The normalisation of drug supply?: The social *supply* of drugs as the 'other side' of the

history of normalisation

Ross Coomber, Griffith Criminology Institute, Griffith University, Brisbane, Queensland 4122, Australia

Leah Moyle, Criminology and Sociology, Royal Holloway, University of London, Egham , Surrey, TW20 0EX

and

Nigel South, Sociology, University of Essex, Colchester, CO4 3SQ.

Abbrev title: The normalisation of drug supply

Corresponding author: Professor Nigel South, Centre for Criminology / Department of Sociology, University of Essex |Colchester CO4 3SQ |Essex |UK.
Email: soutn@essex.ac.uk ; phone: 01206-872693

The normalisation of drug supply?: The social *supply* of drugs as the 'other side' of the
history of normalisation

Abstract

Aims: Describes how the relative normalisation of recreational drug *use* in the UK has been
productive of, and fused with, the relatively normalised and non-commercial social *supply* of
recreational drugs. Methods: Semi-structured interviews with 60 social suppliers of recreational drugs
in two studies (involving a student population n=30, and general population sample n=30).
Respondents were recruited via purposive snowball sampling and local advertising. Findings: Both
samples provided strong evidence of the normalised supply of recreational drugs in micro-sites of
friendship and close social networks. Many social suppliers described 'drift' (Matza 1964) into social
supply and normalised use was suggested to be productive of supply relationships that both suppliers
and consumers regard as something less than 'real' dealing in order to reinforce their preconceptions
of themselves as relatively non-deviant. Some evidence for a broader acceptance of social supply is
also presented. Conclusions: The fairly recent context of relative normalisation of recreational drug
use has coalesced with the social supply of recreational drugs in micro-sites of use and exchange
whereby a range of 'social' supply acts (sometimes even involving large amounts of drugs/money)
have become accepted as something closer to gift-giving or friendship exchange dynamics within
social networks rather than dealing proper. To some degree, there is increasing sensitivity to this
within the criminal justice system.

The normalisation of drug supply?: The social *supply* of drugs as the 'other side' of normalisation.

Introduction and Background

The Normalisation Thesis

For Parker et al (1995: 25), young people growing up in the 1990s did so in a social context of a new level of availability of recreational drugs as a '*normal* part of the leisure-pleasure landscape', and whether they became users depended upon personal and peer group influences and choices. This was not an argument that *all* young people would turn to the use of drugs. However, what could be argued was that acquaintance with 'recreational' drugs and/or users was no longer unusual and drug users were as likely to come from a range of 'normal' backgrounds across the social spectrum as be linked to risk-factors related to social exclusion, previously identified in various studies of pre-1990s drug use (Measham & South, 2012). Others have been critical of the normalisation argument and its implications, observing that prohibitions, peer-group resistance, parental attachment, and preference for alternative activities remain significant deterrents to drug use (Shiner & Newburn, 1999). Both viewpoints have validity and this is reflected in the suggestion that while we may not have seen a widespread uptake of use, society has witnessed a 'cultural normalisation' of the social use of drugs (Pearson 2001; South, 1999: 6-7). The debate has been significant and enabled the concept of normalisation to be refined across the last two decades (Aldridge et al 2011; Measham & Shiner, 2009) and applied in various other national contexts (Measham & South, 2012: 691-692). Parker et al. (1995: 25) also argued that the supply of drugs among friends and acquaintances (later described as social supply) was highly prevalent and a natural corollary of social use because illegal drugs had 'become products which are grown,

manufactured, packaged and marketed through an enterprise culture whereby the legitimate and illicit markets have merged'.

Normalisation in a Contemporary Context

It is the case however, that landscapes and cultures evolve and change. Parker et al. were referring to a post-Thatcher world supposedly permeated by a spirit of entrepreneurship; this persists in some respects but in attenuated and mediated ways. Shiner and Newburn's (1997; 1999) much referenced critique used 1995 American High School data on disapproval of drug use which seems possibly inappropriate anyway (these respondents being young enough to compare with the adolescents studied by Parker et al. but too young to have much experience of a normalised culture of social use) and out of date in a world – or more specifically an America - where 'cannabis ... is fast becoming a legitimate business': 'Four states, as well as Washington, DC, have now legalised marijuana consumption for recreational use' while 'a further 21 allow it for medicinal purposes under a panoply of state laws' (The Economist, 2015). Once again, this is not intended as an argument that everyone is now 'lining up to buy' newly legalized substances but this does represent a signal of further cultural and market acceptance that would have been unthinkable twenty years ago and that now provides social scripts that feed into media storylines – fictional comedy and drama (see e.g. the US television drama-comedy *Weeds* or the UK television comedy *Ideal*) as well as news and reality shows. There are also two further cultural disruptors that have significant implications for both the maintenance of normative prohibition and for the normalisation proposition as previously developed. First is the explosion of the virtual market place of the internet as a source of drugs – hard to police and relatively easy to use (EMCDDA, 2015); and second, the new technology of e-cigarettes and techniques of vaping, the subject of

