw a very good group of people to be

around if you know what I mean (Respondent 19).

MOTIVATION AND REWARD

There are many commonly cited motives and rewards of crime. These are material, experiential and social. One motive for committing property crime stands out above all other group and individual motives. People commit burglaries and robberies for money. Interviews with thieves have consistently shown that their desire to acquire other peoples' cash or property that is easily converted to cash and drugs is the foremost contribution to their decision to steal. The thieves who provided me accounts were as materially deprived as those in earlier samples and things were no different for them. In the words of an aggravated robber and active street hustler, "[t]hat's what it's all about man. Everybody wants to get rich. Get more than the next man. That's what it's all about. And I was just basically doing my thing" (Respondent 27). Offenders use the proceeds of crime for a variety of purchases. But, typically stolen money is spent quickly on nonessentials. Much money available to offenders must be used to get by personally and sometimes to help out family and friends. Stolen money, at least some of it, can be enjoyed. This money is to be blown without consideration of saving or future needs. Most of the burglars and robbers I spoke with used the meager fruits of their crime right away. They usually spent all or a good portion of the money together, on group purchases of drugs to be consumed the same day. Lasting criminal financial rewards are rare.

Well, my friends and me done drugs and drink, but that really well some of it was just to get drugs and party you know we would really not plan for the future. We would just live for that time you know, we were just getting the money to party that night (Respondent 7).

Some also spent money on activities taken for granted by those in steady work with decent wages. A state raised youthful offender with an eighth grade education and third grade scholastic ability reports that he is ashamed to admit that he and his partner's money from a series of burglaries was spent on some pot, some groceries for their families and adolescent pursuits: "to go to the swimming pool, go to the arcade, to the mall and just stuff, these wasn't no big crime or nothing like that" (Respondent 23). This burglar is currently facing charges that may place him in prison for stealing two used car jacks to make a few dollars. Regardless, of how money was spent, most of it usually was gone before the criminal group broke up and each participant went his own way. Due to the small amounts taken and the activities that often accompany criminal days and nights, the pockets of criminals are often empty when they awaken the day after committing a crime. A youthful armed robber with a new family explains how he prioritized the use of his stolen money. He gave spending plans more consideration than most, but the short time between his crimes and lack of heavy drug use also left him richer than many offenders.

Well obviously we was blowing a lot. You do three armed robberies in a month and the worst you can get out of one is \$50 a piece. And every one we done we got some money so . . . it depends on what I needed at home. Pay bills, pay rent somewhere. If all my bills was paid, I'd probably go out and buy toys or my wife a ring or a necklace, a hundred dollars on dope (Respondent 2).

The costs of street life and keeping up appearances makes finding crime partners easy. Offenders usually know plenty of people in desperate financial straits and this gives them a large pool of potentially willing co-offenders on which to draw. A thief described his partner's readiness for crime, "[h]e had no problem with it. Money in his pocket, he didn't care." (Respondent 15). Another younger thief answered a similar question about finding his partners and how he knew they would come, "oh I knew they would come. I never had that problem. Never run into that. And if they have a hit a lick before they know. Everybody needs more money" (Respondent 13).

An impoverished middle-aged burglar reported that he usually stole small items like hubcaps, grills, car parts, weed-eaters, chain saws and other tools. His motivation was severe alcoholism and his simple desire was to come up with enough money for a daily case of generic beer (Respondent 40). Despite his simple desires he could not accomplish them with legitimate work. A past conviction is evidence of the style of drinking that created his cash flow problem. He was caught unconscious in the closet of a highway patrolman's house-trailer. The home was nearby a friend's where he had been drinking. The officer's handgun allegedly was in his waistband and pocketknife in his pocket when he was discovered. This charge cost the thief nearly four years in the penitentiary. He believes, probably with good reason, that the lengthy sentence resulted from his unfortunate choice of victim and borrowed items. He does not recall any of the caper as he was completely blacked out when he pulled it. His partner who was supposed to be the lookout has told him that he went in and never returned. The lookout who was too frightened to go inside left him behind. Another addict said that he was long past the

point in his career where there was anything enjoyable about crime other than the money, “[B]elieve it or not, I didn’t enjoy it. I did it out of necessity. I didn’t do it because I enjoyed it period. I can’t see any enjoyment. It was pretty miserable actually” (Respondent 19). Thieves steal for money, but it typically is not the need to get beans, rice and blankets that motivate theft.

Money is a first but not the only motive for serious acquisitive crime. The money that thieves claim to have had in their pockets, from work or other crime, during thefts indicates that some do not steal only when desperate. Although the thrill of crime subsides with age, experience and desperation, many offenders enjoy the feeling they get from doing a crime. The offenders I interviewed were very simple and clear in their description of the enjoyment of committing a crime, leaving few openings for the phenomenologist’s imagination to expand and interpret. Unlike others who have looked into the experience of committing a crime, I found few offenders who reported experiencing sensual pleasures by doing evil in a conforming society or of sexual gratification from crime. The men I interviewed did not use religious or sexual metaphors in their descriptions, but their motives are complex and they find the power of making money easily and intimidating victims alluring.

Experiential attractions of doing crime were the rush, showing off and a sense of accomplishment and conquest. The rush comes up immediately when talking to offenders about how they experience their crimes and what they get out of doing them. Some offenders experience it as a positive sensation as “fun,” a “thrill” or a “high.” The most common analogy used to describe the physical sensation of committing crime is drug use.

Drug use and theft have a rush in common. This parallels the descriptions found by others in examining ethnographically the intrinsic rewards of committing crime (Cromwell, Olson and Avary 1991; Fleisher 1995; Shover and Honeker 1992). As one of the 40 habitual offenders interviewed by Wood and his co-authors (Wood et. al. 1997) put it,

In a way, it's like a drug. I mean it was like a drug in a way. I mean I got that same kind of buzz. I've heard people say that it's like sexual orgasm, but I don't think it is. Its sort of a buzz like you get off drugs, the adrenalin rushes in.

The description recurred in my interviews. Several likened doing crime to the drug experience, particularly the speedy and powerful drug experience brought on by stimulants and opiates. Some also reported that the experience of committing a crime is best described as fearful and did not experience it as pleasurable. One burglar of a beer distributorship described it as a, "trippy feeling like when you know that you have lost control of a car" (Student Account). For other thieves, the experience of committing a crime was a strange combination of pleasure and fear that they attribute to "adrenalin". A convicted armed robber and career offender, who has enjoyed less than five years of time on the streets since 1974, likens the odd thrill of crime to his combat experience. He explained, "I enjoyed the rush. It lasted a few seconds, maybe a minute, if that long. The same rush that you had in Viet Nam" (Respondent 17). With experience the rush is more easily managed and although still pleasurable for some becomes only a dreaded necessity for others. An opiate addict found no sensual pleasures in his crime. He explained, "Oh, hell no I didn't like it. You like it if you get away and nobody gets hurt. It tears you up.

I would be gagging from nerves on the way up to a house” (Respondent 4). Part of the rush of doing crime derives from the speed at which information must be processed during one; competent and some incompetent burglars and robbers strive to complete their crimes quickly. Many burglars reported that they could enter an unfamiliar dwelling “tear it down” and exit in less than five minutes. Robberies from “throw down” to “get away” are typically shorter. The rush of crime is contributed to by the pace at which crooks must take in and react to a host of variables in their surroundings. Crime happens fast and it usually seems to offenders, even when they have planned extensively, that the start of a crime comes on quickly and suddenly and the pace is frantic.

When a group or person crosses the threshold of a risky crime, they do not know what will happen in crucial upcoming seconds. When they “throw down” on someone in a robbery, the person might react violently or when they come crashing into a building someone may be waiting for them. In the opening seconds of a stickup or heist, there is much to consider. The rush comes not only from the action involved in doing a robbery or a burglary, but also from the unsure outcome of the event and difficulty comprehending rapid stimuli.

PI: Once you had done one of these [armed robberies], you didn't really have a problem with it.

R18: No, it was too much of an adrenaline rush. You run in and grab the money and be speeding off, nothing to it . . . it wasn't really a good time, as much as it was another kind of high. *You always worry about something gonna happen or something go wrong, like somebodies gonna stay in there ten seconds too long and you got to worry about that. It's just crazy.* For the rush and for the drugs. I mean there wasn't no point to the money cause it just got turned right into powder. (Respondent 18,

emphasis added).

The source of the rush comes from laying it all on the line by risking encounters with victims or law enforcement. It is a feeling that is familiar to most people who have been in a situation where much is at stake and many factors of the risk are beyond their control. Hearts pound, palms sweat, breathing increases pace and muscles tense up immediately before carrying out a crime.

The students who described their crimes to me often went into detail about the thrill of crime as a motive. For most of them, it seems to have more significant bearing on the types of crime they chose and how they carried them out than for down and out street-criminals. Not being in great or immediate need of money, even students' serious acquisitive crimes often were committed just for the thrill of it.

The rush is not the same in all crime. For some crimes there is little thrill. If a criminal proposal really is close to a sure thing and the offenders have enough experience to know it, crime can be more like work. High payoffs can still make low risk crimes exciting but if the payoff is low and the task likely to be uneventful, the rush is minimal. One burglar who had an accomplice that allowed his friends to burgle her parents' house while they were on vacation reports a banal experience.

PI: Did you enjoy committing this crime?

R28: I didn't. I mean just kind of, it was just something to do on a Friday night. I mean I really didn't have fun doing it. I didn't really not have fun doing it. I just went and did it. I came back and didn't really worry about it.

The career offender whom I earlier deemed the most successful offender and hustler in the sample for his many years of street time (Respondent 29), lack of legitimate work and avoidance of imprisonment reported that when he was committing a typical burglary the experience was little different from any other loading of a truck. Criminal profit did give some measure of satisfaction, however, he also commented that crimes with a greater chance of arrest and challenge were more thrilling. He found the experience of shoplifting rewarding because given his race, long-haired, and strung-out appearance he knew that store employees would be watching him. It gave him a special thrill to beat them when they knew they were being beat. According to him, burglaries that he attended were too well planned and secure to give the same rush although the costs of being caught would be great.

Students described somewhat more subtle rushes and reported that the rush of their crimes resulted from a feeling that they were tempting the fates. For those very few that committed crimes similar to the street thieves and wrote about their experience of it, the rush was more powerful and overwhelming. This suggests that it is contingent on the risk of apprehension.

On the way to a planned crime anxiety and apprehension are common moods. A mixed feeling of uneasiness and pleasure (the butterflies) gives way to an unadulterated neurophysiological rush once committed to crime. The rush is most intense when offenders have committed to doing a crime, but do not yet have any clear indications how things will unfold. The rush was variously at its peak when offenders approached houses and kicked in doors, got out of cars brandishing weapons to go in stores, came out of

hiding and approached their target, cornered a robbery victim, or took a swing at someone in a robbery. It recedes when what was a completely unpredictable situation becomes more tame and easy to comprehend. The rush lets up even more so as the crime progresses toward safety. The excited feeling of committing a serious crime is usually gone within a few hours, although several inexperienced offenders reported laying awake on the night they committed their crimes. One said that his nervousness during early crimes of his short-lived period of biweekly robbery kept him on edge continuously. He spent his evenings pacing the floor and at the window of his home looking for police. The nervousness became manageable later when he realized they were not coming (Respondent 1).

The experience of crime varies by criminal task. Getaway drivers report a tense and contemplative nervous sensation where all of their doubts previously put out of mind come crashing in at once. Time slows and a person's whole existence is focused on the possible outcomes of an event. Drivers and lookouts who stayed at a distance during their crimes report that to them it seemed that their partners took "forever" (Respondent 49). Having little to do physically, drivers begin to play out the possible best case and worse case scenarios in their minds. Mere minutes can stretch to seem like they will not end. The more time their partners take the crazier criminal decisions seem. When alone, offenders quickly question the wisdom of being in a crime. One remembers that he only interpreted the rush as pleasurable after escape:

It was a tremendous rush. No, doubt, I mean it was frightening. I mean

simply from my point of view, I am the one that just has to sit there. I mean I am involved in the act but I am not really committing the act. I mean I am just transportation and that few minutes when they were gone, you have got to wonder, 'What's going to happen, what are they going to come back with?' It's frightening, your fate, but when they come back and everything is all right. then it certainly is a rush (Respondent 49).

Another robber driving a car with four passengers reports that while two were inside robbing, nothing was said between those in the car. They just sat and waited in silence until one announced to others who did not need to be told twice, "here they come, go, go." (Respondent 22). A burglar remembers that he could not take the pressure of waiting alone out of sight of his partners any longer and began to bang with a stick on the sides of the trailer that his friends seemed to be taking their time burglarizing (Respondent 31).

When a group that is committing a crime breaks into smaller groups, those that have the most distance between themselves and carrying out the crime often experience doubts and brief regrets about what they are doing. They know that what happens in the criminal situation is largely beyond their control and this is worrisome. They are completely dependent on people who might not be so dependable. In addition, they may be the more reluctant participants in a crime while eager participants are close to the action. When there is no audience and they need not impress, they begin to wonder how they came to such an uncomfortable position.

Experienced offenders know that breaking up a criminal group is risky. One reports that he finds it safer to have his driver drive around the block while he is inside. This reduces the chances that the car will be noticed and means that the driver need only

be in danger for a few seconds and keeps busy the whole time (Respondent 14). Burglars report that the necessity of searching multiple rooms breaks up their groups, but that they often communicate by talking loudly to each other across rooms. They also may have a central location in the house near the entrance where they drop off stolen goods and meet each other as they move through the house (Respondent 5). Quick communication and seeing partners reduces worries about what they are doing.

Those who entered buildings to rob them reported some sense of relief that things did not fall apart when they made their move and that victims behaved predictably. Once they had made their initial move the offenders were "on automatic". It was too late to turn back and they could act without much thought. The moment of choice was behind them. This relief and commitment to crime often briefly precedes the group committing to crime. In the minds of many participants in group crimes, the point of danger and crime is crossed when they make a choice and commit to it. A robber recalled his realization that he was in a crime.

R3: I think this happens a lot of times. That people find themselves in situations that like lead up to a specific moment in time where you have to make a decision to do something. And my particular one was getting up off my chest. Laying, getting up off the ground and running in the door, with him behind me. You know up to that time it was basically just getting high and doing something stupid. At that particular moment it became a serious crime.

PI: You knew it was for real then, that you were going to do it?

R3: Yeah, yeah, because like you realized because you have a knife on somebody you gonna have to make a move. Cause, the other guys are gonna make a move.

No consistent sensation lasts throughout most crimes. Offenders reported that the rush comes and goes and varies in magnitude as crime progresses. This is especially true when everyone is not sure that a crime will happen or when everyone is not fully informed what the crime will be. A trip to a crime that his partners had planned without filling him in on the details seemed mundane to one crook until he arrived at the scene. In retrospect, he remembers that there were many indications that something dangerous was happening.

We was having a good time on the way down there like usual. Riding around and drinking and smoking marijuana and things like that. I didn't think at first that there was nothing to it other than a night out drinking and partying. They was just all yelling and carrying on like we usually do" (Respondent 33).

The experience of crime also varied according to changing assessments of risk during it. Thieves reported feeling a tension and anxiety and sometimes a sense of excitement during planning and going to the scene of a crime. For those who were sure that they were on course to commit a serious crime, this sometimes brought on an intense awareness of things that did not "look right" in the environment. One burglar reported that he and his partners were quiet and apprehensive before their deliberative crime. They looked over their shoulders constantly for police cars or other evidence of disruption in route to a break-in. Despite the obvious nervousness in a group, few offenders discuss their fears with others before approaching a target. Silence is broken with only occasional interruptions to warn the group of risks or indicate agreement or disagreement with a course that the group is following. Their thoughts were busy with characteristics of the target, their environment, what might go wrong and how to deal with it. On the night they

committed their last crime they had been to several targets because someone would see something and “get jumpy” about hitting a particular sight.

Everybody was nervous. Everybody was nervous and on their toes and watching on the way to the job. Watching for police all around and maybe we are gonna get pulled over. How would we explain the tools that we had, burglary tools? I mean everybody was on their toes from beginning to end (Respondent 13).

Others reported jittery nervousness while they were trying to understand the planning of a crime and their situation. At this stage of crime commission, many offenders are focused on trying to determine if their group really is going to go through with a crime. At the same time, they are developing a strategy to get away with it. Only those who have done similar crimes together many times are completely confident that they will commit a crime before they do. Determined groups with a plan still have a reasonable chance of backing out. An experienced burglar reported that in his last charge, an armed robbery of a bank depositor, he and his partners made three stabs at it before working up the nerve and deciding that things looked right (Respondent 46). The depositor, in each failed attempt, moved too quickly for the group to come to agreement and intercept him. Another robber who had decided with his partner to rob and stab a convenience store clerk went all the way to the counter with a knife and intentionally dropped a soda on the ground for the clerk to pick up, but could not go through with stabbing a woman in the back. He and his co-offender simply went outside and regrouped. They decided that it would be too suspicious to try again right away. The two acquired a gun and came back

the next night for the robbery. After much hesitation and a little debate, they robbed the clerk at gun point and shot her in the chest.

When offenders are assessing their situation, they look back and forth between the target (whether dwelling or person) and the people they are with to try to find signs that tell them what is going to happen. Crime and the situations immediately before them are extremely ambiguous and difficult to read. Ill defined situations build tension and anxiety and when they play out are thrilling.

Whereas one might expect that the minute a criminal law is violated is experienced as the most unpleasant, this is rarely the case. In deliberative crimes, it more often is experienced as a near inevitable culmination, the critical test. The anxiety largely is over when someone acts criminally with a definitive move. Then the stress of making choices or calculations, wrestling with hesitancy and being unsure of what might happen is over. It is time to act and instinct and a rush of adrenalin take over. Offenders throw themselves into the fray and many are glad when they have decided and can get it behind them. Once they are committed and things go as planned the rush subsides. Some burglars report, for example, that they feel safe when inside a building. It is the entrance and exit that worry them (Respondent 2).

Criminal experiences are similar to the experience of other dangerous situations. As in initiating crime, getting out of the foxhole is the most difficult part about storming an enemy line in combat; once the move is made it feels like there is nowhere else to go but forward. M. Brewster Smith in his (1949) examination of data collected from U.S. ground-troops in World War II found that their primary motivation to keep going once in

combat was their desire to “end the task,” next was solidarity with their group expressed in responses like “sticking together, buddies depending on me and my friends around me.”

The rush is a powerful experience, but the enjoyment of it comes in moments where the fear has not completely worn off, but triumph is in sight. Of course, many offenders miscalculate when their moment of glory and security has arrived and are enjoying the high until they are caught. A pleasurable and powerful rush turns to panic for those that forecast their impending demise.

Several thieves reported that the law and legal consequences were little deterrent to them although they did contribute something to their fear and their rush. When a group is intent on committing a crime, the law is something to get past by showing courage and determination. Understandably, the courts are at perceptually great distance from the country stores, houses, and people in the streets that are the targets of many thefts. When confronting these targets more immediate fears entered several thieves' minds, although they rarely voiced this fear to others in the group. They worried more about being killed in the act than being arrested. Thieves also worry that they may be placed in a circumstance where they would have to choose between escaping and wounding a victim. Several admitted that they knew if given this choice they would hurt someone to escape. These fears of immediate, violent consequences or actions are well founded. Three of the burglars that I interviewed had been shot while doing crime in the past. Two were shot during the last crime they committed. A burglar pistol whipped a victim who came home with the victim's gun so that he could escape. Another offender participated in a robbery where they killed someone who happened upon their crime. Two of the charge partners

that participated in offenders' last crimes went on to murder a victim in a later crime.

A group of young and busy thieves had committed nearly 20 burglaries of businesses in a small rural community near one of their homes. In these thefts, they would simply crash out windows, run in and grab the register, guns, cigarettes and the safe if possible while the alarms of the stores blared. This group had made the papers repeatedly and the police were looking for a clue to their identities. The interviewed burglar recalled his most salient fear and how it contributed to his preference for initiating crimes but avoiding some jobs during them,

I didn't mind doing it, but I didn't like to go in. I would break the windows with a cinder block or rock and then they would run in. To me, that was the easy part. They would be in the car . . . I hated the idea of going in there because I knew that somebody would be laying up in there with a shotgun (Respondent 35).

Experienced thieves told me that watching your back is a challenging part of burglary. The burglar must focus his attention on getting the goods. This is reason for "bringing in" others. In three cases, participants in apprehended burglary groups were caught red-handed by homeowners or security guards who approached them without notice. When offenders cited challenges of criminal tasks as the reason for going with or recruiting co-offenders, the primary reason was to prevent surprise. A thief reasoned, "I mean the more eyes you have there, the less chance you have of somebody sneaking up on you" (Respondent 13).

Many offenders reported that the obvious practical advantages of doing crimes

with others are reason enough to expect groups to be more willing than individuals to do crime. One said that others offered, "safety in numbers I guess. It felt safer in numbers. Three of four people can clean out a display case pretty quick, while I was getting the floor safe up." (Respondent 8). Participants in crime groups believe that the presence of others gives both psychological and physical security during a criminal event. Since they are concerned primarily with immediate dangers, particularly of ambush and being wounded or killed, street offenders like to have back up. The most important purpose served by having others along is the additional eyes and ears they provide. They speed up criminal tasks and can watch for dangers while others are engaged in carrying out the crime. Robbers also are aware that in physical confrontations numbers are advantageous. A robber explained that he could have easily pulled off his groups' method of robbery by himself and tripled his take, but that he was simply, "too afraid." (Respondent 1). Another noted that, he did not "have the heart" to do robbery alone (Respondent 47). Apparently, it is comforting to know that others have come to similar conclusions in their risk assessments risk-taking and that one will not be ambushed and shot or apprehended alone. When the rush is at its height, contemplation is difficult and communication more so. Offenders must act and react quickly without taking the time to consider every possible route of behavior.

Other people allow offenders to divide the worry of watching out for danger.

A suitable situation in which to show-off is a reward of crime. Young offenders are especially prone to confess that one of their motivations for crime was their desire to show off for friends. The specific phrase "showing off" came up in four interviews. The

idea was expressed in more interviews as when thieves said that they were trying to “be cool.” Uncertainty concerning criminal situations and what will happen because of criminal excursions gives ample opportunity for showing off. Crime provides actors an opportunity to show to others that they are brave and that nothing phases them. Street criminals like others who intentionally place themselves in extremely dangerous situations do it to impress. In this regard, they do not differ greatly from the soldier who charges into combat because of, “his comrades and fear of their reproaches, and retaliation if he abandons them in danger; [and] his desire to go where others do without trembling more than they” (Du Picq 1947). A young burglar’s thought parallels the preceding thought on infantrymen, “I had something to prove to other people. I wanted everybody to think, look at him, man. Don’t mess with him. I don’t know. It was stupid. If they could do it, I could do it” (Respondent 36).