heated debate as to whether this is normalising smoking and may serve as a gateway to use of other smokable drugs, or whether it is a public health breakthrough in assisting smoking cessation (Triggle, 2014; Drummond and Upson, 2014; Cressy, 2014). What is of interest for the normalisation debate is the smart advertising, design and market segmentation underpinning the new vaping market, creating a new clientele for a new, previously non-existent product and means of using and inhaling a substance. The availability of e-cigarettes for use with cannabis oil products is now the subject of commercial development and much journalism (see e.g. USA Today 2014), and if established as 'safer', then use of cannabis via vaping may well accelerate relative acceptability.

Social Supply as the Other Side of the Normalisation Debate

A little over ten years ago it was suggested that as drug use in the UK becomes 'more normalised' and cultures of leisure, pleasure and youth become 'relatively more accepting of drug use' then the supplier role, especially between friends and acquaintances, would also become more normalised (Coomber 2004: 503). Individuals involved in use would likely feel they are no longer crossing over a border of deviance in the way they once might and therefore, if they should also find themselves 'drifting' (Matza, 1964) into the role of supplier or dealer, this too would feel more acceptable than in the past. Furthermore, many in such roles would not see themselves as 'dealers' as commonly and legally understood, nor would many or most of those that they sell drugs to (Coomber 2004: 503; South, 2004). More recently, in a study of illicit drug users in Scotland, McPhee (2012: 245) found 'There were few participants, who would describe themselves as dealers, although it was clear that several had engaged in small-scale commercial enterprises'. Over a decade on, we consider it timely

to review the proposition that the relative normalisation of recreational drug use has also resulted in some meaningful normalisation of recreational drug supply.

We start from the proposition that the social supply of drugs is now a widespread phenomenon and that this has been evident on a small-scale for decades, emergent from the mid-to-late 1980s (Blum et al 1972; Dorn, Murji and South, 1992: 3-15) and preceding the era of dance drugs and clubbing (Parker & Measham, 1994). While social supply is often observed as a popular activity within youth drug markets (Coomber & Turnbull 2007), it is also found to characterise meaningful segments of the adult drug market (Nicholas, 2008; Shearer et al., 2005; Winstock et al., 2001; CSEW 2013). Research literature frequently suggests that access to drugs is very often 'sorted' by friends, based on a preference to eliminate 'risky' interactions with dealers proper (Potter, 2009; Coomber and Turnbull, 2007) whilst also representing a convenient and cost-effective option for acquiring drugs (Measham et al. 2001; Moyle, 2013), with less likelihood of them being poor quality, fake or unsafe (Murphy et al., 2004; Jacinto et al., 2008). However, the 'social' aspect of social supply remains key to involvement in this activity and users have discussed the symbolic importance of the supply transaction within friendship groups, as well as highlighting the ritual and enjoyment stemming from group buys (Moyle, 2013). While social supply is understood by both the legal system and by those engaged in it (users and suppliers) to be something 'less' than drug dealing but 'a little more' than simple possession for use, there is no official recognition of 'social supply' as distinct from commercially motivated dealing (Coomber & Moyle, 2014).

This is despite the implementation of new drug sentencing guidelines in England and Wales by the Sentencing Council in 2012, recognising different levels of harm and culpability by setting thresholds that supposedly distinguish between possession and supply, and define

'social' supply as being an activity where no profit results. Moreover, while the 'lesser role' category recognised by the Sentencing Council may have loosely aimed to capture social supply offences (Moyle et al., 2013), the guidelines reflect a limited understanding of the ways in which social supply transactions take place in a real world context. Specifically, they fail to understand what would be common use and supply thresholds, and the realities of common exchange dynamics where even much *social* supply involves some form of minor or modest gain or profit.

Drawing on recent fieldwork (Moyle, 2013) and the synthesising of several key contributions from the 1980s through to the 2010s (Coomber, Moyle & South, 2016), we explore the idea of normalisation as it relates to the social supply of recreational drugs as an adjunct to the *relative* normalisation of drug use (Parker et al, 1998). The argument constructed rests upon the idea of micro-sites of normalisation, as opposed to a notion of generalised normalisation, where the former applies to the exchanges and sites where social supply takes place and the latter to the case of social use. The context we are describing is now one of *relative acceptability* of recreational drug use and of *social* supply and the exchange of drugs which is distinct from *financially motivated* drug dealing. It is also important therefore to highlight the degree - or lack - of pecuniary motive in social supply and how this type of supply activity illuminates the 'other side' of the history of the normalisation of social drug *use*. In proceeding in this way, we need to be mindful of Potter's (2009: 52) point that any attempts to 'delineate differences' between 'types' of drug dealers, 'can gloss over the complexity of drug distribution and the overlap and interplay between what come to be seen as different patterns of supply.' Arguably, this context is also partially shaped, not just by a wider prevalence of social use, but also by certain narratives critical of current criminal

justice approaches and the effects of what are seen as unreasonably heavy-handed policing and prosecution of young (and not-so-young) recreational drug users.

Aldridge et al. (2011: 219) have argued that normalisation, on a general level, is not a matter of absolutes but can instead be best understood as representative of a move of deviant activity from 'the margins' toward 'the centre'. In order to understand the relative normalisation of supply, we draw upon Matza's (1964) theory of drift to explicate how drug users, by virtue of their strategies to keep themselves supplied and to get the best possible deal, gradually slip into social supply roles. We argue that it is this subtle drift or slip that renders social supply a practice that is, with varying degrees of involvement, increasingly engaged in and experienced by many recreational drug users. With the majority of our research populations regarding a 'supplier' label as problematic, we also draw on Sykes and Matza's (1957) 'techniques of neutralisation' as a heuristic device that usefully describes the 'mental gymnastics' (Mohamed & Fritsvold, 2010) social suppliers engage in, often describing supply as 'normal' and representing an act that is not considered to involve much more than continuing to participate in social drug use and its associated cultural mores. Because we are talking about a form of supply that is now acknowledged, even in law, to be less serious than 'dealing proper', this drift/slip and neutralisation can, as we shall see, be usefully described as 'soft drift' and 'soft neutralisation', reflecting the relatively fluid and easy mental gymnastics involved.

Methodology

The original data presented here formed the basis of a PhD study (Moyle, 2013) focused on non-commercially motivated forms of drug supply (social supply and addicted-user-dealing). This explorative project utilized interviews and case studies with 60 social suppliers

comprised of a 'student sample' (a sample of 30 second and third year undergraduates from a range of subject groups including but not limited to: sociology, business studies and geology) and the principal research population, the 'Somerset sample', (86% male and 14% female). The findings here are drawn mainly from the latter. Conducted between 2010 – 2013, this research generated thematic data exploring the types of roles that social suppliers played, as well as data on routes into supply, motivations, and relationships between suppliers and users. The Somerset sample's (n=30) age-range was from 23 to 32 years old (average 27); at the time of interview, all were employed, in a variety of occupations (including journalists, teachers, architects, media executives). In terms of their drug use, 87% had used drugs in the last month and 83% had provided access to drugs (socially supplied) in the last six months. At the time of the research, respondents reported regular use of cocaine (28%), MDMA (23%), cannabis (17%), ecstasy (15%), ketamine (11%), Valium (2%), mushrooms (2%) and mephedrone (2%). Access to these respondents was garnered through advertising the study using social media and targeting known individuals who were thought to have some involvement in social supply activity. Snowball or 'respondent driven sampling', where respondents offer referrals to those who possess similar characteristics that are of interest to the researcher (Biernacki and Waldorf, 1981), was then employed as a means of gathering the remainder of our sample population. Ethical approval was gained from the University Ethics Board and normative anonymising and confidentiality measures were employed to protect respondents from harm and identification.

Findings

Having outlined the 'normalisation thesis', and how social supply sits alongside this within a contemporary context, we now present our findings. We outline different social supply typologies, highlighting the nuances evident in this activity, providing a basis for understanding how such activities may be experienced as normalised for drug users.

Following this we discuss how cultures of reciprocity in peer networks can promote the normalisation of supply, creating indebtedness and a need to engage in social supply on behalf of others 'to return the favour'. Finally, drawing on the work of David Matza (1964), we explore how users may 'drift' into supply, providing a heuristic device that illuminates how supply may come to be viewed as an extension of use and a relatively normal aspect of regular recreational use rather than a distinct or easily separable act. While the findings principally draw on Moyle (2013) and the 'Somerset' and 'Student' samples referred to above, we also consider our findings in relation to other empirical studies, notably the work of McPhee (2012).