Once a group sets itself on a criminal course, the intense focus of the situation makes it an especially promising theater for showing off. Individual offenders may gain recognition by intentionally playing into a risky situation or making crime more risky than necessary. All eyes are on the acting offender and the person who is pushing the direction of the situation in the direction of the group’s agenda has considerable power over victims and co-offenders. This person, who is enabled by the group’s acquiescence or agreement, must be watched so that his associates can determine what is going on and what his next play will be in a very personally important event.

Showing-off is competitive display. In crime it is done by fostering an image of know-how, toughness or bravery. Group crimes are the perfect chance to prove that one

is a “hardman” and can meet the challenge of a risky situation (Katz 1988). More important than building a street image is meeting the perceived demands and challenges presented by the immediate situation and immediate associates. Looking cool on the streets by word of mouth is an indirect reward of crime that may never come about. To offenders I interviewed a reputation spread by word of mouth was not nearly as important as standing behind immediate situational claims of criminal capability and performing on the same level as associates. This in street lingo is known as the ability to “hang.” Those who cannot hang in a criminal crowd or criminal situation should not make pretense by riding or associating with those likely to do crime. Conversely, to run with capable criminals without flinching is an integral part of establishing a reputable street image. Although the two had never discussed the matter, a burglar explained that his young partner who escaped from jail with him and eventually committed burglaries to stay free and on the run should not have accompanied him if he was not in agreement with the crimes, “[T]his is what I do. I am a burglar. He knows that, and he knows that if he is with me we are going to steal ” (Respondent 1).

The implied claim of being bad and knowing the ways of crime and the streets is tested by dangerous situations and the company that a person can keep. A group of men insecure in their group’s criminal abilities might try each other constantly in their attempt to decide exactly where the group stands and their position in it. They must know who is really capable and who is only pretending. It is also enjoyable for those who are less fearful of doing crime to watch others balk and shy away from crimes while they are pressing onward. Often those that initiate this gamesmanship are confident that they will

do well in any test of heart or bravery. Criminal situations, thereby, offer them a chance to secure a respected position among their present company. They often initiate their tests playfully, by presenting their running buddies with challenges or by slight demonstrations of their criminal capability. They push the buttons of their partners and implicitly ask them if they will go another step toward crime or danger. For a night, or throughout a string of crimes, the admirable role of the hero can be taken by the person who leads the way in a successful crime.

Crime provides an opportunity for people to show that they have mastered the rush and are willing to sustain it and push it farther. In the same moments that some offenders are catching their breath, others are acting crazy and pushing the envelope. Sufficient individual variation in the experience of committing a crime exists to allow some group participants (usually older, more experienced, or very reluctant offenders) to be glad of any small break in the rush of the event. They prefer to calm down and catch a breath and let the surroundings sink in. Others constantly seek the next source of excitement and try to keep a continuous thrill alive. They know that when things cool down opportunity for showing off and showing off their ability to master a risky situation is behind them. When the post-crime conversation turns to glory, they want to make sure that their feats of bravery and risk taking are remembered.

Offenders may get a situation in hand only to find that someone with them does something wildly unpredictable. The adrenalin rush comes back on and the situation again seems out of control. A burglar on probation for a short string of home thefts when he did his last few remembered that the men with him shocked him when they took the keys to a

classic Corvette in the homeowner's driveway, spun its tires out of the driveway and into the street and sped away. They made a conspicuous exit and left him standing in a burgled home. It seemed that they had suddenly lost control, to this young man although he had also been running wild all day.

The robber who shot the clerk remembers his surprise when his co-offender looked at him after completing a robbery, took the sawed-off shotgun from his hands and shot the clerk of the store in the stomach. A robbery that was only seconds away from successful completion had in the mind of this young offender become a senseless murder. Although he was panicked and silently brooding, his partner seemed levelheaded despite his violent act. The gunman immediately warned him of the severity of the situation and reminded him that he was willing to kill to avoid arrest. This conversation suggests that crime may be carried to extremes intentionally to show-off criminal capability and to increase the group's investment and allegiance to each other. Fortunately, the clerk survived without crippling injury.

The pride in accomplishment provided by successful crime is as inviting as the rush and showing off. Thieves who reported feeling reluctance to commit a crime and remorse after completing one reported often reported a brief sense of accomplishment. The most reluctant offender enjoys escape. This satisfaction comes not from thinking that some special skill or finesse was needed to commit a crime. Most thieves recognize, especially with some criminal experience, that their crimes typically are simple and low-skilled. Instead, confidence derives from a feeling of good fortune, that things are going their way, and from the knowledge that a group has what it takes to roll the dice at high stakes. It

feels good to win or to temporarily think that one has succeeded in crime even if upon reflection criminal victory is recognized to be contingent on luck. As a habitual offender burglar said of his group, "I couldn't tell you if we were good at it or bad at it, but we did it and we had got away with it, that's what's important you know" (Respondent 7). In immediate retrospect, many offenders find crime to be easier than they thought it would be at the outset. Enjoyment of the rewards of crime in part derives from the knowledge that little labor was done to get them and that nothing went terribly wrong. Committing a crime and leaving the scene with a reasonable chance of getting away is no small victory. To some thieves, accomplishment also is found in the style of crime they commit and demonstration of an unwillingness to bend to the odds or the law. Pride in accomplishment is greater for a group and individuals in it when crimes are done with some flare. One burglar reported that he and a friend once burglarized a drug store and returned to the scene to ask the police if they needed any help (Respondent 35). Getting caught can also be a chance to make a demonstration of style by going down proudly. Perhaps, pride in accomplishment explains why three thieves I interviewed kept the newspaper articles that covered their crimes. They are documentation of stylish crime. One prided himself on the humorous nickname given him by the papers before he was caught for robbing the same target repeatedly. He was arrested only after being shot and breaking both legs while climbing into a fleeing car window. A second gleefully explained that his prominent newspaper coverage resulted from the highspeed chase that he had given police. His partners wanted to abandon the car but he would not slow down enough to let them. He eventually dumped the stolen car into a river and made his way to the

other side. Officers apprehended him but not before picking up a resisting arrest, failure to yield to an officer and assault on an officer charge.

Another burglar recalls that the thrill of crime for him was contingent on unexpected success. Part of this thrill came from the enjoyment of knowing that he had beaten homeowners who secreted their valuables.

It was a . . . like breaking in a house, it gave me a high. It was like finding something that is hidden in a house, that somebody had hidden in a house thinking nobody is going to find it or running across something that was really worth a lot of money or something that was really extravagant; that was exciting (Respondent 15).

A thief, who does not want to brag about criminal accomplishments, cannot resist touting the last crime despite his arrest. Like most burglars he rationalized that his group was really stealing from insurance companies.

We always stole from people that could afford it. Wealthy people. Peoples with insurance. The house we hit up in Hawkins county was a good, real good lick. I hate to brag about it, but it was fairly substantial. Look at the charges I got from it. Its public record. Burglary and theft from \$10,000 to \$60,000 (Respondent 16).

The rewards of accomplishment are added to by quick liberation from the constraint that prevented motivated offenders from committing a crime. Clearly, many subjects had been carrying at least some abstract motivations for crime around with them for some time. Some are very active criminals and others have been in the past. Many street offenders go through periods of "rehabilitation" and "relapse" on both drugs and

alcohol and crime. For many, the potentiality for crime is on the back-burner until the situation seems right. The sense of release when a crime is committed probably results from immediate pressures to go through with a crime and accumulated past consideration of opportunities that were never taken. The momentum of crime reflects both proximate and removed pushes and plans toward crime that lead to a critical decision crossroads. By committing crime some had returned to a familiar way of life and others who had been loosely contemplating "doing something" overcame their hesitations.

An offender who participated in a brutal assault and armed robbery reports the sensations that reflect the intensity of his excitement. The assault was so damaging to victims, who intended to rob the robbers and had just come from an all male bar, that the state considered tacking hate crime charges on the two offenders. The victims did not know that they were playing with danger by walking into a situation that already was defined as criminal by others. The drug dealers who committed the robbery, had suffered through several robberies while selling cocaine on the streets, but in this instance they turned the tables. The victims did not share in the knowledge that both offenders were experienced drug dealers, who had been on the road for a week fleeing the police for drug trafficking crimes. Victims did not know that one assailant was on parole and on the run. Nor did they know that the offenders had thousands of dollars worth of money and crack cocaine on them that they had no intention of handing over. They also had no knowledge that one was a night club bouncer and accustomed to violence. In addition, these men were in the words of the interviewed robber "belligerent" drunk and high. With all of this knowledge, the offenders' decision to turn a robbery to their advantage was easy. It took

only a quick glance and comment between partners to initiate the crime. They expressed in an instant that they were about to be violent and that this violence potentially could lead to robbery.

Well see me and him we standing together when they come up with a knife and that's what they said, "set it out" and I looked around and I said to him 'this ain't even gonna work.' I was saying to hell with it, I am tired of being robbed. I hit him with a whiskey bottle upside the head. We was kicking them and stuff and you know I was talking crazy and walking around and saying 'rob me?, rob me, y'all gonna rob me'. 'Ah, you bitch.' And then kick them and kick them and kick him. And then he says, 'look at all that jewelry we ought to rob them.' You know it wasn't anything. Just adrenalin pumping hyped as hell . . . Really I wanted to kill them. I wanted them to die. You know, but I knew if I kill somebody then I really am going to go to prison, but I wanted them to die. That's what I felt inside. I mean just hatred. That's like the fifth time I been robbed. Just that time I got lucky and caught them before they caught me, you know so it was . . . I felt better than I ever felt in my life. I ain't gonna lie, I mean it's just like a surge went through me, then I looked down and seen the blood and I looked over and seen people hollering, 'stop, police' and all this and that's when I panicked. All I was thinking was po-lice! Going to jail (Respondent 9).

Crime cuts ties to more conventional problems and puts the past at a distance. It is liberating. During the commission of a crime and soon after one, worries are concentrated on a single event. Not only does crime temporarily divert attention from a whirlwind of mistakes and pressures but it suits chaotic lifestyles. An amphetamine addict remembered that his indulgence in the drug left him in a state of delusional paranoia and that crime seemed to make sense. Crime is consistent with and makes sense in periods of extreme irresponsibility and partying like there is no tomorrow.

Things were crazy anyway, I was worried and paranoid all the time. We sat around the apartment and listened to a police scanner for Christ sakes. Our apartment was full of stolen stuff and krank and we were living off of hot credit cards. If your like that anyway why not do a crime so you got something to really worry about (Respondent 50).

After doing a crime, crime groups engage in a brief celebration until the thrill of having done something notable wears off. Many offenders reported laughing uncontrollably and excitedly while recounting the details of crime including the looks on victims' faces, problems encountered and blows landed. A wheel man explains the scene where he and his partners are watching a captured video tape immediately after their robbery of a sandwich shop. He still smiles as he remembers his partners' gall.

I mean by this point they were laughing their asses off. I mean they did, they thought it was funny as hell. It's like if you make it through something, it's comical . . . I mean it was kind of funny. It's like these people's faces when you see them, I mean I thought it was funny cause it's like you can't believe that they actually did that . . . you have got all kinds of people in there, not to mention every single person that's in there is a witness. I mean what are you going to do kill all of them? I mean they robbed every single person that's in the place and that's why they got five counts put on them, cause he robbed four people in there for their wallets. You know, it was funny when they first went in there and you see, you have to remember you know who they are. But, then you see this woman at the cash register and you have got one of them sitting on the counter with this shotgun stuck in her face and she is so nervous she can't even open the register. And then you see the one that's got the five counts, he goes back in the back and then the tape cuts off and then he pulls the tape out. It is wild. It's amazing. I am surprised that he is smart enough to get the tape (Respondent 49).

One obvious attraction of having others along on a crime is the post-crime celebration. For some crime-groups, especially the more experienced ones, the post crime

celebration is brief. It may consist of a quick stop by the fence or dope man's home. Sometimes, crime has become routinized for them. These offenders are past the point in their careers where they engage in revelry over pulling off what they realize is a petty score that will keep them from stealing only until they run through the money or their fix is gone. They do still enjoy a more relaxed sense of accomplishment much like that experienced from any job well done and they enjoy spending the proceeds of crime. Most offenders go much wilder in celebrating the proceeds and accomplishment of crime.

GROUPS AND EXPERIENCING CRIME

Having others around enhances both the enjoyment of the physical sensations of committing a crime and the sense of accomplishment and freedom it entails. Groups provide an audience that can be shown just how far one is willing to go out on a limb. In some groups, the normal odds of committing a crime are raised intentionally to show off more than committing a simple crime allows. That the performance is not necessary to the commission of the crime is the point. Like the athlete who delivers a peak performance despite the fact that the competition is thoroughly beaten, or the football player who high-steps the last fifty yards to the end-zone - unneeded risks are taken in crime. They serve both as an attempt to show ability and to flaunt and celebrate the ease with which one can commit to and get away with criminal action.

One reason that groups may be rewarding is that others may literally increase the sense of exhilaration during a crime. The rush is particularly enjoyable in a crowd. If it is like a drug, this is not at all surprising. Most drugs and their effects are used and enjoyed

socially. Watching how others handle themselves under the influence and in the face of the unfamiliar is informative and enjoyable. Research on experimentation with drugs shows that the effects and how to interpret the drugs as pleasurable is learned from more experienced users (Becker 1967; Best and Luckenbill 1994: 35). The same may be true of crime. Certain groups might transform fear into a pleasurable rush by showing how to handle and channel it. They may also make a sport of unusual sensations by turning them into a challenge or by doing something unusual.

Others are important to the experience and the sensations of crime in that they sustain the experience itself. They provide people with whom to share an experience. After they break in a garage or hold someone at gun point, lone thieves do not laugh and joke or “hoop and holler” but most groups of thieves do. Nor can lone thieves recount every detail of their crimes and relive their glory through conversation with their cronies. If a group gets away with crime, the apprehension, anger and terror that preceded it are easily forgotten and it becomes something through which one has made it. Close calls are often the subject of conversation, humorous stories and bragging among thieves.

Groups enjoy their shared secret and can keep it to themselves or selectively reveal their successes to others who they suspect will be appreciative. One burglar reported that he and his active burglary crew would go off in a private room to discuss criminal plans but everyone knew what the subjects of their conversations were. They were not above dropping hints and exchanging knowing winks and nods in semi-public places to let others know that they were capable thieves (Respondent 13). A robber reports that when returning to a party they let on that they had “done something” to get a large amount of

cash to people who were there earlier when they discussed the possibility of a robbery. They did not reveal details but enjoyed watching their friends use the drugs and alcohol they had purchased and wonder exactly what they had done.

Oh yeah, we thought we were cool . . . they were high! They were happy as hell, they didn't care. They were jumping around there. 'Yep, let's do some more coke and they were all ready to damn do some' (Respondent 5).

SURE THINGS: CRIMINAL CONVERSATIONS

The conversations that precede most crimes are made up mostly of small talk. They do have a quality of bravado and coolness to them typical of heavy drinking conversations. Much of the talk that precedes the mention of crime is of women, drugs and past criminal exploits. Sometimes it is of people who have wronged one or more participants in the conversation and how they should get what is coming to them.

PI: What did you talk about on the way down there?

R31: Just basically drugs and carrying on like anybody else would. Really nothing. It was mostly about girls we used to go out with and parties and things like that. Nobody mentioned nothing about doing robbery or anything like that (Respondent R31).

This subject matter could easily be coincidental considering our population's lifestyle. Most subjects were getting high before their crimes and heavy topics would not be expected. It may also be that conversational bravado brings to mind the need to prove something. In almost all the conversations that preceded a criminal event and could be

described to me, some ambiguous mention of other crimes was made. Sometimes, it was about a criminal experience of one of the parties to the conversation, a description of how to do one, or about the attractiveness of a target or some lucrative drug deal.

Remarkably, several conversations began with discussion of someone present having once been in prison or jail for thievery. These general conversations turned into thinly veiled proposals to commit a crime. One of the first things mentioned in conversations preceding acquisitive crimes is money. A few typical reports of the immediate conversational back and forth before a crime follow.

PI: Do you remember the conversation?

R5: Yeah, it went, 'we need some damn money.' 'How can we get some money?' And then here he sat and told us all. Well, we were all sitting there and he was telling us about robberies or whatever and he told us how to do it.

She said, 'hey, I know where we can go and get some stuff to sell. Let's go get it.' And we said, 'fine'. (Respondent 28).

Um, we was riding around getting high and I was telling them that I needed to make some money for Christmas. They kinda looked at each other and started laughing. They pretty much said, 'you need to make some easy money your with the right people.' I said, 'that's what I'm talking about.' Yeah, when they said fast and easy, I didn't know they meant armed robbery . . . I knew there was a lot of times you could go get dope and then drive and make a pretty good chunk. Cause you know that's what I dealt with was dope and then when they said that, something to that effect (Respondent 2).

In the following case, an offender remembers the conversation where he sought out help with committing a robbery of his boss because he had no experience with the

crime.

It is not like you approach him and you say hey look here, I have this problem and you know. It's just like you are getting high and everything like that. You talking about this son-of-a-bitch who did this to you [payroll dispute] and that son-of-a-bitch that did that to you basically and I said 'I ought to go over there and take my money! Etcetera, etcetera, etcetera.' One thing goes yeah, yeah, yeah, I ought to! I ought to do this and I ought to that and one thing leads to another and basically I find myself in a situation where like I'm laying on the side of a hill, saying 'what the hell am I doing this for?' But, then you go through with it (Respondent 3).

Another robber remembers that his co-offender, who knew that he was in dire straits, came to him with a crime proposal that lead them to commit robbery together.

It's funny because my uncle suggested doing it. I didn't know what he was going to do. He just told me that he had a plan to get some money real quick. He knowed that I needed it. Then he said we could rob the Winn Dixie. So we set there and talked about it off and on for about a week. Then we went to the store and the more we set there, the more we watched, the more I drunk. And he had a gun too. I said, 'sure, let's do it.' Cause I had lost my job like I said and I had lost all the funds and I was trying to get my kids. He told me what to do and how to do it, cause I didn't know how to go in and rob a store (Respondent 34).

Once the subject turns to the practicalities of committing a crime, things become decidedly optimistic. Nay-sayers were rare in this sample of people who went through with crime. In fact, it appears that for the more deliberative crimes, attention was focused almost exclusively on the act itself, on assessing the appropriateness of the target and on figuring out what to do. The conversation is even businesslike by this point in some crimes. A thief recalls, "[H]e said, 'first take your gun out and your mask and wait until

the store closes. It closed at 11:00 o'clock. Exactly 11:00 o'clock. And then when they open the doors to close them and lock them, that's when to hit them.' Right when the manager was at the door, I should kick and push the door open. He'd know I was there for that, robbing them" (Respondent 34).

Exceptionally experienced and active offending groups conversations are especially brief. For them, motivation is not at issue and they proceed immediately to the mechanics of crime. One habitual offender said that in his group of friends you never had to worry about discussing crime. His co-offenders would case houses while out on dates and talk about burglaries and robberies, "like you might talk about the weather." (Respondent 7).

Most crimes that crooks go on are sure things in their calculations. A first time burglar reported that his crime was first mentioned to him two days before it occurred but that it did not seem that it would ever really happen. His girlfriend had mentioned to some of his homeless and more actively criminal friends that her parents were going out of town soon and that she was angry with them over being thrown out of their home. The conversation was initiated again on the day of the robbery. He went to work and when he returned everyone was ready to go. The crime seemed so low risk by comparison to the many fights and drug deals he undertook that he did not hesitate to go along.

Well, she had mentioned it, just 'my parents are going on vacation and we should go rob them', and I said, 'well, I don't know.' But, that night it sounded a lot better and a lot easier. If someone had just said let's go rob a house and I would have been like your stupid. I mean the only reason I went along was because she said there is a bunch of jewelry and my money was guaranteed. Basically, that's why I went (Respondent 28).

There was not a 'bunch of jewelry,' just cheap costume beads and stones and he never profited from the crime, although his more streetwise partners made off with the family guns.

As the minimal level of planning that most offenders report putting into their crimes suggests, the conversations that turn a group toward the decision to commit a crime are brief. A robber, like many others, said that little was discussed once it was decided how to commit his crime and the location of cameras was reviewed.

PI: What did you say on the way over?

R10: Nothing really. We were a little nervous, but we figured it was pretty low risk. We didn't talk about it much. I guess we were worried. Not really. It was pretty safe really.

A home invasion robber who purportedly thought his crime was a routine collection on a drug deal reveals that his partners had given him some conversational clues that he was in on something 'big', something 'over my head'. But, they phrased this information so optimistically that he thought it just talk.

When you are on drugs, more or less you don't think about nothing like that. You don't know if the next guy is out to get into something serious or not . . . The only thing I really remember is that he said, 'later on down the road, we might have enough money where we don't never have to work again or mess with drugs and just lay back,' I mean I didn't think nothing about that, but it didn't seem to me to make sense (Respondent 33).

He goes on to say that the conversational hints began to make sense when they pulled into

a driveway and put on ski masks.

I mean as soon as we pulled up, and they had gone in and come out to get me and when I got inside that's when I first knew. I mean they didn't tell me outside before I went in . . . that's the part I couldn't understand about it. All I knew is that the people in there [a mansion] wouldn't mess with these two guys (Respondent 33).

Another thief reports that while drinking with his group's victim, he continually made antagonistic remarks to the man and would not let up. As the remarks became increasingly aggressive and the group became increasingly drunk others in the group began to suspect what might happen. In the minutes that the berated victim-to-be went outside and vomited from drinking too much, this robber said that he simply turned to his partners and said, "let's rob him" (Respondent 47). When the victim returned and accidentally vomited on the aggressor's shoe, he was assaulted and the group proceeded to beat him mercilessly. They stole his car, wallet and whiskey and left him unconscious on the floor.

The phrasing in crime proposals is interesting. First, because it often is somewhat ambiguous at the outset. It allows the person making the proposal to impart loosely his (proposals were initially made by men in all cases but two) meaning to the audience. In the above case the aggressor uses jibes and insults to orient his partners to crime. By making ambiguous suggestions, he can get across to them a vague idea of what he is proposing. It also allows him to feel out his partners and read their reactions. Usually, the person making a proposal already feels secure that his audience will at least be receptive to

what he has to say. Anyone participating in the preceding scenes would know that something illegal was being proposed, although they may not know if the person talking is sincere. By gauging their reaction, the proposer knows if they get his gist, and are thinking along similar lines. He judges and decides how likely they are to agree. Before pursuing the specifics, it is best to make sure one's assessment of the audience is correct. In most of the deliberative group crimes described to me, this initial invitation was engaged in enthusiastically by at least one and often by all present. Crime proposals are ought statements. They are meant to show that the person making them views the group as potentially criminal and wants to check his assessment with others. The proposer sees a crime opportunity and thinks that something ought to be done about it. The proposer is implying that the group could have what it takes to pull off a crime, if only others would agree.

Where specifics of the target and the plan were discussed, points of contention sometimes arose. A thief who took more convincing to take on what he considered to be a risky target summarizes the pettiness of the conversation that preceded this burglary. He reported that it was a conversation that had initiated many of their crimes. He usually gave in.

PI: Did you tell them that you wanted out?

R31: I did a couple of times not this time, but it didn't help none. Same thing, they just sat there and I would go ahead and get it over with so he would shut up and quit crying about it. He would aggravate us to death.

PI: What did he say?

R31: Just go on and say all kind of stuff, like saying your scared and say your momma had more nerve than you did. Just stuff to more or less make you

mad. He could get you so mad that your temper and you just would get out and do it anyways.

In a few cases, the person making the initial proposal may have received more than they were bargaining for when they put out their conversational bait. For them, small talk suddenly was transformed into reality. The person making the initial proposal is surprised with the quick resonance of his idea with a group. One hardened thief said that his crime began while he was hanging out at an oil distributorship with some friends talking about his prison experiences. The clerk, a new associate of the group, mentioned that someone should rob his employer. This offender began arranging right then, to stage a robbery while the night deposits were being made. He explained that he always had his ears open for criminal opportunity and that through years of stealing he had learned that, "if they are for real, if they really want to do something, then they will do it right then cause there is not any sense in waiting" (Respondent 46).

Situations that precede many crimes are not terribly conducive to conversation. People are drinking and using drugs heavily during them. In spontaneous crimes, they are often busily engaged in another illegal pursuit or in keeping their eyes open for dangers and criminal opportunities. Many conversations that eventuate in crime take place in automobiles with front and back passengers and with radios playing. If hesitation is shown, there is the potential for conflict or at least exchange of friendly insults aimed at hesitant participants that can bring other talk to a halt. If a group is motivated to commit a crime, then any single individuals' hesitations, if not properly articulated and acceptable are likely to get ignored. As the coming chapters will show, the actions of some

participants in crime leave little room for talk and even less for debate.

Once a group has begun to commit a crime, conversation usually comes to an end or is reduced to the bare minimum. Most thefts simply happen too quickly to converse during them. They also may require that everyone busy themselves in different tasks and be physically separated by some distance. The conversation once most crimes are started consists of barked orders and warnings or reminders to hurry.

Criminal conversations and plotting often begin ambiguously and usually escalate quickly. However, the subject of committing a crime does not emerge in a conversation that is going in another direction. Hitting a co-offender cold with a proposition to commit a crime is rare unless other offenses have been committed with that offender. Like most proposals, crime proposals typically flow from the general to the specific. One offender points out to the others the groups or his own need or motivation to commit crime, or points to a promising and accessible target. Interested others give some indication to continue the direction of the conversation. Then, preparations are discussed. The escalation from a deliberating to a criminal group is fast. The chance to back out of a crime gracefully, before the momentum builds is lost in an instant. When others in a group consent or puts up an front of agreement that a crime should be committed, escalation is fast. Silence and staying present is taken as consent. Many if not most offenders never give their verbal consent to a crime.

CHAPTER 5

RESOURCES, TARGETS AND DEFINING A CRIMINAL SITUATION

Robbery is taking someone's property from their person by force or intimidation. Burglary is breaking into a building to commit theft. Robberies have things in common other than their legal definition, as do burglaries. Those who prosecute the crimes and those who commit them see them differently. Thieves understand robberies and burglaries chronologically as they happen, not just according to a legal criterion. They realize that legal boundaries are not barriers that people consciously choose to cross after considering the consequences. They witnessed and participated in the construction of a crime.

Group crime is constructed in two ways. First, crime is assembled or put together through deliberate action. Persons intent on keeping criminal options open as a possible route of behavior put together the elements of crime. Crime may be only one of several alternatives under construction and it may not be sure that a group will choose a criminal course, but that does not diminish the fact that some participants, sometimes with intention, are laying a possible criminal path. They are acting on others and their environment in ways that lead a group toward risk and crime. Consider the provision of cocaine to a group. Users may not be fully aware that crime is an alternative that they are leaning toward when they inject the drug, but they have made it more likely if only because their injection reduces the chances that they will spend a quiet evening sleeping. A small action toward crime has been taken by setting a scene where crime would fit.

Crime also is constructed social psychologically. This construction happens when participants in situations that eventuate in crime select elements from their environment

and mentally define these as crime conducive. Of course, not all crimes share the same characteristics but when trying to understand their situation people check for clues in their environment. They then envision these as a consistent setting that makes sense of surrounding objects and events. In deciding if a criminal situation is shaping, a primary consideration is whether recognizable elements associated with crime are identifiable in it. The presence or absence of the proper or needed resources is a consideration that both constrains and opens possible paths of behavior. It takes material and social as well as mental and physical resources to commit a crime. Participants use these resources to set the scene for crime and to frame a definition of a situation as criminal. Some offenders consciously construct a path where crime is a possible predictable outcome and others add to the initial construction by recognizing the trajectory that is being cut.

MATERIAL RESOURCES

Material resources are needed to commit many crimes. These usually are not sophisticated. For most of the burglaries described to me, only a few simple tools were needed or used. Typical burglars do not come prepared to beat sophisticated alarms and crack heavy-duty business safes, as their short planning sessions would suggest. Few would know how to accomplish a complicated burglary that required more than prying a door or crawling through an air conditioner hole even if the proper tools were available. One wisecracking burglar responded quickly to my question about burglary tools with an answer that gave me the impression that he had been saving it since hearing it in one of the many prisons and jails he frequented, "burglary tools, yeah I used burglary tools, I carry

them with me everywhere I go - size twelves" (Respondent 14). Other burglars reported carrying simple burglary tools regularly and two subjects had previous convictions for possession of burglary tools. Usually, these tools would not be considered criminal in the hands of other people engaged in legitimate handy work. Tools used often by the burglars in my sample include pry bars or crowbars, screwdrivers, hammers, bolt cutters and saws. Several mentioned throwing large objects through windows or using sticks to break windows and remove air-conditioning units to gain entry. A couple mentioned using glass cutters. Both had them in their tool kits for legitimate reasons. One of these well-equipped thieves installed glass doors for a living and the other customized automobile interiors. A practiced thief used a car jack to remove a floor safe. An exceptionally skilled burglar, who had experience as a locksmith for an alarm company, used more innovative tools including small wires, wire cutters and pieces of metal in his last series of burglaries. He could successfully and repeatedly burgle jewelry stores with his considerable skill, targets out of reach of most thieves. His rare skills and knowledge of thieving tools were in demand by several thieving crews (Respondent 14). Another experienced thief took particular delight in explaining to me that he learned in prison how aluminum cans may be torn and modified for use as a burglary tool that can bypass magnetic window seals on older and cheaper residential alarm systems. His last burglary was of his partner's parents and necessitated no such measures, however (Respondent 16).

Two burglary crews used acetylene torches to open safes they had stolen in their last period of criminal activity. Both had the torches convenient for legitimate purposes

and the interviewees who used them said that the cheap safes they took could have been broken without the torches. The torches made the work more easy and enjoyable. The subjects' enjoyed recounting the safe cutting sessions indicating that these thieves relished acting like professional box-men of lore.

Most burglary tools are easily accessible and cheap. They often are taken from tool kits in the backseats of cars or beds of trucks. They would have been present even if not for a burglary. Multiple people in a group may provide them. Whoever has what is needed pitches it in or grabs it out of the garage or truck. Tools usually are contributed haphazardly. This is not always the case, however. Some experienced and busy thieves may not know with whom they will be doing a crime, but they are sure they will need their tools eventually. A life sentence habitual offender explained that he carried burglary tools to parties and even when he only had plans of socializing on the street corners that were his daily haunts. He remembered that he kept the tools for theft convenient, "burglary tools, yes sir. Always did have them with me just in case we run up on a place" (Respondent 7). Most burglars do not know what to do with safes if they find them and they avoid alarms. Some reported that they did not even steal convenient valuable merchandise but would be satisfied with cash that they could grab quickly. Generally, easy targets are plentiful for those motivated to do a burglary and little motivation to plan sophisticated or high paying "retirement" crimes exists.

In robbery, weapons are useful tools. Like burglary tools, they do not necessarily appear at the scene of a crime because it has been determined that they are needed. A thief who was considering avenging a squabble with his boss casually grabbed a butcher

knife from his mother's kitchen as he was leaving her home that evening (Respondent 3). He had not yet decided exactly what he was going to do with it. He ran across an experienced robber who helped him put the weapon to use. In another robbery described to me, the weapon was a razored box-cutter that happened to be in the borrowed work truck that the assailants used to follow their elderly victim home from the grocery store. The weapon sufficed to frighten the victim. Other weapons of convenience used in robberies include whiskey bottles, cattle-prods, and combat boots. A grocery store robber reported that he established a modus operandi in which he discharged poisonous canisters of mace, handed him by his partner directly before their first robbery. Following his partner's instruction, who claimed he had done this before, he sprayed the mace to help give time for escape after robbing the stores with a gun (Respondent 34).

Guns, of course, are a common piece of "facilitating hardware" in robbery (Lofland 1969: 69-72). Of the 22 robbery events that lead to last contact with law enforcement in my sample 12 of them had at least one firearm displayed or used in them. In two cases, these weapons reportedly were B.B. guns. In two other robberies, a gun was loaded and ready in the car but not needed or used in the crime. In three robberies, a gun was discharged and every time someone was shot. Most robbers have no preconceived intention of shooting someone. Only one person in one group clearly had planned that his robbery would be committed by shooting the victim. Thieves do not calculate precisely but they know that shooting at people is a good way to get caught and a bad idea.

In many robberies where guns are used, not everyone is carrying a gun or weapon.

Usually, the person who owns a gun carries it. The role of stickup man in an armed robbery may come with the territory of being in possession of a gun. Armed robbers apparently carry weapons with them often. Many reported that their group had or came up with a gun quickly when they decided suddenly that they needed a weapon for a crime. None of the robbers who used guns in their crime reported having to go get them. Guns were easily accessible. In three robberies, the guns were newly acquired on the day of the robberies. This suggests that the presence of a gun, in conjunction with other circumstances, may contribute to a criminal definition of a situation or the choice of the type of crime to be committed. Some robbers were carrying guns because they knew from experience that when out with this group of friends they might rob something.

The person in a crime group who provides a gun is not always the one who carries it. Sometimes groups assign the job of stick-up man to the person deemed most suitable. In four robbery events described to me that involved guns, someone else in the group provided the guns that the stickup men used. In two of these crimes, the stickup men had never seen the guns until minutes before they committed their crimes. In the four cases where someone who was not planning to go inside provided a gun to a stickup man, the provider was older or female. Offenders reported that they thought that older partners were less suitable stickup men. An armed robber explains how his first encounter with the pistol that he would use came when the wife of the man driving the car passed it over the passenger headrest while he was in the backseat smoking marijuana. He had been riding go-carts at a commercial track, drinking and otherwise blowing money with this older couple all day.

She just said, 'hey, let's pull in here at this restaurant and rob somebody' and she reached in the glove box and took out a pistol and she handed it back to me. So we pulled in the restaurant and I sat there until somebody come out of the door and I got out and showed the pistol and took his wallet and then we got on the interstate and tore out of there" (Respondent 38).

Another reports that the gun he used in a thirteen-count string of armed robberies was used in previous robberies that he had no part in and only limited knowledge about. The driver's girlfriend and passenger during a short and ambivalent conversation about illegal ways of making money also suddenly pulled guns and ski masks out of the glove box.

Neither one of the guns was mine. I claimed one of them at the trial. I carried one. But, I had made up my mind that I wasn't going to shoot no one and every time I went in, I held it up by the barrel. Yet again, the gun was loaded so it kinda goes against what I'm saying . . . The guns was theirs. They had them and some ski masks already in the car (Respondent 2).

One young robber reports that after he and his partners pulled their first armed robbery with a Saturday night special, they immediately set out to buy respectable weapons. Having proven that they were capable of robbery, they had to be properly equipped. They purchased a rifle and a shotgun and went immediately to his home to saw off the shotgun. After playing with the guns, they put them away until they needed them for the next armed robbery committed by some participants in this group (Respondent 49).

Some burglars carry guns and other weapons but the vast majority do not. Guns are of little benefit in a burglary that comes off well and offenders expect their crimes to go well. Usually burglars have no contact with their victims. Many burglars also are

hesitant to carry a weapon because they want to avoid hurting someone. All of the burglars, with the exception of one, caught with weapons in my sample had stolen them recently and had not yet had a chance to dispose of them. This suggests that burglars are more reluctant to injure victims than many would assume. One burglary group whose victim came home with the theft in progress used a gun they had taken out of a drawer as a desperate means of escape (Respondent 4). Even the habitual offender burglar caught with a gun that he did not steal says that it was just bad fortune that he was carrying it when he committed his burglary. He and his partner, "didn't have the guts to shoot someone" (Respondent 7). Several burglars that I interviewed also said that they were not capable of armed robbery. Studies of burglars have found that some differentiate themselves from robbers. Robbery is a crime that many burglars admit they lack the stomach to commit (Wright and Decker 1986: 55).

Automobiles are indispensable to many robberies and burglaries. Thieves hypothesize that travel to and away from crime increases greatly their chances of getting away with it. They often do not travel great distances to commit a crime. They see cars as a means of increasing the number of potential targets available to choose from, making a quick escape, hauling goods and of getting far enough away from home that they will not be immediate suspects in a crime. If something turns up missing in their own neighborhood, some active thieves suspect they will be the first place investigators look.

When I asked why they left a safe in the store that he and his co-defendants entered illegally, a burglar alluded to the importance of an automobile in getting valuable, low risk targets. His group escaped with only petty cash from the register and some

groceries in the referent burglary. He reports that they failed because, "we couldn't take the safe. We didn't have any wheels" (Respondent 23). Robbers often want fast cars and may recruit people that drive them. Burglars mentioned that for them storage space and a clean looking automobile sometimes was a concern, but most did not consider the possibility of a high speed chase. A burglar who was caught in a car chase because he had a temporary tire on his car explains that this did not seem important for a burglary as he had it planned.

We went to the house and as we were leaving we passed a police officer, he [partner] saw his brake lights and he [the police] starts to turn around and come real fast. We go real fast and he is trying to look backwards and finally we run a stop sign and he has got a little donut tire on his car (laughs). We weren't expecting to be chased. He had a donut tire and it made us fly off the road and we got arrested by police officers. We were going too fast, he was chasing us on them back-roads and finally we run a stop sign (Respondent 21).

While automobiles are not the first consideration in deciding to do a burglary, some burglaries would not occur if no automobile were available for escape. Interviewed burglars and robbers said repeatedly that automobiles were considered in choosing crime partners. Several robbers said that they were brought in on crimes that already were planned because they had faster and more reliable cars than others in their group or because they were the only person in a room with a car or license to drive. They often describe selection as if the responsibility for driving to a crime fell on them because they had access to a car. Car ownership contributes to the role played in a crime. People who went inside in robberies were not the owners of the getaway car. Owning the car provides

thieves an acceptable reason to stay outside during crime, but may be the reason they are included.

I went over there and they were saying that they couldn't get his car out because of the snow . . . yeah, they had been doing this before I got there. And then their car died out and they needed a way to do it. And I was all geeked up like they were (Respondent 18).

A burglar explains how he came to recruit a burglary partner into robberies that he was secretly doing with another group.

We only included him that time and that was because Eddie's car broke down and Eddie wanted me to use my dad's car and I told him, 'we ain't using my dad's car' in case something happened. I wasn't using my dad's car. And so we pulled Greg into it one time cause we definitely had to do it that night or wait another week or something (Respondent 15).

Another thief explains several reasons he was brought in on a robbery planned before he joined the group. One reason is his transportation.

R33: More or less, just transportation and to be a part in it, to stand by the door or something like that. After they done get you involved in it, it's too late to run, and they knew I wouldn't snitch.

PI: They didn't have their own car?

R33: One had a truck. But, he said that the night we was going out for riding, they asked me if I wanted to party and I said, 'well let's take yourn' and they said, 'well, our trucks got too much heat on it in that county.' So I took my car, I mean if I knew that this was going to go down [robbery and shooting], I wouldn't have took my car and stuck it in the front yard of this house. Not with me driving it every day. I really believe they was wanting to use my car.

That way if something comes down, it would be my car instead of their truck.

SOCIAL RESOURCES: CONNECTIONS

If the object of many crimes is to get drugs, then it should be no surprise that the ability to convert stolen goods or monies into illicit party favors is important to criminal groups. Indeed, many offenders I interviewed noted that they did not commit their crimes with money as the ultimate objective, but with drugs in mind. Stealing money, was simply a necessary and bothersome preliminary task necessary to score drugs. Money is easier to steal than dope. Three of the offenders whom I interviewed volunteered that they had robbed drug dealers or planned to rob them during the immediate course of events that lead to their crime. They expressed a great deal of fear about doing this, however. Robbing drug dealers is dangerous. One aforementioned group had been shot at while grabbing dope from dealers and driving off. All three came up with safer crimes, robbing stores and burglarizing homes, that would prevent the necessity of knocking over dope men. Dealers may be armed, may know who robbers are and may go to lengths to exact revenge.

Subjects described four ways that drugs and alcohol contribute to crime. They are not only material motivations for crime. A second way that they contribute is by reducing fear of consequences and increasing bravery. Some groups use them to prepare for crime. Third, drug use can be an important step in defining a situation and other people as potentially criminal and setting a crime conducive scene. Finally, drug use may foster obligation to other users.

Although drinking and doping is a normal undertaking for today's serious property offender, a few noted in interviews that they intentionally used drugs and alcohol to prepare themselves for crime. Drugs diminish fear and consideration of long-term consequences and add to bravado and criminal claims making in conversation. In spontaneous crimes, alcohol and drugs contribute to crime by diminishing capacity to think clearly and care about consequences. Offenders may accidentally drink and dope themselves into a state where they do not care or know what they are doing. In deliberative crimes, however, these effects are often intentionally sought. Alcohol and drugs offer a diversion from the building tension and brief doubt that can accompany planning a crime. As two men put it, "the more we set there and the more we drunk. The better it sounded. It took me at least a couple of six packs to get my nerve up" (Respondent 34). Another thief remembers, "it took an amount of courage to build up to do these things I was doing, the only way I could do it was if I was loaded" (Respondent 19). Drugs and alcohol can build up nerve; many offenders reported that they could not do crime sober. The intentionally intensified drinking that precedes many crimes also suggests preparation. A few deliberate offenders are careful to achieve only a slight buzz before committing a crime. Others go all out. Directly before the jumping off point of many criminal events, a preparatory dose or a final swig of alcohol is taken, not without some dramatics. Hesitant participants in crime claimed that they were encouraged to consume drugs and alcohol to diminish their fears by others in their group. Drugs are both an objective and tool of crime. One chronic alcoholic reported that his partner put drugs to use,

R32: Oh, he kept getting me drunk, or about to be drunk, getting me to where I didn't give a damn.

PI: What do you mean he was getting you drunk?

R32: I mean he was buying me beer.

Earlier in the interview he said of the night previous to his last robbery,

He come to me like on Thursday night, saying he needs some money and he tried to get me drunk to go ahead and do it. But, I wouldn't then cause I knowed that sooner or later I was going to get caught" (Respondent 32).

Certain types of drug use in settings that have other criminogenic elements express potential willingness to engage in crime. Witnesses to heavy consumption suspect that one is always on the hustle for a hit or willing to take chances open to criminal opportunity (Agar 1973; Faupel and Klockars 1987; Faupel 1991). Drug use is a litmus test of criminal receptiveness. When legitimate means of acquiring the quantity of substances desired are plainly absent, but it is clear that no one has intentions of moderation the message becomes apparent.

Drugs are also an indication that one is out for a wild and experimental time. Drug use can set a tone that no one expects the evening to be dull and conventional. It will have risks. Heavy indulgence is a means of showing off. It is a demonstration that the conspicuous use of property (expensive drugs) is not a bother. It is a display that the material and physical costs are no barrier to partying and living in the moment. By engaging in certain forms of drug use, signals are given off that one is a committed partier

and is willing, even if temporarily, to sever ties to conventionality and responsibility. When a substantial amount of money is spent in hours or days of indulgence, doubt that someone will be receptive to crime disappears. In his popular book *Showing Off in America*, John Brooks (1981) devotes a whole chapter to drinking and drug use as means of showing off and argues that they are a fundamental cultural ways of conspicuously consuming and proving oneself. This dimension of drugs and crime is evidenced when crime groups go out and steal to come up with the money for drugs and then take them back and give them to others, "like it weren't nothing to throw down an ounce of cocaine on the table" (Respondent 18).

Social drug use can motivate crime by fostering group obligations. In the following account, a young man describes how he used drug monies owed him from the day's party to motivate a burglary in which he would participate only as driver.

I mean we had spent all my money and they figured I wanted to do it just as bad as they did. I told them, 'look my money is out-right gone.' I guess I figured they owed me. I mean I wouldn't have cared a bit, the thought would have never crossed my mind if I had went out and bought a hundred dollars worth of pot and smoked every bit of it. I wouldn't have thought they owed me anything. But, I bought three hundred dollars worth of rock and it was gone in like two hours and I felt like they owed me . . . He shared it with me [money from the burglary] because he better have. Bubba was telling Tommy we had to get some more money. I had spent my whole paycheck on them you know. I told them, 'look I got no more money. All my money was left back in Nashville, its about time ya'll come up with something . . . Tommy ran out and came back with an old chainsaw and it wouldn't start. Bubba says to him, 'come on Tommy, if you are going to steal something, steal something we can sell' (Respondent 31).