'Doing' Social Supply

In the UK, the Police Foundation Report (2000) of the Independent Inquiry into the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 first associated the concept of social supply with 'small scale consumption among friends' that 'may involve supply and indeed supply for gain' (p.25). There has since been a small number of studies commenting on the scope of this term (Nicholas, 2008; Coomber and Turnbull, 2007), with social supply largely characterised as 'not for profit' supply or supply to 'non-strangers' (Potter, 2009). Qualitative research has highlighted the nuance and complexities surrounding definition. Moyle's (2013) study for example, identified a number of different ways in which social supply is done and the varying motivations that accompany these different modes of supply. Supporting findings of earlier research (RSA, 2007; Coomber and Turnbull, 2007; Police Foundation 2000), designated buying activity was found to be a popular way of 'doing' social supply, with an individual buying on behalf of a social group, and thereafter the drug being split between other members of the group who have 'chipped in' money for the substance/s. While designated buying is most associated with the social supply concept, more involved practices may also fall under

this term. 'Party buying', where an individual will purchase large amounts of drugs for a specific event for a group of friends, or 'stash buying' (see Murphy et al. 1990) where larger quantities of drugs are purchased to reduce the cost of the drugs, can also be conceptualised as non-commercial and as social supply, even though the quantities of drugs supplied may be closer to what might be expected from a profit-motivated dealer (Moyle et al., 2013).

Social, family and peer networks: Cultures of reciprocity and supply as 'normal'.

While the notion of reciprocity has been recognised within commercial supply markets (Coomber 2003), there has also been wide appreciation of the propensity for reciprocity and exchange between social sellers (Blum et al. 1972; Dorn and South, 1990). Empirical data suggest that cultures of reciprocity tend to draw drug users into 'taking their turn', which leads to the supply act being part and parcel of intermittent and regular recreational use. This echoes the basis of the 'mutual societies' described by Dorn, Murji and South (1992: 10-11) as friendship- or acquaintance-based networks of users, 'some of whom, some of the time, will supply drugs to others' and where 'every user is potentially a supplier, and everyone is expected to help out everyone else.' Without exception, all those interviewed within this research study (student and Somerset samples) confirmed that they had shared drugs (for free) and/or given drugs as 'gifts' to friends and, supporting Hamilton (2005), the frequency of this behaviour was most popularly referred to as occurring 'most of the time' and 'all of the time'. In a U.S. study echoing these findings – titled 'You see it everywhere. It's just natural' - but derived from a quite different population and context to ours, Gilliard-Matthews et al. (2015) noted the importance of friendship groups, social networks and / or delinquent peers for adolescent substance use, especially regarding unplanned initial use which occurred as a result of 'hanging out' with friends who were able to supply. Proportionally it seems,

young people are as - or more - likely to have received drugs for free than to have purchased them (Aldridge et al., 2011; Dunn et al., 2007). Other research (Coomber & Turnbull 2007; Duffy et al 2008; Pavis et al., 1997) supports this and provides explanations for sharing behaviours based on the kind of sociability described by this respondent:

> I think if you go in and do it all together, it's more of a, you're all doing it. Whereas if you all go out and buy your own, and then come back and then do it on your own, it's more like … I don't know, it separates you all a bit, sort of thing. I think it's more social if you go in and get it all together, and then do it together as well.
>
> *Tom* (27), Somerset Sample

While some entered into sharing to provide care and control, sociability and convenience, a number of others also remarked on the value of sharing as a form of insurance. Respondents explained that sharing with friends and acquaintances provided a certain amount of back-up in times of drug shortage, when access could not be obtained and when financial capital was low, (this was also the point of the 'mutual societies' described by Dorn, Murji and South, 1992):

> Yeah, I think so, yeah. I think there is a bit of an 'eye for an eye' kind of mentality about that. You like to see it back; because you've offered your mates, [they] will offer you back, if you know what I mean. Kind of if they've got stuff and you don't have the money for it they'll be cool.
>
> Jay (20), Somerset sample

In this sense, the underlying and normalised reciprocal ethos inherent in sharing behaviours (Coomber & Turnbull, 2007) where a gift 'is never free' (Mauss,1990), suggests that this culture commands a certain amount of indebtedness (Gouldner,1960), effectively ensuring that individuals who had previously shared could expect a reciprocal drugs offer whilst providing sufficient rationale for continued participation in social supply.