Often, thieving crews went straight to one or another partners' drug connection to

score immediately after fleeing their crime. In some cases, they waited in the car or turned their money over to someone in the group assigned the task of scoring. Not everyone has equivalent connections and drug dealing etiquette advises against introducing strangers who have just committed a crime to dealers. A few thieves noted that they were the source of narcotics for most of their friends and that their crime partners came by to score drugs on the day they committed their crime. Having a convenient drug dealer probably increases the chance of crime. Drug connections contribute to crime and are no less important than contacts that provide hideouts, weapons, or tips on places to steal in shaping a criminal situation. Getting away with stealing and selling stolen goods does many thieves little good, if they cannot contact their drug connection to get their reward.

In addition to the ability to acquire drugs an important resource for burglary groups is the ability to sell stolen goods without high risk. If a thief plans to make any consistent money stealing "merchandise", as the burglars in my sample derisively call everything worth stealing that is not cash, then they must have a reliable fence. Many thieves told me that they avoided merchandise. Only a few burglary groups had a reliable, stable and profitable means of disposing of it. Most were confined to stealing small quantities of easily disposed of goods like guns and jewelry. Those burglary groups that do have access to a fence tend to be experienced thieves, to steal more regularly and to make larger scores than those who did not. Even these receive nowhere near the true value of the goods they stole. One burglar told me that when he took a loaded van full of goods that he estimated as worth about \$10,000 to sell, his fence told him that a thousand dollars was his top price. As the thief worded it, "I nearly took his fingers off reaching for

it.” (Respondent 14). Burglars, who are often desperate and addicted, are in no position to bargain with a fence. Four of the burglars that I interviewed were caught while trying to dispose of stolen goods on the street, at pawn shops or when their fence was arrested. The number of possession of stolen property charges on interviewees criminal records shows how difficult dealing with merchandise can be. Four had this conviction in their history. These convictions result from keeping stolen property around too long.

Thieves often make contacts with fences through drug transactions and drug contacts. These contacts are often dealers looking to make an illegal dollar wherever they can. The thief who committed a burglary of a rental storage unit on the spur of the moment and had never done a burglary before remembered that the group had not planned on moving twenty plus storage units full of stolen goods. They knew that they could through drug contacts they maintained in several states, however, and the goods were sold immediately (Respondent 24). Most thieves who steal merchandise do not know exactly what they will do with it. They sell it for whatever they can get to friends or people that they know who are always looking for a deal. Some thieves have built up contacts through years of stealing and looking out for safe places to sell and the best price. These often maintain associations with extensive networks of thieves, fences and drug dealers. One burglar returned to crime after time off when he met two neighborhood teens at his apartment swimming pool who were inclined to steal. During one of their first conversations, he mentioned that he could get a good price for stolen goods. Young and inexperienced thieves seldom have the opportunity to have their booty sold before they steal it. The young men were excited at the prospect he offered. As he described the

enticing opportunity, "I had a real nice fence up in Ohio. I lived between Ohio and Tennessee and had relatives both places. I had met him through my sister who knows what I am off into. I could sell him a toaster if I wanted to" (Respondent 15).

PHYSICAL RESOURCES

Physical resources also are useful for committing a crime. Simple labor is particularly valuable for some crimes. It may take more than one person to intimidate the victim in a robbery, for example. Some crimes described to me could not have been committed easily with a smaller group. In the previously mentioned burglary where storage units were emptied of their valuables, it is difficult to imagine a lone offender sufficiently ambitious to accomplish the task. He may not have tried. That requisite manpower sometimes falls short reflects the minimal planning invested in most crimes. Burglars often must leave behind the valuables because they do not have the labor available to lift and load them quickly. Robbers sometimes choose a victim that is resistant and do not have the manpower to steal his goods. Some experienced hustlers will go in search of brute manpower when they run across a job that necessitates the participation of multiple people. One reported that he regularly paid adolescents from his neighborhood to help him load goods from homes he burgled (Respondent 29). Finding labor for a crime that already is conceptualized is little challenge for most active thieves, but labor availability does influence timing and choice of target.

Usually, strength does not play much of a role in selection of co-offenders. It does not take great strength, even to lift or break the hinges on most safes. Multiple

participants are included in burglaries to increase coverage of the area being burgled or to create a division of labor believed to increase short run security. Some burglars find it comforting to leave a driver on the outside or to have a lookout, for example.

Whereas a great deal of physical strength is not necessary for most crimes, fighting ability and willingness to fight was important for some offenders in the selection of partners for both robbery and burglaries. This is not because they expect to fight so much as the ability to fight well or viciously is seen as an indicator that one has what it takes to pull off crime. Fighting is an indicator of courage or heart. In their descriptions of their partners and in elaborating on the reason that they put faith in them, several subjects noted their associates' accomplishments in fights. One burglar when asked how he knew that his partner's proposal to rob a local store was serious referred to other things that he had seen this partner do. He claimed that he had once witnessed his partner shoot at someone with little provocation and had little reason to doubt that he was serious about a simple robbery (Respondent 46). Another remembers that a fight was a defining moment in deciding that his future criminal associates were loyal and could potentially prove useful as friends.

I had a little bit of trouble with this girl and I didn't know she had a boyfriend and he come up on me. And Bubba he come right up behind him with something in his hand and knocked him out. And I just kicked him in the stomach a few times and it was over. That's one reason I thought Bubba might be a friend you know. I mean this boy was pretty big (Respondent 31).

PSYCHOLOGICAL RESOURCES

Tales of stupid thieves abound. The literary qualities of a criminal plan gone bad

are largely responsible for their proliferation. Bumbling thieves suit the disdainful image that we have of them and we can appreciate the fate that befalls inept thieves. Those that pass out at the scene of their crime, stop to make phone calls or crash cars while fleeing a robbery, forget to remove or cover identifiable features of their person and clothing, or break down, run out-of-fuel while fleeing police are especially good entertainment. These stories are not rare among convicted thieves. All of the above happened to one or more of the thieves that I interviewed. When we consider that many offenders may be reluctant to own up to their most inane mistakes, we might hypothesize that idiotic criminal moves are quite common. These moves reflect the mind-set, and the intoxication, that accompany crime. They are the disadvantage to this mind-set. The ability to commit and seize a criminal opportunity is from the perspective of the motivated offender the advantage.

If a motivated offender is to carry out an action where the risk is imprisonment and financial reward likely to be a pittance, careful calculus must be cast aside. The situational ability to do this has led some to paint the criminal as incapable of balanced or reasoned choices by birth or proclivity. Others have focused on the psychological techniques that offenders use to negate some possible outcomes of their crime, changing the equation and allowing them to go through with it. Offenders use the famous techniques of neutralization to assign blame for their actions to others or uncontrollable circumstances, for example. By removing responsibility before committing crime, they can act in a fashion that they know is unsuitable (Sykes and Matza 1957). Standard techniques of neutralization were used repeatedly by thieves in my interviews. Group crimes added convenience to rationalizations that placed blame on criminal partners.

Crime can be morally rationalized with simple psychological adjustments and rationalizations, but the question of consequences remains. Through other psychological techniques, fear of consequences can be adjusted. Others are instrumental in reducing fears and constructing optimistic outlooks for crime. Despite neutralizations and optimism most offenders, certainly the deliberate and partially sober ones, know that there is a chance that they could be caught and severely punished for crimes as serious as robbery or burglary. In criminal situations, they put these fears out of mind.

Abandon is the psychological suspension of fear of consequences to enable risky action. It is an ability to commit to a behavior despite severe and reasonable potential consequences. It is a situational condition; some situations and groups inspire it. It is easier to develop when a dangerous situation seems inevitable or when there is seemingly nothing to lose. Combat, for example, brings many people to abandon as do other situations that require risky action. Abandon also is an individual characteristic; certain individuals are able to suspend fear of consequence more than others. In the military, soldiers who have learned from watching them often disparagingly label those who do it best 'heroes'. They are despised because complete abandon endangers everyone, not just those who have suspended their fears. Offenders usually have insufficient time to come to similar conclusions about risk-taking partners. By the time they are caught, it is too late to judge the value of careless courage in their partners. Abandon is a psychological state, but it can set the tone or mood of an event. Abandon has many synonyms among offenders and others that touch on its core meaning. In its more flattering forms, they may call it guts, balls, nerve, heart or bravery. They may also call it wildness, stupidity, insanity, or

unpredictability.

Some level of abandon is necessary to commit serious crime. It is a resource. Those thieves who commit crime repeatedly know that eventually the odds will turn against them, but they do it anyway. They cultivate abandon sometimes through the use of drugs and alcohol. Those who purport not to have cared about the consequences of their crimes, often had to put themselves through a period of mental preparation to cast off the last of their worries. Some offenders reported laying in wait or watching their victim and “psyching” themselves and others up to do a crime. It may take several attempts to get everyone to cast aside worries and commit. Even those who are capable of crime sometimes must take a deep breath or look to others who are about to do the same thing to build their nerve. Many consider this last stage of mental preparation to be the difficult and anxiety producing part of committing a deliberative serious crime. It is the part that experienced thieves look forward to putting behind them because they have learned that hesitation does little good and may even increase risk and fear.

Abandon suits the images of self-reliance, chance-taking and fearlessness that are cultivated by those facing the dangers of the streets regularly. Thus, some offenders admired the ability to suspend fear of consequence. They also noted that one reason that they knew that accomplices were capable and would be willing to commit a crime, was through past demonstrations of abandon. It can be turned on as needed by some street criminals. Katz (1988) has described the image of themselves as street hardened “bad-asses” that many armed robbers cultivate. Abandon suits the image of the hardman who does not care. Some offenders have invested considerable effort into cultivating a criminal

reputation. Crimes also are opportunities for those who are a little less secure in their readiness for crime to demonstrate that they can hang with these offenders and do what it takes to gain the rewards of crime.

Another mental resource is much less common than abandon but was mentioned in enough interviews to merit attention. It is the ability to manage a criminal situation and usually is found among older and experienced offenders who know what do to and how to handle the emotions and pragmatics of criminal situations. This ability includes staying calm despite the rush and spirit of abandon in crime. It also is the ability to predict how crime will progress and to readjust if it does not go as planned without being visibly rattled. Street-thieves often refer to this managerial capacity as 'cool'. I call it *control*. Control is the ability to keep what is an unstructured, improvisational and wild time in hand so that the material goals of crime can be accomplished. Inexperienced thieves who were with more experienced offenders said that the control their streetwise partners exercised is the primary reason they saw their partners as an asset. Most of those who described the characteristic said that they could tell that their partners were familiar with criminal situations and had things under control because they acted as if the events were routine. Degree of control is easiest to see when things are not going exactly as planned. A robber contrasts his level of control and demeanor in a criminal situation with that of his old-con partner.

I had never done it before and I forgot the mask and everything. But, he was smart enough to like wait and find out what was going to happen before he even came in. He stayed behind, till I got a hold on him [the victim]

(Respondent 3).

He proceeds to say,

R3: He had a car and everything and so he offered to take me over and rob with me. He had done this quite a few times and everything. So to speak, his expertise did come into play when we were almost caught . . . After the guy got away, he went to the phone and called the police while we still there on the grounds. And he went up the street and somebody pulled up and wanted some gas and I had been seen. So I was wired. Where do you go? Confused. And so basically, what Willie did is he walked right up the street to the bail bondsman. The place is right across the street from the bus depot and right up the street, he knows is the bail bondsman's place. So he calmly walked up there and took the money and threw it in a trash can. Went into the bail bondsman's place and started talking, asking about making a bond, making a bond for somebody. And we just sat there and talked and police were driving up and down the street and everything like that. And so they called and asked about the bond for this guy and he says, 'o.k. let me try and get enough money together.' So he calmly calls a cab. Cab come and we got in the cab and we got the money out of demsti-dumpster. And he says, 'stay cool.' And you know I would still have been running the streets and everything. You know and not knowing what to do and probably would have certainly got caught then.

PI: So, he was able to stay cool.

R3: Yeah, stay cool and be able to come up with a plan like that in that particular situation. The guy is smart.

An experienced thief explains that the ability to keep control can be cultivated through practice, but also is precarious when living the lifestyle that accompanies street-crime.

Although some is necessary, abandon threatens to undermine even full-time, ambitious thieves and their group.

Whenever we went inside, we knew what to do. This one wasn't no different. We knew exactly what would be expected of us. It you know was a thing that we had done so much that we knew we had to take control. That's what it is. It is taking control. You have to know this is someone's home you're invading their life. They've lived there no telling how long and you're going in invading everything. You know that's scary . . . it's one of those situations where you don't just get caught; you get yourself caught. Just common damn sense, you know you can't take everything and you can't live in their house. You got to grab and go, get the hell out of there as fast as possible . . . the earlier crimes that we did you know we had more control, more ambition. He had experience, he knew what the hell he was going in there for, he knew what the hell the deal was. He was someone that I looked up to. I reckon at the end he's a junkie. Lost control and didn't care about nothing except him. Didn't care who's hurt (Respondent 4).

An advantage of having some members in a criminal group who exude control is that they can reign in those who do not. Abandon is necessary for most crimes and some control is desirable. A successful criminal group must not care enough about consequences to prevent them from committing crime and seizing sudden criminal opportunities, but care enough to try to do it safely. People in criminal situations sometimes get carried away by the excitement and threaten the safety of others in their group. Some participants in crime were infuriated by the inability of their partners to show restraint and get the job done once they were engaged in committing a crime. A person or group that exudes control can put an end to this problem. A burglar explains how he kept things in control, calmed things down and eased his young accomplice's nerves during their early burglaries. To him, as to many of those with control, crime is a means to an end and they "do it for a living" (Respondent 5).

He was young. There wasn't much confidence in him. I went back over what

he did. It didn't usually matter, but I found something that he missed and I didn't touch it. I just left the room and I told him to go back again and to look for certain items to see if he could find them. I planned on working with him. It kind of builds his experience and his confidence if he finds it. He liked it. It makes him not so nervous. Nervous people make me nervous and accidents happen when people are nervous and frustrated. It's a bad thing to say, but I was good at what I done . . . I have busted someone in the head that I was with for trashing a place. Just because you are in there robbing somebody, you ain't got to trash their house. That's just being an idiot. What did they do to you to trash their house? What good does that do you? If you are robbing people, heck take what you are going to get and go, ain't no sense in tearing nothing up (Respondent 5).

Another repeat offender and long-time prisoner reports,

We were putting these jars of coins, real big bottles in the trunk and one broke and he cut his hand. From there on he was panicked. I just finally got fed up and stopped him. 'Damn slow down. You got to think about what your doing' (Respondent 16).

Thieves need a limited amount of knowledge and experience to commit a crime. Nevertheless, crime like any intense situation is more comfortable and secure when the people present and relied upon seem to have some knowledge and experience in the situation. Especially for the unaccustomed, it is reassuring to know or think that someone else has things in control. It makes it much easier to jump into the fray when others are willing and without fear. Young or foolish thieves often mistake lack of hesitation about committing to an event for comfort that comes from skill, confidence and familiarity with a situation. Some are shocked at how calmly their partners handle arrest, because they mistook the lack of fear in their partners for confidence. Upon arrest they realize that their partners simply had resigned themselves to failure. Thus, offenders may misperceive abandon as bravery when it really is acceptance of eventual failure. One first time loser

reported of his partner, "I couldn't believe him, he was just like whatever, it looks like I am going back (Respondent 39)." Abandon is impressive, but control also is used viewed as a valuable asset and when present can change the mood and perceived opportunities offered by a criminal group.

TARGETS

Thefts always have a victim. Victims typically are present during robberies and absent during burglaries. They are an afterthought in many crimes. Participants in deliberative thieving crews usually reported that they decided that they would do a crime and then set out to find an appropriate target. This was especially true of those who had some participants with considerable experience stealing and groups that had done crimes together before. In a few deliberative crimes, however, an attractive target inspired the crime. Inside or public information about a target's attractiveness whether provided in an ambiguous, playful, or direct crime proposal can inspire crime. This happens when a thief recognizes an attractive sum of money or goods in a place or on a victim and thinks that present company might overcome barriers to stealing it. They often share this information to see if others see the same potential. In three robberies, for example, would-be thieves made it known that places they had worked for kept cash and had security measures that could be surpassed. Several burglaries were also of houses where thieves had an inside line, usually because family or friends lived there.

Targets play a larger part in the inspiration of spontaneous crimes. A group of people who are toying with or think that each other may be capable of committing a crime

are on the lookout for a promising criminal target if only because they are worried what will happen if one appears. A promising target is the catalyst that turns the groups' heads firmly toward crime, however. Recall the man who walked up on the group of young drug dealers looking for a fight (Respondent 27). The robber relates that the most important characteristic of his target was when he encountered him.

PI: Was it because the guy was white?

R27: No. It wasn't that. It could of been anybody. Next person to walk down that street. It could have been me . . . He wasn't no pushover.

In another example of an opportune target, an unwitting victim approaches an abandoned house to drink with street-youth and then decides to take them on in an exchange of insults. This naive or brassy young man had in the words of his assailant, "walked up to the place carrying a bottle of Crown Royal, like \$40 whiskey, and flashing his car keys around . . . I don't know what he was thinking, I ain't going to be played for no punk" (Respondent 47). The mere arrival of this unwelcome house guest had clued everyone else in the room into the possibility that a violent crime could occur. His entrance to the closed party contributed to setting what was previously a friendly, if aggressive, drinking group on a quick course to becoming a band of muggers.

DEFINITION OF THE SITUATION

Action occurs within a definition of the situation and redefines it (Berger et. al.

1977:12-15). Defining a situation “involves registering information about a setting and organizing it into a cognitively sensible whole” (Heise 1979:4). Defining a situation begins with feature recognition. Inferences are made based on features in the environment. Dilapidated buildings and street-corners full of young males send signals that danger could be ahead. We take what we see and fill the gaps to make sense of the things and people around us and come to a definition. A gun in the face and the currently fashionable phrase “set it out” tells the victim clearly that a robbery is occurring. For offenders, situations also may be defined by similarly brief and powerful cues.

One thief told me that when he saw his victim hit the ground after another robber’s blow landed, he understood what to do from seeing the scenario played out many times while selling drugs as a child. He said, “hitting that guy, it was like if I was to throw a ball at you. Your hands would go up right. Instinct. That’s about what it was like me deciding to jump on this robbery” (Respondent 27). Once a person arrives at a definition of a situation they can shape things and make moves to insure that their definition fits the immediate situation (Frake 1964; Goffman 1969, 102; Heise 1979). They understand new phenomena according to their definition and they modify the situation to make their definition fit. Scene setting is done by,

moving about to confirm that all the parts of a scene are present, or it may involve assembling required paraphernalia or mustering human participants, or it may involve locomoting to a setting where a required situation exists intact (Heise 1979).

Shared definitions of a situation may come about from all participants in a scene

recognizing the same appropriate course of action or aligning their actions through improvisation. When the perception is that the group has the resources of crime, a group is in the right setting, and an appropriate target is available, a shared criminal definition of the situation may arise. The resources of crime discussed in this chapter all contribute to a criminal definition of a situation. These resources usually do not appear on a scene by coincidence, however. They also are used by some participants in events leading to crime to set a scene. Some participants are better able to assemble resources and shape definitions of the situation than others. In pre-criminal situations, those viewed as knowledgeable criminals have unequal influence in setting the crime trajectory. Those who take decisive criminal actions also exert great influence over criminal events.

LEADERSHIP

Unlike some 'organized' street-gangs, crime groups do not have formal leadership. Jobs are not allocated by assigned offices and formalized power differences between group participants in most street crimes. They are assigned by coincidental physical placement within an event, eagerness, resources available to each participant and quickly formulated perception of the most appropriate place for each person.

Many thieves took care to note that there was no ringleader in their group according to the way the police use the word. Their crimes were seldom carefully organized. Either everyone in them had given some indication that they were willing to do them or they happened spontaneously. As one subject said of the ringleader title attached him by police for crimes he committed with two younger men, "I mean I had a little bit

more experience and a little bit more knowledge than they did, but it never went to my head or nothing” (Respondent 15). From the thief’s perspective, “no one twists their arm” to make them commit a crime. Most accept responsibility for their own downfall, but they also acknowledge that not everyone is equally responsible for a crime. Leaders are people who exercise disproportionate influence over their groups.

In most crimes, some participants are most responsible for instigating crime because they propose or start one. Others defined leaders as the persons who took control and managed a crime once it was underway. Often this was the same person. Crime groups are not autocratic, but most subjects could easily identify an instigator or leader in their crime.

There was one that was a leader. He was the one that wanted things his way. He wanted them how he wanted them and he was the main one who hollered at people to get things done. You know he said, ‘let’s go do this.’ And I’ll tell you, he had a way of talking you into it, like I said. If I was skeptical about a job, like I didn’t like this one, he had his way ‘oh come on pussy’ and this and that and the other. There was one that was real dominant . . . It was almost like, how do I want to word this? It was almost manipulation as far as getting us to do something that we didn’t want to. Like, I’m not saying that any of us didn’t want to do what we did. It if like we are skeptical, it was like he’d manipulate us into going on into it the way he talked to us. It was that pride thing he had . . . there were several different jobs like this that I wouldn’t have done if it weren’t for that (Respondent 13).

Considering that multiple people not interviewed were involved in the crimes, a substantial number (9) identified themselves clearly as the leader and more as instigators of their crime. A self-proclaimed leader whose group stole a van and credit cards in a burglary and then drove out of state with no destination says,

I don't know him that well. I had the idea of getting the van [in a burglary]. You know, whenever I had the idea of getting the van, he went along with it. We were coming from a friend's house . . . he was just following me, he was ten years younger (Respondent 19).

Often, thieves attribute leadership to the person they think has the most knowledge and experience in criminal situations. Those who portray themselves as knowledgeable players increase their influence in situations that others assume they know how to handle. A burglar explains that his co-offender's history and reputation as an experienced young hustler placed him in a leadership position.

PI: Was there anybody who you would say was the leader of this group?

B30: Yeah, Bubba. He was.

PI: What do you mean?

B30: Well, it's just Bubba could say something you know and whether we wanted to do it or not, we would. Cause we figured he was right. I mean it was like we knew he had been around more than we had.

PI: What do you mean been around?

B30: Well, I mean just getting around into things. Like just getting high or stealing or fighting or whatever. He wasn't scared of nothing.

PI: But, he didn't say 'let's go do a burglary'?

B30: No, he didn't. He never said it right out. He just said, 'we got to have some more money' and 'let's get some more money'. 'Come on, if we get some more money, we can get some more rock.'