Friendship, Identity and Trust

Duffy et al (2008) found users of a range of substances reported a high incidence of sharing and gift-giving behaviours among peers because 'it's a social thing', although cannabis users appeared to be the most committed to this practice with many commenting on the high expectation that users would share, with one participant describing it as an 'unwritten rule'. The sharing of illegal drugs such as cannabis has been conceived elsewhere as similar to the trading of non-illegal items such as music, make-up or tobacco (Cullen 2010). Indeed, in their study of 'adolescent cannabis transactions', Coomber and Turnbull (2007: 16-17) proposed that use and access to cannabis revolved around social networking and as such, the social exchange and reciprocity practices involved should not be exclusively viewed as 'dealing' but as 'another social act (among many) that facilitates integration and sociality among the narrow, but sometimes peripheral, social network they wish to access'. For example, Cullen (2010) argues that, through the means of exchange and reciprocal relations, young women who traded cigarettes were able to begin to gain status and learn of group dynamics and rivalries as well as owning a social space in which they could engage in identity formation. Cannabis use has also been strongly reported as significant in helping to form and sustain user identities (Bell et al., 1998; Hammersley et al., 2001). Within this study, such processes

seemed to have particular significance and more generally it appeared that involvement in sharing and supply in a new context - e.g. being at university - provided access to a relatively insular world which offered sociability and a unique culture in which drug use was felt to be relatively normalised and non-taboo:

> Well, it's more widely available and you're surrounded by more people who have been involved in it in the past. Yeah, it's kind of like a learning curve, isn't it, I suppose, so we're just trying out different things and it's just ... I don't know, it seems wrong calling it opportunities but (laughs), that's kind of the way I see it, it's just the opportunities have been there since I've come to university. And also I'm more sort of free and independent, I live by myself, so I'm sort of capable of making those decisions.
>
> Dylan (20), Student Sample

In this world the general involvement of individuals can also be seen as an identity-building exercise which allowed them to establish their place within the social order with other individuals, employing narratives that related mostly to 'shared experiences' and feelings of 'belonging'. Those specifically engaged in *distribution* also described these themes, viewing them as providing general benefits of supply along with notable increases in social status. This was also noted by McPhee (2012: 243):

> Cooperation and bartering were common currencies in several social groupings interviewed for this research. With each group having responsibility for accessing a drug of particular type, they acquired skills that were useful to their social

group, enhancing their status, but also enhancing the social aspect of their lifestyle.

Supporting findings from the *'Illegal Leisure'* literature (Aldridge et al., 2011; Parker, 2000; Parker et al., 1998), the data highlight the perception that drug supply among friends is seen as signalling trust and friendship and rarely conceived as a matter of serious criminal offending. The quote below indicates how important social use and the quality of friendship are seen to be:

> Normal? A lot of us are social users, so if you are getting some then you will get some for your friend. The two go hand in hand. Because they're friends, I know what they've done; I would never entertain the idea of getting stuff for someone I didn't know…it just feels normal getting for friends.

> Fred (25), Somerset Sample

Social supply as Extension of Use

Apart from normalisation occurring at an individual micro-level, the data support the idea that the normalisation of drug use also, in turn, provides a certain level of normalisation within distribution (South, 2004; Coomber, 2004). Small-scale social supply acts, such as 'designated buying', where an individual buys on behalf of the group, appear to have become a normalised activity for drug users:

Absolutely, umm, just sort of, if you're doing it with friends then they'll want to get some stuff too and if they're already going then they'll ask you if you want any stuff picking up, so do you know what I mean? It's quite easy to get into but it doesn't feel serious at all.

Sophie (25), Somerset Sample

A similar arrangement is reported by McPhee (2012: 243), describing 'a small group who access large quantities of certain types of drugs which are then bartered in a social situation'. One in particular explains that she and her partner can access ketamine in bulk, which they then exchange for other drugs:

With most of the parties I go to everyone sort of brings stuff to share. If we bring along a bunch of k [ketamine], someone else might bring m [mephedrone]; some might bring pills so there is usually not that much running around trying to sell drugs to take.

Renee (30's) (McPhee, 2012)

Our data highlight that for the majority of social suppliers, normalisation of supply did not represent a deliberate move up a ladder of supply but instead simply 'came hand in hand' with use. As in the findings of Murphy et al. (1990), moving into supply did not generally represent a conscious decision; instead, the culture of normalisation surrounding 'own use' diminished any perception of the supply aspect as being either calculated or conspicuous:

I think when it comes to having…I think if every weekend you're doing drugs it means 3 days out of 7 you've probably got drugs on you, so having an extra bit doesn't really make much difference. So literally having that extra bit and an exchange doesn't stand out…I literally hadn't thought about it until now, but yeah….

Sarah (29), Somerset Sample

Familiar ideas of social supply, where the supplier buys small amounts for friends, for little or no profit (Duffy et al., 2008; RSA, 2007), and shares or gives 'gifts' to friends, can be easily applied to the normalisation of use but it is more difficult to position 'party buyers' and 'stash-dealers' in this framework because they had to seek out contacts who could supply larger quantities of a substance, and were more likely to obtain these from a less familiar source (such as a commercially motivated drug dealer). Again McPhee (2012: 243) found parallels. In the case of 'H' and her 'social circle of drug using friends there was a 'system' evident whereby they all try to source drugs, and bring supplies of their drug, hoping to barter for other drugs in a social gathering. She explained that some of her friends are known for accessing a particular drug in bulk, and thus having a surplus means that they can use this surplus to bargain and barter for other drugs.' H describes the process as follows:

…quite a lot of my friends bring it, especially with K. They are all there, co-ordinating; getting it brought up from London or flown in (names particular country) …I guess a lot of it is just because there is no other way of getting hold of it and so they actually work out how to do it themselves. It's not something that I've ever done.

H (30's) (McPhee, 2012)

Nonetheless, if small-scale, this activity can still represent a form of social supply transaction that users 'dip in and out of' periodically, as South (2004: 537) found, where respondents - as far as possible - try 'to stay a 'legal' person who happens to use (steps just over the line) and occasionally does some small-scale dealing (takes a few steps more over the line but races back again)'.

On some level, when users engage in the widespread and popular practices of sharing, drug gifts and nominated buying, they are also engaging in supply. When otherwise non-deviant populations purchase large quantities of drugs in order to distribute to non-strangers, this suggests a *meaningful normalisation* of social supply behaviours *per se* but in a dominant legal context where these behaviours are still illegal (with the implications that follow from this). This is heteromorphous behaviour occurring in liminal spaces where normalisation of drug use is accepted and where, in micro-sites of friendship and close social networks, social supply is normalised, accepted and - according to the rules of friendship - may even be expected.

Drifting Into Social Supply?

As well as using normalisation as a theoretical tool to understand social supply behaviour, we would suggest that the idea of drift (Matza, 1964) is important in understanding social supply. Conducting research on a population of juvenile delinquents, Matza's work highlighted the fluidity of young peoples drift into and out of crime; portraying the extent to which 'the delinquent transiently exists in limbo between convention and crime' (1964: 28). For Matza,

delinquents are not especially different from non-delinquents since for the majority of the time they are conventional in both belief and conduct (Downes and Rock, 2007). In this respect, delinquents were not consciously committed to deviant values but, due to low levels of self control, they tended to drift in and out of deviant activity, blurring moral boundaries and rationalising their acts through 'techniques of neutralisation' (Sykes and Matza, 1957). Scholars have since made use of Matza's theoretical position as a way of understanding transitions in and out of drug supply, for both cocaine sellers (Murphy et al., 1990) and suppliers of ecstasy (Ward, 2000, 2010; Murphy et al., 2004). Murphy et al.'s (1990) seminal paper used the concept of drift to make sense of respondents' fluid cocaine supply histories, highlighting the tendency for drug users to drift into supply by virtue of strategies for negotiating the problems concerned with using a prohibited substance or minimising risk/harm. Empirical findings taken from the data presented here suggest that many social suppliers exhibit behaviours consistent with the 'drift and drug supply literature'. One of the key factors that appears to be conducive to 'drift into supply', particularly for cannabis users, is the propensity for regular drug users to try to gain the best deal possible. In attempting to obtain more for their money at a cheaper price, suppliers obtained a larger quantity and distributed excess quantities to friends, drifting into supply as a consequence of buying, rather than choosing to buy for supply purposes. Considering this logic, supply can in some ways be conceived as a *consequence of the buy, rather than the motivating intention* as explored by Brady, below:

> You think, hang on a minute, why would I, for example, just go and get an eighth of skunk which could go in a night, if there were four of five of you...or should I go and get a half ounce which is four times that amount and then maybe I can sell two of them to my friends and end up with two myself...that's basically how it works...a

basic economy of scale...