When I asked what he meant when he said his partner had "been around", he replied:

Just from what everybody else would say you know. Like when I first started running with him, I got a friend up there that I have known since I was young and she told me right out. Watch Bubba. I didn't really know why she said that. So I asked around and different people would tell me. He will rob you blind. He might tell on you. He will steal anything.

Since pre-criminal events are ambiguous, especially to the novice criminal, participants must look to each other and assess likely future moves of others and the group. Those who seem to know what they are doing and exude decisiveness and confidence yield considerable influence. Crime groups must decide who to follow quickly. Accurate and detailed information on criminal experience usually is unavailable and must be determined by interpreting situational cues and behavior. An experienced thief explains how he decides if he will defer to another person when stealing. If they look good he will let them choose the target and lead the way,

You can tell by the way they move and the way they look at things. They look at places in a certain way and they see certain ways to get in mainly. There are certain ways to bypass simple alarms and things you might not think about. This shows you that they have done it and know what they are talking about. I wouldn't know riding around with them, I wouldn't know till it came time to go in a place. You can watch when you're inside, how they act and when you see them go through a place and the places they will look for stuff hid. You know like money, gold, guns. You learn hiding places. I watch the places they look and I can tell (Respondent 5).

Those who make decisive moves toward crime also are viewed as leaders. With no formal means of allocating leadership, those who act exert powerful influence. This influence may be even more powerful when others have not agreed in advance or are

unfamiliar with the criminal plan. A criminal makes the distinction between those that lead because they move their group into situations and act decisively and those that lead because they do crime well.

PI: Was one of these guys what you would call a leader?

R33: No, not really. I mean I guess you could say they both were. They were into more stuff and I didn't even know what they had planned. If that's what you mean, I guess, but not leaders really. They was both pretty stupid and burned out honestly.

Age is an important shortcut in determining influence. Young offenders more often perceived that older offenders were leaders. The knowledge that someone has been to prison or knows how to steal also increases their influence. One of the most important determinants of leadership and influence in a criminal group is demeanor during pre-criminal situations and crime. In a group of inexperienced offenders, those participants with the highest degree of abandon are likely to impress others and exert influence. These people seize the momentum of criminal situations. Experienced offenders know that a degree of abandon is necessary for crime. They may hope to curtail abandon once a criminal event begins, however. Control, that may lead others to see them as a source of criminal opportunity, is easily sacrificed to chance-taking displays and to the chaotic momentum of crime.

WHEN A PLAN COMES TOGETHER

Targets are an important factor in attracting some criminal groups toward crime.

They are sometimes the deciding element that tips a situation from one where crime is a likely potential to crime. They are seldom responsible for the conception of criminal group, according to offenders' depictions. A group's evaluation and assessment of its resources and other elements of the pre-criminal setting are as important. In evaluating resources, group participants look to each other and to situationally influential participants in their group. Other people and knowledge of what they are willing and capable of doing are important in constructing a shared definition. If motivated group participants look around and see that their group has the potential for crime and the ability to carry it out, they are likely to turn toward crime. Their fit with crime becomes the criteria by which future events and elements in the environment are assessed. Resources set a criminal scene.

Like all persons, criminals have a strong disposition to retain a definition once it has been adopted. "Given a particular way of defining a situation, individuals act in ways that confirm that definition because the definition itself governs subsequent behavior" (Berger et. al. 1977:10). Predefined tasks are central for constructing a progressing event. Only when definitions and plans become untenable are people likely to reexamine a criminal course of action. The process of intragroup interaction that leads a group to define and construct a situation as criminal and to stick to the definition is the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6

PROCESS: MAKING A GROUP CRIMINAL DECISION

Offenders make a choice to participate in a crime. The group whose company they have chosen heavily influences this choice, as do the actions of other participants in it. The process that leads a group toward crime is analogous to the process that leads crowds of individuals to transform into collective bodies that take other consequential actions. It is composed of interaction including convergence and manipulation of decisions and individual preferences. It also is composed of successive decisions and changes in group composition that eventually lead to an emergent shared definition.

FROM CHOICE TO COMPOSITION

Places and activities where action is sought are conducive to the formation of crime groups. Obviously, those who avoid these places are less likely to be presented the chance to join crime groups or other criminal opportunities. A range of behavioral options always is available to those in a particular situation, however. Thus, many descriptions of the events that lead to a group committing a crime contained a long cast of characters who did not end up participating in the crime. They made choices that got them out escalating criminal situations early. Nevertheless, offenders were aware of these people as part of the situation that led to their crime. They were nearby and sometimes even participated in the conversations and interaction that resulted in crime. Sometimes they were full participants in the planning of a crime, although usually they were not.

If people that had some knowledge or suspicion of criminal activity and did nothing to stop it were included in the count of participants in a crime group, the average

number of people in crime groups might be much larger than two. Many crime groups are born of larger gatherings and return to them after completing their crime. In a deliberative burglary described to me, the burglars decided that some people should stay behind because they were too drunk to make it to the car, for example. In other crimes, people were left behind only because in the vehicle taking the group to the crime site no room was available. An offender who was new to armed robbery explains how he came to commit a crime with an experienced offender by leaving a large party with him.

We came from my house. We were real high - drinking and drugging. There was a lot of people. I was even married. I was married and I had a son and a daughter, they was both there. My brother in-law and my charge partner's brother . . . and then he set it out and told us all how to do it. We were all sitting there and he was telling us about robberies and whatever, how to do it. I don't know how he chose me. I was easy to convince. If I had said no and everybody else had said no I don't know what would have come of it (Respondent 10).

Some people manage to avoid participation in crimes even when they are proximate and friendly with offenders. Others jump into any scheme that presents itself. Still, others are reluctant but ultimately participate in crimes and crime groups. Participants are evaluated and selected for crime by groups, while others strategically distance themselves from criminal activity. Joining a crime group results from selection by the group and the individual choice to join them.

Those who would not be desirable to bring along are excluded from crime groups early. These include those who do not want to share in the proceeds or party provided by crime. A group that is planning to commit a crime or engaging in other risky activity will

often take measures to exclude those thought to contribute nothing but the risk of disloyalty. A student respondent explains his group's decision to delay planning of a burglary that they eventually committed, "we didn't talk about it then, because Joey was in the room and we knew that it would not be cool to talk about it around him" (Student Respondent).

Recruiting decisions are based on offenders' rapidly formulated calculations of who can and cannot handle situations that a group might encounter before and during crime. In deciding this, offenders draw on past events and knowledge of others' behavior and on their observations of the current situation. Those whom they believe cannot hang in other consequential situations are excluded from the activities that eventuate in crime. Crime partners are more likely to be selected from street fighters, petty thieves, drug dealers and hard partiers than from conventional friends or workmates. Those who clearly can handle or have no fear of risky situations, are often sought out actively.

Direct propositions to crime partners are not made indiscriminately. Partners are solicited from among those whom it is suspected will be willing to come along. In some crowds, it is considered safe to float a criminal idea to a room full of people and see if anyone is interested. I asked a burglar, who kept up associations with a small network of small-time thieves, what happened when he was motivated and his regular partners were not. He replied,

I never ran into that problem. It's kinda like the more you get the more you want, so pretty much everybody was. If they were asked, they were ready to go. You know cause it's like they have hit a lick at one time or another and

they know that the potential is there to make pretty good money (Respondent 13).

In groups that have stolen together before, inviting people who already know of the group's history and have so far proven trustworthy adds security. A robber explains why he was recruited into an active gang of armed robbers.

I don't know who else they would have asked. I was around and getting high and stuff anyway, me and the juvenile, we were always partying together . . . we would just sit up and do cocaine and watch movies, that was about it back then . . . I knowed the way they were . . . They would go out and steal stuff all the time and break into cars, and the juvenile and the one that I don't like now, they would go out and break into cars and houses and stuff like that. So, you know it really didn't surprise me that they would pull an armed robbery. I knew about it because they would tell me or I would see them bring hot radios in there or something, or a box or something and they would put it in my car. I would carry them around and take them to sell stuff to friends. Swap for drugs, stuff like that (Respondent 18).

A history of shared secrets like those above increases the chances of recruitment, but other relationships with recruiters decrease the chances of criminal invitations. Women, especially loved ones, often fall immediately in the category excluded from crime. Of the 50 men that I interviewed, only 9 of the last crimes that they committed were done with a woman. In all but one of these, there were multiple men. No groups had more than one woman, although in one case multiple women did flee with the offenders. Women never outnumbered men.

Women are sometimes excluded from burgeoning crime groups because others in the group want to protect them. In a string of armed robberies, one thief took careful

precautions to hide information from his wife about crimes committed with her siblings to make sure that she faced no threat of conviction and to make sure that she did not feel tempted to come along. They planned the crimes without her knowledge in the family's living room.

There wasn't no way that they [the police] was going to get my wife placing her in anything. Matter of fact they questioned her that night and she didn't know anything. I never told her nothing. She never seen all the cash at once. She would go to work and I was just piddling. That's everything I did to make sure she was safe . . . the night we got caught I had told her that we were out to look at a car that I was going to fix up (Respondent 2).

Other people are savvy enough to distance themselves from groups of people that are talking about or might end up committing a burglary or robbery. They do not quickly volunteer to fill cars going to poorly designed crimes and they walk away when they see the makings of spontaneous crimes. An inexperienced burglar, who had a continuous party going on at his home, explained that his crime partners were self-selected from a larger crowd because they spoke up, were motivated and were quickly ready to go. The burglary appeared to be a low risk and potentially high paying crime. The most motivated to join the group also were the closest friends of the woman who described the promising target, her parents' home, to her accomplices. One man rode along because he was an out of town visitor to the apartment and everyone he knew was going. His criminal decision was as casual as choosing between an apartment full of strangers and a few old friends and fast dollars. Both what is needed and who has the closest relationship with the offending group are recruiting considerations. In this case, an especially enthusiastic and

encouraging recruit was the "full-time" thief who was present.

When the whole idea came up there was more people around . . . Yeah, yeah there was quite a few of us there that day as I remember. Like I said this wasn't a professional type of thing . . . [it ended up being us four] because of their attitudes and desire for money. Stan needed money to fix his car to get out of town and Nate was just like that. Nate would have been up for just any old burglary. He would have done it no matter what, and I needed money for rent and Sheila needed money for rent too. Just life in general (Respondent 28).

Many witness the planning stages of deliberative crimes and the post-crime ostentatious displays of what obviously are the rewards of crime. But, most witnesses stay on the fringes of the crime group. They are not invited to participate or they duck out when they have a chance. That they are only mentioned in passing demonstrates that they enter only the periphery of the deliberating thief's perceptual field. He looks right past them for those who are willing to help in a crime. Those who have made small contributions but do not come along are largely forgotten when he gets caught or gets away. They enter the thief's calculations only as an audience for his displays of daring and criminal willingness. One robber who had of late been very criminally active described the scene that lead to his last crime.

I didn't know that guy. I knowed the two guys that I was running around with. And we all hung out down there at the gas station. And one thing led to another, and everybody got to talking about robbing and stealing and stuff like that. Which the other guys knowed that I was pretty well off into criminal activities. And so maybe one thing led to another and I was just cutting up with the dude. Then he got serious about it and I said, 'well hell if you're serious let's go for it' (Respondent 30).

When I learned that this crime group had begun with four men joking about a robbery, I wondered why only two who did not know each other well carried it out. His explanation was simple. Some people simply do not show up to commit a planned crime. He explains how he and his partner, a gas station attendant, convened at a prearranged place to rob the attendant's boss only to find that their conspirators backed out: "the other guys they backed out. Didn't show. Just me and the guy that worked at the station, we carried out the plan" (Respondent 30).

Sometimes a stealing group would break off from a larger party because the thieves in the room had become fast friends during past criminal exploits. The stealing groups might meet and party with a larger crowd but their common interest and shared experiences made crime a potential outcome whenever they were together. As the thief quoted above said of his network of about eight to ten partners,

We went out and did things. We might go to an amusement park. We might work on a car together. We might go to somebody's house together. We did a lot of different things together. But, once we made that bond of the criminal life together, we did different things together. In the beginning, the two guys that I started out with [and later got caught with] we were friends and I knew what they did [stole] and it wasn't my business and I didn't care. Then we got off in it together. At first we only did crime together, but then we got to doing other things, blowing money. It was like a bond that happened (Respondent 13).

Some individuals that others do not wish to force into crime are given chances to back out, but do not take them when they realize that everyone else is willing to participate. A weekend visitor to a couple that planned an armed robbery was given every

chance to back out by his friends. While his young friend and his friend's new wife were out stealing, this young man surely would have felt meek staying at their home and drinking alone. The new recruit into the robbery plan had contributed to the last minute planning of the crime but did not plan on riding along until the couple was leaving. When they got to the store, they decided that the new recruit should go in since no one in town knew him and because he did not know the roads well enough to drive.

See, we had already figured it out. [We knew] where the cameras were and didn't look at them and we told him about it. But, he wasn't going to go. He was like 'well I am staying at home', but then he changed his mind. He got drunk right before we went and so it was him who walked in front of a camera . . . We didn't really ever ask him, told him he could stay home if he wanted, but he just volunteered (Respondent 26).

A self described "speed-freak" whose addiction had reached the point of delusion and long periods without sleep observed that he repeatedly found himself with others living at least temporarily like him. They had not yet committed a crime together, but he recognized that his newfound comrades were likely candidates.

We were at a party and everyone else goes to bed. They go to sleep. We just sitting around doing nothing. Now, when you have got a bunch of krank heads sitting around at four in the morning with nothing to do, they are scheming. There is nothing else to do but scheme (Respondent 50).

As people progress toward committing a crime with others, they find that their options narrow and that they are increasingly in the company of those who are criminally motivated or willing to explore criminal opportunities. Thus, crime groups are often made

up of those who either are or are thought to be most willing to participate in a crime. The composition of a group influences whether or not it will make the choice to commit a crime, but once it is on a criminal path its emerging choices also shape its composition. People who have less motivation and are more hesitant about committing crime fall away. As the group composition changes, the group becomes more willing to do crime.

JOINING IN: NEW AND ESTABLISHED GROUPS

Joining a crime group happens in several ways. The way that a person comes to commit a crime with a group tells much about their role in the crime. Sometimes all participants join a crime group nearly simultaneously. No one in the group has offended recently with another participant. Everyone seemingly starts their course toward a crime together. Often new groups are formed when offenders know that everyone else is stealing or is willing to steal, and they decide to collaborate on a theft. Alternatively, when individuals form a new crime group spontaneously it is often because they see a criminal opportunity and multiple people decide to take it. Newly formed crime groups may be spontaneous or deliberative. Participants in new crime groups are more unsure of their partners and are more likely to waver before they finally commit to crime. They often play at crime or take turns making moves toward crime, before someone finally commits the group to criminal action.

Many subjects joined preexisting or established crime groups. This pattern occurs when some participants in a crime have committed crimes together in the past, but recruit or bring along someone who was absent on earlier crimes. Recruiters to existing groups

usually have a specific target or type of crime already in mind and think that a new partner would be helpful. Late joiners have often been active with other crime groups, but this established group is new to them. They are seldom informed completely about the group's history of offending nor, to the extent that any exists, its plans. Their criminal calculations are based on different information than those with experience stealing together. They are sometimes kept in the dark about important details of the crime they are committing. Some recruiters do not mention to new partners that they worked with or know victims of a planned crime, leaving their partners to wonder upon arrest how their group had become immediate suspects. When the group is arrested, they often discover that their partners have committed many crimes previous to their participation and it is impossible for them to prove that they had no part in these. Some are also surprised when they leave a group and it continues to commit a string of crimes that leads to the arrest of everyone who has participated in the group's earlier crimes. Most offenders, especially new recruits to crime groups, mistakenly assume that if they are caught they will face only a single charge.

New recruits often are surprised by other participants' single-mindedness and at how quickly targets are chosen and a crime is committed. They may realize only in retrospect that elements of their crime had been planned or that others in their group seemed to know more about what was going on than they did. They are not aware that the group already had everything worked out before they joined or got in the car. They participate only in the last choices that contributed to a crime. Existing crime groups arrive at criminal decisions more rapidly than new groups. Jobs assigned to new

participants are usually at the periphery of a crime. New recruits often are sold on the appeal of profit with minimal involvement. If they are more suitable for dangerous jobs than others already in the group, new participants may be moved straight to the front. Two robbers that joined existing dyads with women getaway drivers did not take over the job of wheel-man, but were promoted to stickup man immediately.

At other times, new participants in an existing criminal group understand more of what is going on, but are impressed by their partners' confidence built through experience together. To new recruits it seems that crime is easy and routine for established participants. A burglar who went on to do many crimes explains his initiation into criminal opportunity with his group.

On that first one, they had me pull up to a construction supply house. They went over through a fence and loaded up some ladders and I think a torch, some construction equipment. They walked out with them. I was astounded. It was broad daylight (Respondent 43).

Founding participants keep their hesitations from newer partners. Preexisting deliberative crime groups are more likely to have short deliberations that are primarily done while looking for a target. The playful back-and-forth and successive challenges that lead to criminal decisions in new groups are less apparent here. Established groups arrive at the task by a more direct route. New partners generally have less influence on the group's choices than those who have done crime together previously.

In some cases, a criminal plan exists but no previous joint criminal activity when latecomers are recruited. Still, there is a difference in early and late participants'

decisions. A young burglar tells how he and his partners kicked off a long string of burglaries by debating extensively whether they should do it. They then picked up some younger boys who they thought gladly would go with them. By the time these latter participants joined the group, deliberation was over. This account suggests that latecomers' dearth of knowledge provides less power over group decisions.

He had been aggravating me about it for six months wanting me to go with him. Let's get a store. Let's break into a store and lets break into a house and what not. I never did go along with him. I guess he continued to talk for five or six months, something like that . . . They were for it right off. They may have already knew, I don't know if he talked to them previous to it. I don't know. They never mentioned nothing about it. I don't believe they had. I had never heard anything about it, if they had . . . We asked them to go riding around from the pool hall and we just went in there and asked them to go get something to eat. Then we went and ate and started talking to them. Then we went and looked at some places and we just went and did it (Respondent 35).

Offenders often bring late partners in on a crime only because they happen to be partying with them or because they are friends. One robber talking about a burglary earlier in his career explained that he discovered an opportunity that was both too good to pass up and too good to keep to himself. He went and recruited two friends to do them a favor: "one of them was staying at my house. I figured what the hell. I'll tell them. They a good friend of mine, there's plenty and they might as well get some too cause I ain't a mean person" (Respondent 27). Other offenders, especially those with experience, saw the presentation of criminal opportunities to others as doing impressive favors for partying friends. As a habitual offender explained his reason for taking on a young partner, "I thought, he's young but why not give the kid a chance" (Respondent 5).

Opportunities are presented to those thought to have what it takes to commit crime. One career offender explained that his life of crime began at a young age when newfound friends recruited him into a car theft ring. His story of his first serious crime shows how even in juvenile crime, partners sometimes are recruited into existing groups on the basis of their presumed or proven abilities and resources. It also shows that in action seeking places where poor young men are congregated, promising criminal potential may be noticed and utilized.

We was sitting in this field and getting high. Smoked a couple of joints and we was riding dirt bikes in this big old field. Jerry says man I know where there is a big 550 and its water cooled and that thing is smoking. We walked down Richie Street and we saw that big old yellow 550 and it was a nice motorcycle. We was riding old junkers. We went back to these people's house and I am sort of getting off on this, I am getting ready to steal this motorcycle . . . I started getting a little antsy and then I put my foot on the peg and rode it off down the hill. You know, that big old motorcycle, man, and I had got away with it. I hit Jerry and we go up through the field and there's a couple of older guys up there. They were huffing paint. And Jerry starts huffing paint with them. He's eating candy and he starts tripping and gagging hisself. He thinks he has swallowed a tooth. That's how hard he's tripping. He gets on that motorcycle and he takes it back. He's about to get busted. He pulled that sucker up right in the driveway like he owned the place. I grabbed a hold of him and pulled his ass out of there and here we go again on this motorcycle. I stole it twice. The next day this guy that was down there, he comes up to me and he says 'hey man, I know where to get a car'. I said, 'can you sell it?' He says, 'yeah'. 'Well, show me where it's at.' He was up there sniffing paint with us and he knew that I would steal anything. We went out and got the car and he took it and sold it and [laughs] ever since then you know it's been down hill (Respondent 16).

PLURALISTIC IGNORANCE

In a section of *Delinquency and Drift* called the *Situation of Company*, Matza (1967) speaks of the inference of a delinquent subculture among juvenile offenders. They

refer to this subculture to define situations as criminal. When the situation seems like those they associate with crime, potential offenders draw from recipe behaviors of how to act criminally. Matza contends that inferences of appropriate scripted behaviors are often off the mark. A delinquent in a criminal group usually believes that everyone else is fully if temporarily committed to a delinquent way of seeing the world and acting when they are not. The assessment that sees crime as appropriate action is often mistaken.

In Matza's (1967) view, most offenders are not committed to crime or a criminal subculture. They do not consciously choose a criminal life, but only give off the impression that they are criminal and similarly misunderstand the impression that others provide. This mutual mistake where everyone believes that their own definition of a situation is constrained by another's adherence to criminal recipes of behavior ensures that the group's shared view of its situation is criminal. Pluralistic ignorance, is the mistaken belief that others are committed to delinquent activities and looking at the world through criminal lenses. Very few offenders adapt a stable criminal identity, but many will play along with others who they think are firmly committed to crime. Matza contends that,

in the majority of cases, pairs of delinquents discover one after the other that they had shared misunderstandings. They had not really been committed to delinquency - it was fun and each thought that the other demanded it, but they had never really believed in it . . . A very small proportion may discover that they are in fact committed to their misdeeds. They decide to be criminals. A larger proportion never publicly evaluate delinquency and continue through their adult life guided by their misconception of the subculture deriving from the system of shared misunderstandings. Each is privately uncommitted but publicly a receiver and transmitter of miscues suggesting commitment (1967:54).

EMERGENT NORMS: MAKING A COMMON DEFINITION

Matza's pluralistic ignorance perspective meshes well with the emergent norm perspective of collective behavior (Turner and Killian 1987). It too argues that groups or crowds come to conclusions and act because of participants' shared perceptions, intentions and decisive actions. It also infers that these collective behaviors are not always the result of reasoned actions to achieve an end. They result from the necessities of making inferences and coming to conclusions in situations not conducive to careful consideration of every person's opinion and decision preference. The emergent norm perspective goes into greater detail about the types of situations that lead to individuals adapting a shared group perspective and more detail about the interactional patterns and individual moves that lead them to do so.

The perspective is intended to explain crowd collective behavior, but many of its tenets are applicable to smaller groups. Collective behavior is defined as, "forms of social behavior wherein multiple people have a shared objective and object of attention that are not defined in advance and where there are not formal procedures for reaching decisions" (Turner and Killian 1987:4). Collective behavior is the outcome of a crowd's struggle to interpret an unfamiliar situation and find a consensus for behavior. The social order contains socially communicated and learned solutions that are built in and easily applied to most problems. When unfamiliar problems arise, groups may redefine the normative order. Through communication with others using simple verbal messages and symbols, groups come to a consensus that something should be done to resolve the unusual problem before them. Different actors in a group suggest different approaches to solving

the collective dilemma, giving different prescriptions for “what is going on and what is to be done” (1987: 21). The emergent norm perspective emphasizes that motivations for participating in a collective event are diverse.

Exploratory verbal behavior that results in a common solution is called keynoting. Keynoting involves “the presentation of positive suggestions in an ambivalent [cf. uncertain] frame of reference” (1987:85). Turner and Killian reason that:

When an unusual, difficult-to-assimilate event occurs . . . individuals entertain a variety of interpretations of the event. They may engage in a brief period of covert restructuring activity, turning over in their minds various possible explanations of what the situation is and what action may be appropriate. A gesture or symbolic utterance made to such an audience may be characterized as a *keynote*. If it embodies one of the competing images held by members of the crowd, it encourages those members to express themselves. The keynote and these supporting expressions shift the balance in support of the keynoted image (1987:59).

Some people faced with dilemmas will not know what to do or say and so stay silent and others “tersely and forcibly” make proposals and keynotes. The latter have more influence over a group. In lynch mobs, few people make gestures as dramatic or influential as the person who pulls out a rope, but the gesture would not resonate if others in the crowd were not prepared to make violent sense of it. As Turner and Killian note, “[p]reexisting latent tendencies, common to many members of a crowd facilitate the development of a common mood and imagery” (1987: 26). For keynotes to become action they must be consistent with the emergent mood and imagery of at least some influential participants in the crowd. Several keynotes might be advanced, but only some will have a special

resonance with a significant contingent of the group.

As some participants accept a proposal and make their acceptance known, this sways those who have remained neutral toward a keynoted proposal. Salient keynotes crush dissenting opinions with greater ease as more people accept and enact them. Conflicting conceptions fall by the wayside. Options are forgotten and lines of action closed as the situation develops. Reconstructed definitions of reality and new definitions of the situation, are called emergent norms. Committed groups that have developed them no longer mill around without a purpose. Their new line of action is established when a keynote takes hold with some participants in crowd and they align their actions toward that end.

An extraordinary event provides a space in which a collection of people with diverse interests in that event interact and decide what to do. Some are passive observers and others actively exploit the situation. The keynoting process is set off by some types of people for some reasons and complemented by acceptance of others who may be acting for different reasons (McPhail 1991). Individual motives are still important and do not necessarily become unified with an emergent norm. In other words, the definition of the situation is both constraining and permissive; latitude exists for a wide range of behavior consistent with the definition of the situation and a wide range of motives (Turner and Killian 1987:33).

The setting is used to help narrow participants' search for comprehension and select situationally important factors. Multiple devices are always available for categorizing people and his or her actions. The search for the appropriate categorization

device is situational and tends to be a characteristic that can be projected on all the present persons and actions and that makes sense in the current dilemma (Heise 1979).

Categorization devices are tested by observing the actions of those present and by making inquiries or suggestions to see how others respond. People looking for solutions to their current situation evaluate the people with them and what they have in common to predict the likely course of action.

CRIME AS AN EMERGENT NORM

It is debatable whether crime groups are instances of collective behavior, but they share enough characteristics with them to merit comparison. Although Turner and Killian's project was to develop a model of collective behavior for the large spontaneously formed crowd, the characteristics that they contend start the keynoting process are present in many informal small groups including crime groups. Three types of questions initiate and feed the keynoting process. First, actors are concerned with resolving uncertainty about what is happening, has happened and is going to happen. Their efforts at comprehension begin individual and group attempts to define a situation. Second, their assessments are constrained by the shared perception that something should be done immediately. Ambiguous situations are vacuums waiting to be filled by decisive action. When group participants are not only uncertain about what is to be done, but about who is to do what, the negotiation of a definition becomes urgent. Finally, people who are present when an ambiguous situation presents itself develop concerns about leadership. They want to know who is going to act first and whose lead to follow. Everyone knows

that they need a leader but no formal and quick mechanism for choosing one or deciding what they should do exists. The heightened awareness and perception of consequence in a situation create a demand for answers to these shared questions and make it ripe for keynoting.

Situations immediately before crime are ripe for keynoting. Criminal situations are ambiguous, especially for those with little experience in crime. Many subjects reported that a great deal of uncertainty about how the crime they committed would unfold was present at the outset. Others claimed not to know that their group would commit a crime until it did. More common was the claim that people in the group knew or suspected that something illegal was going to happen or that there was a strong potential for it, but were unsure exactly what it would be. In addition, confusion about what others are doing surrounds many criminal decisions and it is considered bad form to hesitate and ask for clarification. Many offenders reportedly were surprised to find themselves at a decisive point where crime or law abidance had to be chosen quickly. In retrospect, they say that they should have known from clues in their environment that such a decision might realistically arise. Others place themselves intentionally on a path that is designed to eventuate in crime, but still are surprised when they get to the scene of a crime and it comes off. They structured their group's decision from the outset, but improvisation, lack of structure and imperfect knowledge allows them to hold out the possibility that a crime will not happen. They are ready to commit a crime in theory or have expressed readiness. However, they have only the loosest notion of what to do or expect because crimes are difficult to manage and people behave unpredictably in them. To many offenders in

groups, crime gives the impression at the time of the offense that it came on suddenly.

Some confusion or ambiguity may arise from differential ignorance of the situation among participants. Some people define a situation as criminal before others. Criminal events usually seem unfamiliar, ambiguous and difficult to assimilate even among repeat offenders. Few people become completely accustomed to serious crimes that have potentially severe consequences and that contain many variables beyond their control. Offenders must ask, often with little communication between parties, if a situation is what they think it is, if their associates are in agreement and what they and others are going to do if things go well or if things go awry. Once a definition of the situation is established, there still is much confusion about who is to do what.

Urgency precedes criminal events also. One source of this urgency is a sudden change in the group's or some of its members financial situation or the realization that they have parted their money away and cannot carry on without more. Offenders often are 'pumped up' on drugs and adrenalin before they do a property crime. A need or desire for drugs provides further impetus and sense of urgency to some crime groups. As one burglar said of the crack cocaine that motivated his crime, "[I]t's powerful. It's got that effect. You got to have more and you don't care how you get it" (Respondent 31). Urgency also derives from recognition of criminal opportunity and from arousal brought on by dangerous situations. It comes from the perception in criminal groups that the situation is right and the desire of some offenders to get crime behind them. Once a criminal definition begins to arise, someone must do something or the group will suffer a severe let down in the action and momentum that has sometimes been building for hours.

When hiding at a lookout with hearts pounding, turning back, getting in the car and going home seems untenable. One middle-aged experienced thief told the story of how his partner's urgency to commit a crime outweighed his better judgement. He went to extreme lengths to convince his agitated and motivated partner that his plans were ill-conceived. After committing one successful robbery together that everyone agreed was promising his partner did not want to stop. This group canceled two robberies before they robbed a convenience store because their overzealous partner pulled his gun while inside despite his accomplices' protests.

He told me about the first plan and he got me across the state line before he told me about the second plan . . . I just knew that I was out of state and that I wanted to get back in state to be clear of whatever it was he had planned. I have dealt with them all my life, and I ain't robbing no dope dealer with a gun. I am not robbing him of his dope or his money. It's way too dangerous . . . I got a cousin that went out of town to make a drug deal and ripped them off and got a carload full of bullets . . . The point is I wouldn't rob no dope dealer. I threatened him with my gun, and he finally turned around and listened. Well, we pull up to the hotel and me and him get out and he is in front of me and he is itchy and I am noticing how itchy he is. And I am standing behind him and I said, 'no'! And he says, 'yeah man them's old people.' I said, 'no'! I know where he carries his gun and when I see him go for where he carries his gun I just pulled out my gun and stuck it in his ribs. I said, 'I'll put one through you right now.' By the time the old lady walked to the door I asked how low is the rates and I said, 'I saw some lower up the road'. So I got in the truck and we rode on . . . I finally convinced him and we headed back to where we was from. On the way back, I said, 'we need to stop and get some Mountain Dew and some beer.' So we pulled in and I walked in first . . . I see him reaching for his gun behind his back. I knew what he was doing . . . He robbed them and we got in truck together . . . I was on the camera and I knew it. I have tried to explain it a lot these seven years and it comes down to this. The guy is a idiot, point blank (Respondent 32).

The immediate safety of the criminal group requires that offenders be aware of and

watch out for each other. When someone makes a positive move toward crime, it is likely that others in their group will follow suit. Individual participants in group crimes know that criminal situations are as much in their partners' hands as their own and that everyone must escape for anyone to escape. As many situational cues are taken from those within a criminal group as from victims or bystanders.

Crime temporarily unifies a group and typically offenders adapt their behavior and preferences to suit those of their partners once a crime begins. Criminal events are no time for disagreements or critique. Some offenders reported having serious differences with their partners over their actions and plans before and after crimes, but usually differences of opinion that occur once a crime is being committed are not discussed during crime. Robbers who reported that they disagreed with their partners' treatment of victims or with their partners' sudden choice of a target usually did not disagree at the time, but some voiced their disapproval later.

Criminal group participants like others in ambiguous situations typically respond uncritically to suggestions suiting the common mood and imagery (Heise 1979; McPhail 1987: 78). Interactions in deliberating crime groups usually go smoothly. Participants in crime often described this agreeable interaction as a process where after an initial suggestion, "one thing lead to another until there we was" (Respondent 35). That many criminal groups are already looking for something to do and loosely think that crime is a possibility before the keynote suggestion is clear. A previously convicted burglar emphasized the point, "I was working at McDonald's and I was needing money and was contemplating doing something anyway when he told me this idea" (Respondent 16).

When keynotes influence a group's behavior, it is precisely because they sound promising to at least some of those present. Those who make the initial proposal may be only half-serious, but are enabled when others show that they too are looking toward crime. Wade (1990) noticed that exploratory gestures in opportunistic settings could quickly turn milling teenage groups toward group vandalism. A drug dealer I interviewed reported that his recent successful theft of the proceeds from his court-mandated driving class motivated him to begin looking for a new kind of criminal opportunity and crime partners. The next week he easily recruited burglary partners with an exploratory proposal. This small time drug ring rapidly and without debate began to make playful preparations for their crime.

It wasn't much of a conversation. I brought it up and then they were like 'o.k., that sounds cool.' I said, 'well, let's do what we got to do here and then go ahead and go.' Then we went and got all dressed up and left. Camouflage and stuff. And coats, just dark clothes. We thought if we had to run we could hide in the bushes (Respondent 21).

Another burglar reports the resonance that a suggestion to break into houseboats and steal liquor and recreational equipment had for him and another drunken friend spending a day at the lake. He believes, with little evidence to substantiate, that the friend making the proposal had committed similar crimes many times before. Despite the potential consequences of the burglary for this offender, who was on intensive probation for carrying a pistol to a fight on a school campus, the event seemed to flow smoothly and make sense at the time. The thought that he could go to prison for "being dumb and

young” did not enter his calculations. The burglar recalls, “he just said, ‘lets go for a swim.’ We went for a swim and that’s where we ended up and we pulled up on that dock. He said, ‘lets see what we can get into’” (Respondent 39).

In crime, keynoting is often gestural. Without talk, definitive action sets the scene and the group’s agenda. When everyone thinks a crime may happen or a group is flirting with the possibility of crime, it only takes a single decisive move to throw the group into crime and define the situation immediately and clearly to all present. One person’s decisive move makes a crime and constrains the reasonable moves available to others. The burglar who ended a multi day cocaine snorting marathon by breaking into numerous storage units explains that a simple gesture let him and his other partner know that a crime was under way. Once a lock was broken, everyone present defined the situation criminally.

PI: It sounds to me like there had to be some planning. I mean you burglarized twenty-something places. You had guns out.

R24: Man, no. None. There was no planning. The bolt cutters were there to break in my storage unit and the shot-gun was inside. It was more or less Jay cut a lock and we all started. There was no intention out there. We got everybody’s shit but mine, which is what we went there to get and we ended up leaving. My shit stayed there.

A robber explains that a definitive move became necessary for him when a criminal group appeared to be wavering. In need of more drugs and desiring to go through with a crime, there came a point when he simply could no longer tolerate their hesitancy and weakness. Having already learned much at a young age from two prison sentences, he knew that they

wanted to commit crime and was tiring of their talk and inability to do it.

They were talking about robbing a place and we were high on crack. We wanted another rock. We pulled into a couple of places and nobody would do it. It was driving me crazy. I can't take that. They were finding every little thing that could go wrong. I finally said, 'alright by god pull in the next place you see.' I went in and said, 'I have a gun' and robbed it (Respondent 41).

A student whose car theft turned into a car-jacking remembered that his groups' criminal intentions were immediately transformed into a more serious crime when the victim of the theft approached them. The group's successive decisions and circumstances had made its choices few and unappealing. They could give in to their angered victim and face car-theft charges, flee on foot, or they could overcome their victim and flee in an automobile. A few quick moves told everyone what the decision would be.

The keys are on the seat and I told my friends. As I start to turn around to walk the rest of the way to the tracks, I hear a crash. Carlos and Derek broke the window with an old bicycle tire that was on the ground. I said, 'what did you do'? Now the alarm is blaring and people were starting to look as they walked by a half block away. I jumped in the driver's seat after reaching in the window and opening the door. I just wanted to turn off the alarm and get out. There was no little box on the keys, it was probably with the owner. I reached under the steering wheel and ripped off the sensor box. There were no precautions to protect the car. As I was sitting my friends start yelling for me to run. Just as I looked back at them, I saw a man running at the car. He was a little dork that must have been the owner. I started the car with the keys that were now on the dash. [I] threw, the beer out of my pockets. Derek pushed the guy down, with a punch. They jumped in and we took off. We were all scared as shit. The only thing keeping us from ditching the car was the rush. We ripped off about 15 blocks and were out of there (Student Respondent).

SUCCESSIVE DECISIONS

Crime comes on suddenly, but the events that are retrospectively interpreted as leading to the decision to commit crime do not happen in an instant even in spontaneous crimes. Crime is portrayed as the culmination of a string of successive decisions and events. This is perhaps more true of group crime where interaction and communication between participants often precede the final decision to break the law. Groups work their way up to committing a crime. They may begin their evening partying, sometimes with known thieves. Would-be offenders get themselves into situations where the rewards of crime seem particularly attractive. They run out of money. They travel to places where crimes are likely to occur. They do not leave crime groups as hints to the course of events are dropped, and they sometimes actively engage in criminal planning and posturing.

In some spontaneous crimes, offenders remember that the possibility of crime was in the air before anyone acted. Successive decisions that can lead to crime are so patterned that few participants try to deny that they had suspicions that their group might commit a crime, although the severity and stupidity of the crime selected often are surprises. Others note that they missed important cues but should have known what their partners had planned from the beginning. This latter group locates their mistake in their willingness to abide by the decisions that were taking their group down a criminal course. By the time the critical decision came, they were too involved to turn back.

Offenders might stumble through successive decisions with their groups without criminal intention. As they approach crime, one person in the group tests his mates by taking another step closer to crime and someone else responds by taking up the challenge.

Initial steps might be as banal as getting in a car stoned on drugs and heading out of town with little money or idea where to go. Closer to the crime, one person loosely suggests a target and another approaches the person or place still not knowing what they will do when they get there. A robber who participated in a mugging reported that he approached his victim first, but did not know that his co-offender was going to attack. He admits that he had seen similar scenarios develop into robberies and had participated in them in the past. He drew from this stock knowledge to interpret the actions of the victim and his partner. He had no qualms about jumping in on the robbery once it was initiated by another.

PI: What did you walk up to the guy for?

R27: I was just going to borrow a cigarette. I don't know. I might have kicked him in the ass or something. Might told him to go on and get out of there. I don't know.

Steps in the direction of crime are usually not completely improvisational and unstructured. Many offenders have been through them before. Some offenders intentionally push their groups through early successive decisions that lead toward crime. They may go through the motions that lead a group to a criminal scene as if it happened by accident when they have had a crime in mind for some time. Some were contemplating a theft before this particular group assembled, but were waiting for the right time and the right situation. Experienced thieves report that they keep a store of potential targets on mental file until they need them (MacGuire 1982; Wright and Decker 1994; 1995; 1997)

They may not bring up the topic of theft until they are in company that is drunk and broke. When they see that they are with willing or motivated others and clues are given that they need not fear snitches, they offer a plan.

SPREE

A *spree* is usually defined as period of uninhibited activity. I use *spree* to mean repeated property crimes committed with the same group without long breaks between them.

Examining only re-offending groups provides some insight into property crime groups, generally. Sprees may last minutes or months. Over half (33) of the groups represented in my interviews had committed one or more previous burglaries or robberies with at least one other participant in their group before their last crime. Five of these did all of their stealing on a single day. Groups that offended together multiple times usually specialized in either robbery or burglary. Some offenders reported that they had done both crimes and some were active robbers and burglars at the time of their last offense. They kept up criminal associations with both robbery crews and burglary crews. Multiple participants in a few groups had done both robberies and burglaries together, but no entire group did both robbery and burglary. This may be attributed to both turnover of group participants and crime group specialization. Many offenders also shared histories of lesser property crimes with others in their group, like stealing radios or trading in stolen credit cards together.

Interviewees report consistently that groups that offend together repeatedly quickly develop a *modus operandi*. They choose the same types of targets whether

people, stores, or houses and they keep the same jobs from crime to crime. Only 22 percent of 113 robbers interviewed by Feeney (1985) considered doing another crime in place of robbery. Several interviewed offenders remembered that the same person in their group usually drove, opened doors, or beat alarms in every crime they committed. Typically, when persistent criminal groups find something that works they stick to it. One experienced and skilled burglar said that he attempted to train his co-offenders in the method of disarming jewelry store alarms, but they were not interested in learning and preferred that he do the job. He believed that while they had him available to do jewelry stores and a regular income from house burglaries on the side, they did not need to expand their skills for future robberies. When his family members and accomplices discovered the rewards of stealing from jewelry stores and businesses rather than residences, they came to get the experienced offender more often than he would have liked (Respondent 8). His skills had become part of the method of this group. A robber convicted of 10 robberies in a short period of time reported that his regular job was the automobile driver. His partners encouraged him to go inside only twice so that he would know what it was like, but he always returned to the position as wheel-man where he was comfortable and had enjoyed some success. (Respondent 18).

Once a group has stolen together and escaped, it begins to define itself as a crime group. The next time the group gets together, crime comes to mind quickly. Several offenders reported that after stealing together once, their group focused its interest on crime and committed crime every time it was together thereafter. Although their first crime may have been opportunistic, the simple assembly of the group came to be seen as

criminal opportunity in later crimes. As groups progress through multiple thefts, there also is more equality in planning in a group. Everyone becomes a willing and capable thief in the eyes of partners. Established groups need not assess whether the group can commit crime and in their decision-making they usually proceed immediately to measuring their ability to commit a particular crime. Groups where participants have considerable criminal experience may behave similarly even if they have not yet done crime together. If an experienced thief expresses his interest in "doing something" to another who has hinted at interest, then the group may quickly take on the character of an established crime group. Neither offender shows hesitation.

Offenders also gain confidence in their group with each theft done together. Many noted that they realized that their group was capable of theft. Most reported that they believed their group was getting better with each theft. A conversation held by a burglary group after their first successful crime is telling. "We sat and joked about it. We was talking about how easy it was. 'Hey, we can do this every day'" (Respondent 36). Another reports that after stealing together for some time, "the way we looked at it, it was just a game and we would get out and run. Never did think we would get caught" (Respondent 35). One burglar who was stealing at various times with different offenders drawn from a pool of about 10 accomplices that he believes rarely stole with anyone outside this network stated that over time the group's confidence became so strong that even threats from the police did not deter them. This group believed that if it could hold up under the pressure of interrogation then it was near invincible. Their confidence proved to be misplaced when his disgruntled girlfriend arrested on stolen property charges

informed. The burglar recalls his group's arrogance, "[t]hey held us for 72 hours and let us go. That didn't end it. That just made us feel like we were that much slicker. Cause we had fooled the police. I mean they had us and we had fooled them again"

(Respondent 13).

Crime groups also build contacts for disposing of goods and other resources over time. Improved connections made through repeated thefts also are reason to continue. One participant in a crew of young burglars reported that he and his partners had developed a "wish list" of friends who wanted specific stolen items. Of course, thieves' parties also become more expensive with access to stolen money and this also is incentive to keep stealing.

The amounts of drugs and money required by many crime groups lead them to offend repeatedly. Several impoverished heavy drug users and drinkers can go through amazing amounts of stolen money. Several groups hit more than one target on their last crime because they needed larger amounts of cash than they acquired in a single theft. The need for rewards and the realization that the group could get them motivated these short sprees. One offender reported that he and his partners planned a burglary but did another unplanned crime after the first one was a "bum run" (Respondent 13). The crime provided nowhere near enough money for three people. In another crime, an unexpected and unwelcome partner brought into the crime by one participant diminished everyone's cut. Having made less than expected, the participant who developed the plan became determined to steal again while they were assembled (Respondent 30). Others reported that they had already stolen more than they needed immediately. Nevertheless, they knew

the money would not last long in present company. In the excitement, they decided to continue stealing while things were going well.

Offenders often reported that their partners' desire to steal motivated them to commit crime, even on nights or days that they would not have done crime otherwise. Many offenders reported stealing much more often than they preferred. In a group that steals together, someone is more motivated on a given day than other participants. Because their group seems a promising source of future income, participants that are not desperate for money may go along. Most repeat offenders reported that some in their group were more eager to steal than others, but that different participants had, at one time or another, initiated their crimes.