Brady (27), Somerset Sample

Consistent with the work of Murphy et al., (1990), acting as a 'go-between' (or 'designated buyer') also provided low-level key modes of entry - or ways of drifting - into social supply. In the case of the 'designated buyers', in line with Blum et al., (1972), once an individual became known as someone who potentially had access to drugs, they swiftly *became* the point of access to drugs. With requests from friends to 'get in on the deal', it 'made sense' for everyone (economically) that social suppliers should purchase for them at the same time. Whilst the concept of drift has been subject to some minor criticism (Ferrell, 2012; Hirschi, 2002), it none-the-less appears to provide useful insight into how some of the individuals in these samples found themselves engaged in the supply of recreational drugs as an extension of their relatively normalised drug use. Many of Matza's delinquents were engaged in crimes of an arguably higher magnitude than those engaged in social supply here – if we accept a context of relative acceptability of recreational drug use. Likewise Murphy et al's cocaine suppliers were 'supplying' a drug that at that point in time and in that geographical space was perceived as a 'hard' drug and more serious than many of the 'recreational' drugs (e.g. cannabis, MDMA; ketamine etc.) our users/suppliers were engaged with. The distance of drift/slip needed for non-criminal social suppliers, because the act itself is now closer to the centre and not the margins of behavioural acceptability (Aldridge 2011: 219), is therefore much reduced in terms of drift and neutralisation.

Normalisation and 'Techniques of Neutralisation'

In this data and also McPhee (2012), innovative but individually confined strategies for acquiring drugs can easily develop into what can be perceived as social supply activity. Initial positive experiences of first use, as well as first drug gifts and distribution, can be understood as leading to a 'mastery of the illicit' (Murphy et al., 1990:114), contributing to a decrease in nervousness and thereby encouraging further and more sophisticated participation. Significantly, findings here and in Murphy et al., (1990), suggest that because the use and distribution of recreational drugs was so established and normalised, it can be hard to define at what point 'supply' began, providing a strong indication that drift features in the transition from user to social supplier of drugs. The key point here is that involvement in social supply was not considered 'a major leap down an unknown road' but rather, represented 'a series of short steps down a familiar path' (Murphy et al., 1990: 325). So, the majority of respondents here did not perceive themselves as drug dealers, with many verbalising the feeling of being 'uncomfortable' with such a deviant status and, as in the findings of Mohamed and Fritsvold (2010: 102), actively de-stigmatising themselves through 'mental gymnastics' and providing reasons why their actions could not be compared to 'real' drug dealing:

If you got caught…it's definitely scary, but I suppose that's what's quite exciting… but then thinking back to my uni' days where I did it slightly more regularly, it did become slightly more normalised because you kind of tell yourself that that's part of organising a night out. Like when you go out and put your make-up on or go and buy booze and you just…that's part of organising…

Nicola (27), Somerset Sample

Techniques of neutralisation have been explicated by Sykes and Matza (1957) as the extension of defences to crimes, in the form of justifications for deviance that are seen as valid by the deviant but not by the legal system or society at large' (p.667). Taking social supply - again consistent with other studies (Jacinto et al., 2008; Murphy et al., 2004) - this process involves the counter-posing of narratives that might describe commercial, 'dodgy' and 'immoral' 'drug dealers' - who would have no preference regarding who they sell to and who make their living from dealing drugs - with their own 'story' about their involvement in a non-commercial, socially-orientated activity. A common rationale for the 'neutralisation' (Sykes and Matza, 1957) of any problematic status being attached to social supply behaviours was related to the *inevitability of future transactions* by known contacts. This appeared to provide a justification for perceiving actions in a less problematic way:

> I don't know, I guess I don't really think about it…it's just second nature. It's just like when people know you're going to pick up pills they'll be like 'oh can you get me some?'…it just comes with…I don't know, I imagine if you're the only person doing drugs then it doesn't matter, but if you've got a friend that wants it as well, then you get it…there's no harm in getting it for someone else, if you're already getting it. That's all it is, isn't it?

> Shane (25), Somerset Sample

Interestingly, some reflected on their actions in the wider context, isolating their supply act and again engaging in 'mental gymnastics' (Mohamed & Fritsvold, 2010) as a means of justifying their involvement in supply:

No I never [think of myself as a drug dealer], because, when buying in bulk and supplying friends, you're supplying to people who are buying anyway, so all you're doing is getting a reduced price from a dealer and sorting your friends out. If I go down to Tesco's and buy a big packet of Mars Bars and give them to my mates, I don't see myself as a grocer.