A final reason for going on a crime spree is the realization that one's fate is tied to that of a criminal group. The value placed on continued relations with a group is dependent not only on rewards. Costs that the individuals have experienced and overcome in their past or present relationship, risks that they have taken with one another and rewards that they might have missed in alternative relationships are perceived as investments in a group (Becker 1960; Hogg and Abrams 1993; Rusbult 1980). If associations are to be kept up with friends engaged in crime and partying together, avoiding future crimes is difficult. One armed robber claims not to have known that his partners were committing the first crime he did with them. Each of his three partners acted surprised at his ignorance and told him that it was the others' assignment to inform him. After they got away with one, he enjoyed the proceeds and saw little reason to discontinue the spree. His fate was now tied to a group and he had already taken the step

into committing serious felony and its potential costs. He remembers his reasoning, "after that first one, then I am already off in it. So I just thought what the hell" (Respondent 18).

To ensure that participants remain loyal to their group, steps sometimes are taken. An armed robber who committed more than 15 robberies with his group recalls his partner's attempts to keep his group cohesive. Similarly extreme measures to keep a crime group together or quiet were used in only two other cases, but they show that cohesiveness is intentionally constructed to increase security.

R18: I knew we was going to get caught. I tried to get out of it once. The guy that got everybody doing it, he started going ape shit. While we was in the car and tried to threaten to kill all of us just because I wanted out. And then the other two was with him. They was like, 'yep, hell no you ain't gonna get out of this. They said, 'we will kill you.' I said, 'well o.k. fine.'

PI: Your own friends said they would kill you.

R18: Well that guy started them up and they was all hopped up anyway and they figured if I was going to leave then I would be liable to tell on everybody. I was like, 'man, I ain't like that.' Two of them knew where I lived. I didn't want the danger, endanger my family or something.

PI: But, that's not the real reason you stayed, out of fear? Is it?

R18: In a way. I mean at that time and all. I wasn't but nineteen years old. It was the first time I really done something like that. Anybody's capable of anything when they are all geeked up. I mean at that time in my life, I didn't care for anybody or anything. I could have killed somebody as soon as look at them and I figure they were the same way.

SOLIDARITY AND INDIVIDUALISM

Sources of solidarity and cohesiveness in crime groups are easy to identify. We have already noted that participants in crime groups share much including common

problems and immediate desires. They are often friends. Uncertainty of the situation and dangers that force people to rely on others further encourages a collective spirit. Crime groups often intend on enjoying the material rewards of crime together. They indulge in the same drugs. Shared nonmaterial and material rewards and trials also contribute to a feeling of togetherness.

Groups have both solidaristic and individualist tendencies, however (McPhail 1991; 86). Everyone in a group is acting together toward a common goal, but many are also planning personal actions according to what is believed appropriate for self preservation and benefit. Everyone is not equally committed to crime or willing to take the risks for it.

Individualism in crime groups is contributed to by the great risks of participation, the short-lived rewards and the conditions of living desperate. Criminal groups are often composed of people who are close to each other and who enjoy moments of camaraderie. However, the harshness of street-life and the difficulties of committing crime make them volatile. A fair share of hustlers and manipulators are represented in crime groups. They have no qualms about taking advantage of anyone who lets them.

In explaining their group's motivation, interviewees attributed greater significance to conscious and deliberate decisions of someone in their group than mutual confusion or miscommunication. Ignorance in crime groups may not be pluralistic. Subjects focused their descriptions of the process that lead to their crimes on those who were most willing and who pushed the group toward crime. Some participants can easily manipulate interactions, conversations and challenges in a criminal group. Definitions of situations

often are constructed with intent and can be imposed on others through action or persuasion. Many participants in crime thought that they had been manipulated into doing something they might not have done otherwise and a few thought that they had been hustled or coned into crime.

MANIPULATION: THE CRIMINAL'S GAME

Experienced or highly motivated offenders often know that they want to do something criminal before or soon after a group mobilizes. They attempt to move the group toward the goal. Criminal events and crime groups are manipulated in that many offenders are placed in criminal situations through the actions and scene setting of others. They would not have found themselves in this particular criminal situation if not for the behavior and intentions of their partners. Most offenders are motivated to commit crime and do not make strong opposition to it apparent. This does not mean that no one manages and encourages them away from some lines of action and toward others. Participants in crime often arrive at a criminal definition of a situation because of deliberate manipulations of one or more participants in their group. Sometimes they do not notice these manipulations and scene setting by partners or fully understand their implications. At other times, they notice that the scene is being managed but think that if they let others take the lead they can satisfy their curiosity and reap rewards without committing themselves fully to the risks of crime. The persuasive techniques used to manipulate crime groups are not unique. Similar techniques of group manipulation are used in other contexts. Crime groups are manipulated by the inclusion and exclusion of

participants, by framing the agenda and setting the scene, and by use of expertise and coalition building.

Definitions of the situation are manipulated by changing the setting to fit the manipulator's preferred perspective for understanding events (Frake 1964). A motivated offender convinced that his present company and their surroundings approximate what it would take to commit a crime, but who does not think that he is yet in a crime group can alter and shape the situation. Manipulators have assessed the situation and have calculated that the elements of a criminal opportunity in a crime group and target are promising. Manipulation of the scene in crime groups is common.

Scene setting may require just moving about to make sure that all of the required parts of a scene are present. An offender may look around to make sure that the things thought necessary to commit a crime are present. In this process, manipulators redefine the objects around them for others by highlighting their criminal potential. Scene setting may be done in the presence or absence of other participants.

The composition of a group can be intentionally manipulated. Participants thought to be willing to commit crime and to have need of criminal resources can be selectively recruited. Putting together a group thought to be fitting for a particular crime event increases the chances that it will come about. Groups composed of participants that have proven criminal abilities and resources also are promising prospective recruits and may be sought. Offenders sometimes quite intentionally assemble friends or other persons that they think will be willing to go along with them into dangerous situations. Manipulators also look for what appears to be a promising group that has already assembled and

approach them with a criminal proposal. Often, these are people whom it is believed have something to offer the group and people whom the offenders are confident will keep a criminal secret.

One method of manipulating group composition is to invite people along for risky events other than burglary or robbery. Groups can be intentionally set on a course of hard partying and wild times that lead to showing off and suspension of consequences that are conducive to crime. Those that willingly come probably will not hinder the commission of this crime. Where groups are already engaged in verbal posturing about criminal abilities or toughness, the most criminally motivated can "call the bluff" of others who are trying to impress. Conversations about daring and criminal ability shift easily to include optimistic assessments of criminal opportunity and calls to action. Conversational cues can be given that those present have both adequate motivation and what it takes to commit a crime.

Definitions of a situation provided verbally by others in ill defined situations are especially likely to be well received (Kohn and Williams 1956). Uncertainty and apprehension in situations preceding crime allow heads to be turned toward criminal opportunity with only a few short phrases. Keynotes are not just exploratory, they are purposeful. I have already noted that offenders think positively, but they also at times intentionally mislead others about criminal prospects. When criminal groups deliberate and someone indicates that he knows of a sure thing that will pay well with little risk and few unpleasant tasks involved, almost invariably it is a lie. The risks and rewards of crime are often calculated based on intentionally misleading information provided by one's co-offender. In describing their past successes in robbery to a potential recruit, one band of

robbers cast themselves as old-pros, but failed to mention the critical mistakes they had made. He learned of their past errors after he had committed a robbery and shooting with them. Early mistakes had already put the police on their trail.

In every one of these robberies, they had blue bandanas on their heads and they didn't tell me. It was very easy to make a connection between all of them. Not to mention that the very first robbery of any of these to occur was one where they had robbed this hotel that I didn't have any real knowledge of at the time. They told me when they had done that, that they had got away clean and nobody had seen them. That they had had their bandanas over their faces. Well, they didn't. When I saw on the news what had actually happened was that there was a security camera at this hotel and there was a perfect image of them both . . . they had tried to shoot the camera and missed and that was the beginning of it right there (Respondent 49).

Another burglar reports that his partners often would steal without him and that they would exaggerate their take to make him regret missing out on a rewarding crime.

It seems like whenever I didn't go, that's when they would supposedly would do real good. They would come over to my house and tell me that they had made \$2,000 or \$3,000 dollars each. I knew that they were lying (Respondent 28).

Definitions of situations can be created by manipulating information, a possibility that has captured the attention of some social scientists (Goffman 1959). Participants in criminal groups often keep information from their partners. Sometimes a speaker implies to others that his thoughts are more situationally based than they are. Offenders that commit crime regularly and that always are searching for opportunity may let on that a specific and immediate situation inspired a criminal idea. This creates the impression that

it is a fleeting opportunity that the present group and situation offer promising illicit opportunity. At first, I was distrustful of those who told me that they were only partially aware of the crime they were going to commit and that others with them knew more. They repeated it often, however. Offenders fear the immediate consequences of crime. They are concerned also with the immediate problems and characteristics of targets that may get them caught or injured. If criminal plans are laid bare, then other participants will begin to worry about specifics and omnipresent dangers. Dissecting simple crimes creates unwelcome doubt. To many, it makes more sense to reveal criminal plans only as they unfold and to leave out details that probably will not prove relevant. In this way, crime groups maintain optimism.

Paraphernalia and facilitating hardware thought to fit in with the crime event that the manipulative participant envisions for the group may be assembled. Manipulators may make it known that they have guns or other objects needed to commit a crime and that they are quite willing to do it. Without stocking caps, baseball caps pulled down low will do. Lacking a pistol, a convenient razor knife may suffice. Collecting the tools of crime can turn the group mind toward looking for an offense to commit. One offender that I was interviewing about an aggravated robbery, told me about a past burglary. His account illustrates how the unexpected appearance of a tool, in this case a set of keys, lead him to see a situation as criminal opportunity. Interestingly, instead of taking the opportunity right then he went to get friends to show them his discovery and include them in his plans. Such a fortunate opportunity accompanied by his presentation of the keys needed little discussion.

Sometimes it just happens to be luck, like one time a store. One day I was in front of the store. It was closed and I walked to the store and tried to open the doors and it was locked. It was closed and when I was walking away from the store I happened to look on the ground and seen a set of keys. So, I am just curious so I pick up the keys and I go to the lock and open the door. I lock it back up, go home and tell about two or three friends. They was just living across the street from the store. Four of us come back and hit it. Try to get in the safe but couldn't, but took all kind of stuff out that store. Sometimes it just happens to be luck (Respondent 27).

Creating a momentum recognized by others as a possible predecessor of crime can help set the scene. Manipulators push the momentum and successive decisions toward crime. Even inexperienced offenders have learned that crimes arise out of certain types of situations. When placed in these situations, crime becomes a realistic possibility. Groups can be placed in situations where crime is clearly an attractive option and where continuing the party is more enticing than letting it end and facing coming down off a drug and adrenalin high. Besides encouraging the consumption of drugs and alcohol, the most obvious way that a group is moved toward serious crime is by committing other less serious offenses and working up to more serious crimes.

Momentum toward crime can be built by other demonstrations of gall, toughness or criminal ability. A few groups had been in or narrowly missed fights earlier on the day that they committed their crime. They had been flashing around guns, ripping and running from petty drug dealers, and playing other risky games. It is an overstatement to suggest that someone in the group was carefully calculating these moves as means of moving a group toward crime. Nevertheless, some offenders probably were using these events for showing off their abilities and measuring up their associates. Many offenders thought that

their partners had an event in mind when they were picked up to commit a crime, but their partners did not mention plans and crime did not materialize until later. They believed this because upon arriving spontaneously at a target they realized that some participants in the crime had preselected it.

Manipulators may also move a group to places that are conducive to carrying out a crime. "Scene setting may involve . . . locomoting to a setting where a required situation exists intact" (Heise 1981). A simple way to turn the focus of group decisions toward a criminal definition is to bring a group that already is suspected of potential criminality to a place that elicits thoughts of crime. The quick route to making the setting more crime inspiring is to move the group to a place where there is an attractive target. This can be accomplished with an invitation to participate in a profitable criminal venture or by taking the group to an attractive target without going into detail about any criminal plan and letting a crime develop.

One of the guys stayed a nervous wreck . . . [mock whines] 'I don't want to do it, I don't want to do it, I don't want to do it.' The driver just set there until he done it. He would get mad and everything, just aggravated to death. Finally start thinking about it and just get up and do it. We sat there for five or ten minutes (Respondent 35).

An offender can motivate a group to commit a crime that some participants are more reluctant to commit by placing them deeper in a compromising situation. Others can be pulled into a crime by decisive actions of some participants that leave them with few choices. They can comply or to wait around and talk to the authorities. Manipulators

suspect that those around them will accept the rewards of crime if they get away with it and they usually are right. The best way that a person can get others to commit a crime is to start the crime. Before this is done, it helps to feel out partners and know that they are backing decisions. Those present at a crime are likely to follow the lead of a person with whom they came to the situation. Two offenders remember how drastic actions constrain choice.

Time he got the one and put him through the window, I mean what am I gonna do, you know. I didn't want to look like a punk and leave. I wouldn't leave them standing there and me a punk. Then if they got away from it, then I would be a punk for leaving. That's how I was. I mean I thought I was in a little gang or whatever (Respondent 36).

I got out and threw something through the window. Sometimes they wouldn't do anything. They would think they saw car lights or just scared. I didn't care. We would just drive to another store and do it again until they come out (Respondent 35).

Two burglars told me that they learned an argot in prison that aptly described one of their co-defendants. The terms are derisive descriptions of those people who have too much abandon and little idea of how to profit from it. In their attempts to show daring, they become pawns for more wily offenders.

He would do anything. He was what you call a send out. Send out, gopher. Like send them out to do something and he will go do it. It didn't matter what it was. He would be in mid daylight out there at Wal-Mart and broke in the machine and come out with the money thing. He didn't care pretty much (Respondent 35).

I got away from them because I woke up. I knew that they were using me as a gopher. Like go for this, go for that (Respondent 36).

A few offenders also found their groups particularly attractive because they were able to take more than their share of the reward. In two cases this was because the experienced offender was solely responsible for disposing of stolen goods. In another, a young burglar learned that by sitting in the back of the car, he had unsupervised access to money from stolen cash registers. A robber explains how his older and wiser crime partner maximized the rewards of robbery at his expense.

He was fast. I don't know if you know what I mean if you ever seen them. but he is like a craps dealer on the lot where they throw dice. After we did the crime, we go to his mom's house and he says to me that his mom is not cool with this. He says give her \$250 so we can stay up here. This is out of my cut. Then he says, 'my brother knows we are here and you better give him \$250 to keep quiet.' Then, 'it's not cool to stay here any more.' So, he takes me to this empty house and we hide there. Then he says, 'give me the rest of your money to go score.' I'm catching on so I say, 'leave your box [radio] here with me.' They already showing my picture in the neighborhood. He goes right out the door and flags down a cruiser and tells them where I am (Respondent 3).

Some burglars will hide a pistol, piece of jewelry or cash from their partners and some robbers will attempt to do the same. This is risky, however. Hiding stolen goods in the fray of activity surrounding a crime may be difficult and may lead to violence. Skimming off the top also is not possible for many groups because they spend all of the proceeds of their crimes immediately. Ties between many offenders are close, but as important for explaining their equal division of proceeds are worries about disloyalty. An

angry crime partner who feels that he has come up short is a dangerous thing as police are always willing to listen to a snitch. Motivation and perceived rewards often are manipulated, but material reward usually is divided evenly.

When an experienced and motivated offender sees the things that are needed for a crime converge, he grabs the opportunity. If someone mentions some inside information to him in an attempt to show off, he knows that this is potential opportunity and calls them on it right away. He assesses the situation to see if the group has what it takes to commit the crime, feels them out by challenging them and then proceeds to move the group in criminal direction.

Those that have tools, cars, inside information or abandon are sometimes useful in crimes and manipulators use them to advantage. The resources for crime mentioned in previous chapters contribute to influence in a criminal group. Sometimes abandon or access to tools, for example, is sufficient to exercise influence. More often these are the things that everyone in a group looks for to define their situation. Experience is usually the most valuable resource in exercising control over criminal situations and others in them. Perceived experience and skill when held by a participant outweigh other resources in determining the course of a crime group. Experienced offenders usually claim to be or are pointed to as leaders. The uncertainty of the inexperienced in criminal situations means that many decisions are deferred to them and others look to them for guidance. Experience allows some participants in crime to predict and manage criminal situations.

Manipulation entails not only getting others to go along with a crime, but reducing one's own risk and maximizing one's own reward. An experienced player sometimes can

motivate others to do crime and distance himself from it at the same time. Some offenders convince others to take on the most dangerous jobs in a crime. Several older offenders talked their younger partners into going inside in robberies by explaining that they were more suitable for this part of the job.

Of course, some offenders really are reluctant to commit a crime. A few reported that they suggested crime jokingly and did not expect their partners quick enthusiasm, for example. Once they go through with it however reluctance is a form of manipulation and is viewed as such by offenders. Reluctant offenders hope to distance themselves from the criminal event and to reap its rewards. In spontaneous crimes, they seldom make the first move and often gravitate toward the route of escape even while the crime is going on. In accordance, with their goal of distancing themselves from a crime, they often occupy those positions most distant physically from the epicenter of a crime scene. During burglaries, they may be found waiting in the car, in the main rooms of houses, near exits or at downstairs windows serving as interior lookouts. Several thieves reported that their drivers had a bad habit of driving away during crimes. They usually came back. Reluctant participants often justify their participation through concerted ignorance and pretend that they do not notice cues that their group is on a criminal course.

Reluctancy usually is expressed by remaining neutral. Hesitators try to ride the fence in criminal events, avoiding enthusiasm for crime but not objecting. Most are hesitant and suspicious throughout a crime, but their fears and trepidations usually only come to the surface at the last minute when they realize that they will really be participating in a crime that their calculations tell them they should avoid. When they

voice their hesitations, they generally are not moral objections or fears of long-term consequence. Instead they express concern with characteristics of the target. They also sometimes voice “bad feelings” that they have about a crime and tell others that something does not “feel right” about a particular plan. Their complaints do not condemn others and they do not complain about being against crime generally. They are against only a particular crime.

Offenders view reluctance as a manipulative attempt to do crime without committing to its risks. Reluctancy is seldom accepted as genuine among repeat offenders. More willing offenders realize that the hesitant may not claim responsibility if crime goes wrong or if arrest challenges their loyalty to the group. They know that some offenders are acting reluctant to decrease personal risk. They sometimes are correct in their assessment. Especially experienced hustlers may be enthusiastic about committing a crime at first, but hang back when the real danger begins. An experienced thief explains that remaining distant from crimes is his central goal since he has become an older and wiser offender. The distance supposedly allowed by his last crime is what motivated him to recidivate after a six-year hiatus from crime.

I was gonna watch while he went in. I can't go into too much detail about this, but his wife worked at the place we robbed. She was assistant manager and she gave us the lowdown . . . Then on the next one I knew we were going to do something. I didn't know what. It all depended on what it was. If I could make money and stay out of trouble and not have no hand in it. Yeah, I knew I was gonna do it (Respondent 32).

Inexperienced or reluctant offenders also may use their relative position in a group to their strategic advantage. One novice acknowledged that he was attracted to a robbery group because he knew that as the last recruited, the most reluctant and the owner of the car, he had some advantage. He negotiated that he would participate in robbery only if he could park at a distance from the hold-up, forcing his partners to walk to their victims and flee on foot before they were allowed in his car. Reluctant participants in crime are more likely to be assigned safer jobs and may gain other advantages if arrested. They can argue that they were least responsible.

I told them I wasn't going to do it [robbery]. I told them I am going to take no part in it at all. I told them the only way I was going to participate in any of this is that this is my car and I am driving it. And you know as far as the crime goes, 'I am going to be just as much involved in it as you are in it when it comes down to if anybody gets in any trouble for it.' 'So, I am getting my fair share' (Respondent 49).

Reluctancy leaves open the chance to blame others. It is especially frowned upon when others think that another is only acting hesitant and they know from experience that they will go through with a crime. After groups of offenders have some experience offending together the consistent hesitation of some participants becomes expected and helping them overcome it routine. Hesitators sometimes need reminding that others know that they have an idea what is going on and will share in the reward. They may need some prodding. Participants who are intent on committing crime often quash reluctant offenders complaints rapidly by questioning their bravery and loyalty.

EXCHANGE AND CONVERGENCE

Manipulation by experienced and enthusiastic offenders is common, but crime also is a convergence of individual interests of all participants. Experienced and enthusiastic offenders have advantages in manipulating criminal situations. By default, they take control. Manipulation is seldom unidirectional or confined to one participant in a crime. Crime is often mutually beneficial to all offenders in a group.

Many of those who portrayed themselves as the most cautious offenders in their groups admitted that they enabled others to commit a crime by their willingness to participate. When the most reluctant participants in a group acquiesce, the group takes a substantial step in the direction of crime. More willing offenders cannot pull back easily when they have been pressing the group toward doing something illegal and when barriers erected by others suddenly are removed.

Some inexperienced offenders sought people to go with them on crimes that they did not think that they had the expertise or abilities to do. Often they had more knowledge of these crimes than those they recruited. They offered information to co-offenders in the hopes that they could impress them or convince them to come along. In spontaneous crimes, like fights that turned to robberies, some were more willing to break the law because they knew that they could use their street-wise company to advantage. They started fights that they might have avoided had they not been confident that by initiating a fight they would force the hand and elicit support from allies. Others said that they latched onto an existing criminal group because they knew it could get the drugs and alcohol that they desired.

Several experienced offenders reported that other offenders came to pick them up and go on a crime because they knew them to be experienced or skilled thieves, or because the group had utilized their abilities in the past. It is unlikely that manipulation by the inexperienced happens very often without more streetwise offenders also recognizing advantages in a situation. Experienced offenders also may portray themselves as drawn into the crime by others, but they probably have seen similar situations enough to realize that they are being invited for the security and expertise they offer.

Occasionally, experienced thieves are surprised by someone they are with committing an unplanned crime. Apparently, their partners have defined them as beneficial and acted without their knowledge. A thrice-convicted armed robber explains that he did not know that his co-offender was going to rob a store where they had stopped to purchase beer, but that he understands why prosecutors assumed he did. His description of himself, might also explain why his partner might have assumed that he would be an asset as a partner in a robbery.

I didn't rob nobody, but that's the way it went all through the works. It was strong-armed robbery. It wasn't no accessory to the fact. It was just strong-armed robbery. You know, I guess the way they looked at it, I had done time before when I was younger. I looked rough, long-hair, long beard. We were both drunk. This guy never had no record, just a clean cut young boy. He was just turned eighteen and I was a twenty-five year old man (Respondent 6).

Another experienced 30 year old offender interprets his teenage partner's actions, "it's hard for me to say what he was thinking. But, I know from my own life and when I first got into trouble how I thought. I am sure that he looked at me as someone who could

give him an alternative” (Respondent 19). A third expert contends that his partners intended to use his skills. He explained, “they know what I am into. But, no respect. They just wanted some. There ain’t no respect. They don’t even like their selves. How they going to like me? (Respondent 46).

TURNING BACK

Although the offenders that I interviewed may be more motivated than more petty offenders, some reported trying to back out of a crime. The way that they chose to do this was usually by pointing out that a crime “did not feel right” or was “too risky” or “stupid”. A burglar remembers his hesitancy, “I tried to tell them I ain’t doing a burglary there. She’s poor. She ain’t got nothing or she wouldn’t be living in that trailer. If we are going to steal something, let’s steal something worth stealing” (Respondent 36).

In groups where at least one participant is extremely urgent, especially if he has the support of others, backing out of a crime may require extreme measures. Two offenders resorted to violence to break the criminal momentum in their groups (Respondents 32; 35). Violence did not prevent a crime in either of these cases, but only changed the target. These events demonstrate variation in willingness of partners in crime to commit an offense. They also demonstrate the degree to which people must sometimes go to turn back the momentum of a group about to commit a crime. It is difficult to stop crime at the last minute and still save face. The excerpt that follows provides one way that crime can be avoided and questions about bravery or willingness to stand up answered.

It was just stupid and I wouldn't go along with it. He got aggravated and was wanting to and I never would. And he got on my temper and I just dragged him out of the car right there and smacked his head against the coke machine a couple of times and took off walking. I walked a couple of miles I guess before somebody come and got me (Respondent 35).

Some experienced offenders reported that in deliberative crimes they commit, anyone has the right to call off any crime "that doesn't feel right." It is not a good idea to take partners along who do not want to do something. They may fumble and are a likely source of information for the police. Many offenders also have developed during their past criminal exploits and arrests the superstitious notion that when "something doesn't feel right" it should not be done. Despite this logic, once the momentum of a crime reaches its peak and others have already committed to it in their own minds, their goals shift to carrying through with it and getting away. The target may be changed but the time for backing out is in the past. At this point, turning back is awkward and will be met with reproach or encouraging insults. Many offenders go through with crimes where they are not completely confident.

The process that leads to a group decision includes changes in group composition, successive decisions by each participant in the group and interaction. Groups define their situation by referring to their environment and to each other. As they continue through successive decisions, they refine their agenda and they understand new stimuli accordingly. Participants with criminal experience more easily control definitions of the situation than others. Once a criminal definition of a situation is dominant, those who are enthusiastic about crime gain influence. Crimes are the result of convergence of diverse individual

interests, but manipulations and influential players play a large role in the group assessment of risk and reward.

CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSIONS: GROUPS, DECISIONS AND OPPORTUNITY

The choice to engage in crime is not made in a laboratory and is not based on a few easily measurable variables. This is especially apparent when criminal decisions made in groups are examined. Crime groups exist in a social and physical environment that has dramatic influence on their form and on decisions made in them. Interaction with others in this environment is particularly important for understanding how decisions are structured and how the offender's perceptual field is constrained. Immediate social influences probably have as substantial impact on decisions as monetary reward or formal punishments associated with crime. Other people are often the most important foreground factor in deciding to commit a crime. Accomplices also influence the frequency of offending. The following concluding statements are intended to highlight contextual influences on decisions to offend in crime groups. This chapter summarizes these statements and what the scholarly understanding of group crime can take from them. The assertions also suggest future areas of inquiry. This research did not test the assertions nor did it test the relative strength of influences on the criminal decision. The chapter ends with a few implications for criminal justice gained from group offenders' insights.

Statement 1: Relationships in crime groups are multidimensional and participants in them typically are drawn from recent and close associates.

Crime groups seldom are formed strictly for the purpose of committing a crime. This casts doubt on the assumption that they are rationally organized for the commission of crime. Undeniably, some participants consider what is needed to commit a crime and

they may assemble others for a purpose. Convenience is usually more important in explaining the selection of co-offenders than criminal purposes, however. Co-offenders are likely to be drawn from friends and family that are part of and can tolerate the tumultuous lifestyles of thieves.

Statement 2: Crime groups assemble in places and during activities where risky situations are sought after and expected.

Crime arises at parties and on street-corners understood to be risky and reserved for a fast-living crowd. In these situations people often are seeking actively or at least on the lookout for dangerous situations and criminal opportunity. Heavy consumption of drugs and alcohol is often part of edgework games found in these situations. Some offenders have been partying for days. Often they assume that allies present in risk-seeking situations are open to the possibility of exploiting criminal opportunity. Attendance and behavior in risky situations serve as a crude gauge of criminal willingness among potential crime partners. It also is rewarding for groups that have created financial and other deficits through recent partying and decisions to overcome them by committing crime.

Statement 3: Sequential decisions take groups to the brink of crime.

Offenders typically do not begin deliberations, decide to commit a crime and then go carry out their plan. Crime groups move toward crime incrementally and sequentially. They are not weighing the costs and consequences at the end of their successive decisions. They look at immediate costs and consequences of each incremental step toward crime not knowing for sure that they will take another or that crime ultimately will occur.

Successive decisions that result in crime can seem inconsequential early in the decision-making process, but become more consequential as a group approaches commitment to a criminal event. Offenders may begin by placing themselves in a position where they need quick money or voice their motive for crime. They then may take up with others, travel to the crime site and confront a victim before the costs of crime becomes a consideration.

In groups, different individuals often take steps in decision paths that result in crime. One person may drive the group to a target. Another may throw a brick through the window and constrain the choices of a third participant who must follow up on a burglary or fail the task and risk breaking the momentum toward crime. With each step in the direction of crime, the group's path becomes clearer and criminal definitions of a situation more prevalent and entrenched. Criminal momentum builds.

Statement 4: As groups progress toward committing a crime, changes in their composition increase the group's criminal motivation.

Crime-groups often begin their deliberative or accidental path toward crime days or hours before they commit one. Motivated crime groups distance themselves from "straight" people and they distance themselves from crime-groups. When groups first assemble, often more people are present and contributing ideas to the crime than finally commit it. As risk of crime increases, the most hesitant observers slip away. Not everyone can keep up with the style of partying that often precedes crime. Thus, a group is conceived around and may have participants in it that are only posturing at criminal ability with no genuine criminal intention. Compositional changes make groups more

criminal as unwilling criminals drop away.

Statement 5: Groups increase the influence of intrinsic rewards of crime and decrease the influence of risk of apprehension on decision-making.

Many offenders enjoy the excitement of committing crime with friends. They also enjoy the sense of accomplishment that doing crime in a group provides. Having others around provides an audience for criminal feats. If crime is committed to prove ability or bravery, then an appreciative audience obviously is important. Having others with whom to enjoy the proceeds of crime and relive criminal experience sustains the rush and sense of accomplishment of crime.

Groups decrease both the perception of the immediate risks of apprehension and the actual risk. It is reassuring that others have interpreted the same situations and decided to commit a crime when a person is unsure of her own criminal decision. Lookouts, getaway drivers or multiple assailants decrease the risks of getting caught in the act. Offenders must focus on their target and another set of eyes is always useful. That accomplices increase the long-term risk of being caught is only considered later by most.

Statement 6: Available resources lead motivated offenders to define a situation as a promising criminal opportunity. Capable co-offenders and groups are among these resources.

Offenders evaluate the resources and facilitating hardware available to them in deciding if a criminal definition of a situation is appropriate. They refer to physical, mental and social resources in doing so. Groups without minimal resources will not see criminal potential in their situation. When ample resources for carrying out a crime are available, then criminal definitions are more likely. If a group has fences available, is high on drugs,

is composed of fearless individuals and has the tools and abilities that it believes a crime requires, then it is more likely to see a situation as a promising criminal opportunity. Many considerations in defining criminal opportunity are not contingent on characteristics of the target. Among the first considerations in defining a situation as criminal is assessment of co-offenders' abilities and willingness. No one wants to commit to a crime that takes multiple people and be left to suffer the consequences alone. Offenders feel out those they are with through conversations and challenges. Inexperienced offenders find those that seem comfortable and experienced in criminal situations particularly impressive and are drawn to crime in their presence. Resources also define the character of a crime group. Many groups have the resources that it takes to commit to crime, but few have access to the managerial skill and level heads provided by experienced and rarely found careful thieves.

Statement 7: Once a group has done a serious acquisitive crime together and profited from it, this becomes a salient part of their group history. After that, they are more likely to see criminal opportunity in the assembly of the group.

Many groups do crime more than once. They may initiate offending together in a spontaneous crime and then proceed to plan future crimes. Many of those in this study offended continually until caught. They saw mere assembly of a group with a history of crime as potential criminal opportunity. Groups often adhere to the criminal methods that have worked for them. Although many offenders did crime with multiple groups and alone, considerable consistency in the type of stealing done by a single group was common.

Statement 8: Types and levels of individual motivation within crime groups vary.

Participants in crime groups may share motives. This is true especially when they intend to use the proceeds of crime to get drugs, alcohol or other supplies to carry on a party they are engaged in together. Offenders may also have different motives in the same group. In a single group, some thieves steal because they are junkies and others because they need money. Others may be stealing because their life is so chaotic; they see little reason to obey the law. In one crime group, an older offender who was a chronic alcoholic and made his living from crime convinced his young nephew to commit crime. He reminded the younger man that he should be motivated because of desperation for money for a divorce and child custody lawyer. Thieves in a single group may also have different strengths of motivation. Thieves may be extremely motivated to commit crime, as when they do it daily to support a habit, or reluctant. Some offenders are eager to get to a criminal situation where they know they will behave impressively. More reluctant offenders may go along with crime out of concerted ignorance, or because they believe their group will never really commit a crime and if it does their personal role will be safe.

Statement 9: Participants in crime groups and their definitions of situations as promising criminal opportunities are often the subjects of manipulation.

Although recognition of criminal opportunity often feels serendipitous to many participants in crime groups, in many ways it is not. Some participants may have been thinking about crime or may always be thinking about criminal opportunity. These participants heavily influence the direction taken by many crime groups. They manipulate groups into criminal situations. Manipulation into crime can be accomplished by

recruitment, pushing the group through successive criminogenic decisions, coalition building, strategic conversation, changing others' perceptions of risks and rewards, or through decisive action. Crime-groups may be characterized by pluralistic ignorance, but in many some participants are much better informed than others.

Statement 10: Some participants are better equipped to manipulate crime groups than others.

Participants thought to have the most sought after criminal resources are most able to influence crime groups. Experienced offenders dominate intra group interaction. They are streetwise and recognize criminal potential and can handle criminal situations. At their best, experienced offenders can manage criminal situations.

There also are situational considerations in determining control of group decisions. Those that take the lead in crime force others to follow suit. Those offenders that have the most knowledge and ownership of a criminal situation also are better prepared to define the group's course. They know what they intend to do and are better informed of the risks and rewards of a particular crime. Offenders that have stolen together have more power and knowledge of their group's course than new recruits.

Perceived familiarity with criminal situations also increases influence. In criminal situations where few people are secure and comfortable, groups are likely to defer decisions to those who they believe know what they are doing. When crime becomes a possibility, potential offenders watch each other and keep a careful eye out for those who they think know how to handle the situation.

Statement 11: Group crime represents a convergence of motives and perceived opportunities.

Some participants use their resources and experience to take the group in their preferred behavioral direction. Crime groups, especially lasting crime groups, also represent a convergence of individual interests. At base, crime groups are voluntary and informal. This means that most participants in crime groups believe at least for a time that it is in their short-run interest to participate. Crime groups provide opportunity for showing off, self-expression, or for material gain and security in a crime. Extremely active offenders may see the elements of a crime group coming together as an opportunity that they cannot forego. Full-time hustlers must be constantly on the lookout for any chance to make money. Less active and experienced offenders view crime groups as an opportunity to prove their ability and to take advantage of the resources and experience of others who seem more capable of crime. Offenders also use the group to mitigate their own involvement in a crime. When groups do crime, offenders often believe that other participants will accept the brunt of the blame. Motives and opportunities are inextricably linked. Crime groups contribute to both.

CRIME GROUPS AND DECISIONS

The process by which groups come to commit serious property crimes is complex. Usually, no single participant's position on whether or not a group commits a crime is responsible for the decision of the group. Few people are duped into serious property crime and but many do not plan their crimes or know with any certainty that they will be committed.

Individual decisions are different from decisions in groups, however. Many

offenders believed that if not for their partners or if they had not run across someone like them, they would never have become participants in a criminal group. Groups do shift decisions, but polarization in natural crime groups is different from polarization of decisions in the laboratory. Crime groups are not stable entities. Their composition changes as they progress through decisions.

Offenders who have ended their criminal careers claim that the best way to avoid crime is to get out of potentially criminal groups early in their formation. One told me that he was invited recently to join a carload of his old cronies, and was forced to make it clear that he "was not like that any more" to avoid arriving in a compromising situation. Crime groups are composed of participants who may have much, including long-term histories and current desires, in common. Still, something akin to risky-shift occurs in groups as they move from edgework to full-fledged crime.

Those most motivated to commit a crime are most vocal and often take decisive action that defines a situation and leads a group toward crime. In the risk taking and showing-off scenarios that precede crime, they have a firm foundation to stand on in influencing a group. Hesitant participants may be seen as weak and incapable of handling themselves. Drugs and alcohol remove some fears of even hesitant participants and allow them to ignore the dangers in risky situations. They often stay silent and try to ride the fence on criminal decisions. Sometimes reluctant offenders do their part to move a group toward crime. They seek the credit that taking an incremental step gives while holding out hope that a criminal situation will diffuse. In addition, situations that potentially are defined as criminal increase the influence of those participants who are most motivated

and perceived to be experienced in crime. Crime groups do not turn to their most hesitant participants to define a criminal situation; they turn to the situational leaders.

Future research on group crime, should focus on the immediate trajectories that place offenders in criminogenic situations. Little is known about the events that place offenders on these trajectories although some offenders report that tragedies and dramatic life changes are important. Apparently, the presentation of criminal opportunity comes to some people more than others, and these people often live similarly reckless lives. There is much to be learned about the short-term trajectory that leads to crime and when it brings criminal opportunities and makes them attractive.

IMPLICATIONS

In this concluding section, I explore some policy making implications of the materials presented in preceding chapters. The conclusion also speaks to current understanding of criminal choice and decision-making. As I noted in the introduction, decision-making research has only begun to examine real offenders and their considerations in making criminal decisions. Examining group crime underscores the importance of the context and immediacy of criminal decisions, if only because the influence of others and their actions on criminal decisions is plain.

An understanding of thieves' decisions to steal, calls two broad trends in contemporary crime fighting into question. The first is the deterrence policy of the current war on crime and the second is target hardening. Advocates of deterrence policy suggest that escalating the threat and empirical odds of punishment will deter offenders from the

enticements of the rewards of crime. Target-hardening advocates rely on increasing the risks and difficulties of pulling off a crime.

Fear of punishment does enter offenders' calculations, but only inexactly. They are more concerned with immediate dangers and rewards of crime than they are with the length of prison sentences. Some have even resigned themselves to the realization that they eventually will be arrested and some are beyond caring. About each crime, thieves typically are optimistic.

A small minority of offenders' deliberations include the objective risks of crime versus the monetary reward. Admittedly, some would prefer to avoid crimes like shootings and brutal armed robberies where risks and legal and emotional costs are too high. As they do not decide all at once, many offenders have only unclear indications that their group's course will result in crime. They may begin to understand their group's course only when it is set by the group's investments, and after reaching the point where dramatic steps and displays of individualism are required to turn back. Division of action and decisions means that the ultimate decision to commit a crime often is as easy as walking to the counter with an armed friend, or staying semiconscious in the driver's seat while he goes, "to get some money." In other cases, crime begins with a decisive maneuver by one person that places an entire group firmly in a crime. Adjustment in the state and federal sentencing tables has limited impact on these street scenes, although many thieves did report that they substantially can increase regret for crime and the sense of injustice at sentencing.

Target hardening is an approach to crime-fighting that advocates making crime less

appealing by making it more difficult, dangerous and less profitable by modifying the characteristics of targets. Targets can be made less appealing, but choice of target is often an afterthought. Many groups are on a course for crime and have perceived criminal opportunity before they come in contact with a promising target. Targets can be catalysts that bring these groups to crime, but motivated offenders also are innovative. Some are determined. The subjects in this study indicate that once on a course for crime an appropriate target is easy to find. If one does not work, a crime group is likely to find another. Low risk, low pay targets are sufficient and plentiful. Thieves report that target hardening displaces crime. According to them, it may protect some victims from some types of theft, but it is not a promising societal crime-fighting strategy.

Deterrence and situational crime prevention advocates should consider the nonmaterial rewards of crime also. Fear contributes substantially to the reward of some crimes. Raising the immediate and long-run risks of crime, without approaching certainty of arrest, may provide promising theaters for showing off criminal abilities and bravery. Current official constructions of deterrence based policies and strategies take insufficient account of factors and conditions that constrain offender decision-making and limit substantially the rationality they employ. Offenders do calculate but the process is constrained by the lifestyle they pursue and share and its goals (Shover and Henderson 1995).

A more specific critique of the criminal justice system is that its current sentencing and investigatory procedures are off the mark. Offenders particularly hold up the plea-bargaining system to ridicule. Talking to offenders who did their crimes in groups brings

many of its inadequacies to light. When convictions and sentences are based on negotiated pleas, justice is often cast aside for convenience. Some offenders in the crimes that I examined served longer sentences so that their loved ones and friends might go free, for example. Some also served longer sentences because their partners did not choose them as the one to protect and threw them to the prosecutorial lions. One offender explained that he coincidentally was cast as ringleader in a string of burglaries. His girlfriend was the first to turn under interrogation. She could inform on many crimes committed by a small network of thieves to avoid prison, but only the ones that her boyfriend committed. When prosecutors selected someone to turn witnesses against, the logical mastermind was the man they could place at "all" the crimes. Some offenders reported that their extensive records helped them in prosecutorial negotiation. The prosecutor's logic was that the offender with the long record was inevitably going to serve a long sentence and that the prosecution could ease up in exchange for placing others in a similar predicament.

Experienced players on the street often learn to play the criminal justice system as well. They are the most likely to consider sentencing considerations while committing crime, for example. Some have learned that in court, offenders are not all in it together, and it may serve them well to stay at the rear of the store or in a car while accomplices place themselves more fully in a crime. In a few cases, entire groups of streetwise offenders have learned that by keeping their mouths shut everyone benefits. In others, they masterfully play the snitch. Prosecutors want convictions, but they should keep in mind that short sentences for everyone participating in a crime may serve as greater

deterrence than putting only some offenders away for long periods. Sometimes the person who provides a gun is as important in the decision to carry off a robbery as the person who wields it.

Active offenders offer criminal opportunities to others and motivate them to commit crime. Another policy implication is that breaking one offender's momentum and motivation to commit crime may have exponential value. One way that this could be done is to increase free world opportunities for drug and alcohol treatment. Many criminal decisions begin with the decision to abuse drugs and alcohol. Immediate trajectories toward crime often start with a bender. There is no guarantee that many offenders would take the treatment offered them. If some junkies' motivation and momentum could be interrupted, it would have substantial impact. More timely intervention might break some offender's motivation to do crime and recruit others into it. Many subjects were wanted or had pending charges against them when they committed their last crime. Some had warrants out on them that were never served despite the fact that they were easy to find. One offender was angered when his accomplice and longtime friend was not jailed for a short time on a stolen weapons charge before he committed a later murder and received life in prison. In his opinion, the police missed their chance to help this offender who already had a record of violence and to help his future victim.

Selective incapacitation is controversial. Controversy derives from the difficulties in determining who deserves and needs to be selectively incapacitated. No one can tell how busy any person's future criminal career will be. Getting busy thieves off the street would diminish available criminal opportunities and formation of serious acquisitive crime

groups, however. Those who have proven in the past to be susceptible to the whirlwinds that lead to crime are responsible for the conception of many serious crime groups.

The most obvious way to break the momentum that leads to crime is to remove state-imposed barriers to offenders. Some offenders reported that the best move they ever made was paroling to another state and escaping those who viewed them as using friends and potential criminal accomplices. A methamphetamine dealer told me that he could never have made it on parole had he been released to the state where he was confined and seemed to "know everyone." As one offender reported of his fortunately successful attempt to overcome the difficulties of leaving the state of his imprisonment and put his crime in the past, "it took an act of God." Offenders who are willing and think that it will be of benefit should be encouraged to start anew. Otherwise, they may be welcomed home by constant presentations of criminal opportunities.

Early and long periods of confinement make it more likely that offenders will appear in a future criminal crowd. This is especially true if they are not given other opportunities. Perhaps, a better strategy than ignorantly selecting those thought to be trouble is to provide incentives to free-world offenders to avoid streetlife, including jobs that keep them busy and paid. People define themselves according to the things that they know they can accomplish and gravitate toward others with similar experiences. Given no other accomplishments or chances to achieve, being viewed as criminal opportunity for others can become a source of income and pride.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX INTERVIEW GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

Explain the project

Present and review study description, consent forms and confidentiality

BACKGROUND

Review information on the event from other sources

Inquire about additional sources of information

Personal and criminal background

Typical day

Employment

CRIMINAL EVENT

Activities the day of event

Motivation

Drugs and alcohol

Assembly

Initiation of event

Initial idea of crime

Description of event

Experience of the event - mood

Agreement or conflict

Planning

Choice of target and choice of crime

Knowledge of plans

Equipment

Use of skills and experience

Status, age and criminal experience

Reoffending - early and late crimes

GROUP

Relationship and description of co-offenders

History of crime group

Division of labor

Confidence in others and group ability

Influence of others

Leadership

Why co-offend

Participation in other groups

RISK AND REWARD

Experience of arrest

Fears

Risks and benefits of co-offending

Impact of crime and arrest on relationships to others

Court, snitches and punishment

Regret

View of sentence

Staying out of trouble

TERMINATION

Other information

Thank for participation

Remind of procedures for contacting me

VITA

Andy Hochstetler was born in Clarksville, Tennessee on March 22, 1970. He graduated from Clarksville High School in 1988. In August 1990, he received his Bachelor of Arts Degree in History from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Both his M.A. and Ph.D. in Sociology were earned at the University of Tennessee. Criminology and Political Economy are his specializations. He maintains scholarly interests in macro-level predictors of crime and punishment, offender decision-making and white-collar crime. He has served as Research Assistant and Teaching Assistant in the Department of Sociology. Hochstetler began an appointment as Assistant Professor of Sociology at Iowa State University in the Fall of 1999.