Ralph (29), Somerset Sample

Many had never really considered their actions as supply and certainly not as comparable to drug dealing, an idea which drew responses of shock, offence and disbelief - as in this response from a respondent studying law:

because I study law. Unfortunately, I'm aware of where I stand legally ... I don't know [laughing], just the idea that I know what I do is regarded as that, and I mean even listening to the way you're describing some of the things ... makes me think, "Christ is that…?" I've never thought about it like that, Christ! [laughing].

Duncan (21), Student Sample

The rejection or avoidance of the dealer label by social suppliers has been interpreted as a means of diverting attention away from the illegality of the supply act and as a means of reducing the risk of coming to the attention of the police (Pearson, 2007; Potter, 2009). However, for many social suppliers it is quite likely that they do not have any well-developed awareness of the real possible legal consequences of their activity and see their offences as more akin to possession. In this respect, they were unlikely to be purposefully using the

social supply label as a means of deflecting deviant status, or minimising potential risks from law enforcement. However, this is not to say that those engaged in 'stash buying', 'party buying' or the equivalent of 'home brew' manufacturing are not aware that their supply activity is moving closer to 'dealer territory', which might be accepted as a consequence of buying and supplying larger quantities of a substance. For these participants, normatively applied techniques of neutralisation may be more appropriate but for many of the others, as we have seen, being thought of as 'a dealer' was commonly 'off their radar' and where neutralisation was active it was, due to context and act, 'soft neutralisation' embedded in cultures of use and broader (relative) societal acceptability.

Discussion

While a general process towards the normalisation of drug *use* (Aldridge et al., 2011; Measham & Shiner, 2009) has become tentatively accepted in academic circles and widely considered in media output (Taylor & Potter, 2013), this process has not, thus far, been widely examined in relation to drug *supply* or drug markets. Parker et al., (1998), and later South (2004) and Coomber (2004), argue that the normalisation of drug use is also conducive to a relative normalisation of drug supply. The recent data presented here suggest that social supply practices can indeed be usefully conceived as 'normalised', as understood in terms of being activities that small-scale social suppliers routinely 'drifted' into (Matza, 1964). Consistent with the work of Murphy et al., (1990: 325), applying Matza's theoretical framework of drift helps explain journeys into social supply not so much as conscious decisions, but instead as taking 'short steps down a familiar path' rather than a 'long leap down an unknown road'. Our findings also bear similarities with the research of Jacinto et al., (2008), where respondents drifted into supply by virtue of finding practical solutions to enable their own drug use. For example, in the data presented here, *all* social suppliers had

widely participated in sharing and gift-giving behaviours and as such, the disjuncture *between use and supply had become less distinct or easily observable*, with this process culminating in social supply practices being conceived as 'normal'. Our respondents had also described the value of 'buying more for less' allowing them to purchase a larger quantity of drugs at a cheaper price whilst also providing them with the opportunity to 'sort' friends and thereby ensuring a level of insurance when they could not access drugs themselves. Significantly, with the data indicating that users are able to slip easily into, and become routinely involved in small-scale social supply practices, this also suggests a certain *culture* of *normalisation* (South, 1999) in social supply as well as use. Here social suppliers can be conceived of as actors blurring boundaries between conventionality and criminality and actively managing their drug use (and supply) in the context of an otherwise largely licit lifestyle (South, 2004). In this way, consistent with the findings of Taylor & Potter (2013), the data also suggest that supply behaviours considered more serious, such as buying in larger quantities, are becoming increasingly prevalent and on their own cannot be the defining characteristic of profit-motivated supply (Moyle et al., 2013).

While a generalised culture of normalisation around supply is suggested by the involvement of users in sharing, gift-giving and small-scale 'designated buying' practices, the findings also indicate increasing involvement by otherwise non-deviant, regular recreational users in 'party buying' activity. While these particular (higher level) social supply roles do not symbolise normalised supply practices *per se*, the propensity for *recreational users* to become involved could also be suggestive or indicative of a relative micro-normalisation of more 'involved' levels of social supply *but - importantly – occurring in the context of recreational drug subcultures* (Duff, 2003; 2005). This again adds support to the value of 'normalisation' as a conceptual tool to understand the prevalence of social supply. In policy

terms, the relative 'normalisation' of drug supply as well as drug use points towards a blurring of the boundaries between the roles of user and supplier (Potter, 2009) and should be influencing out-of-step policy, law and guidelines that determine sentencing (Coomber, 2004), for while the Sentencing Council Guidelines (2012) have attempted to acknowledge the 'lesser' role of social supply, they have used an understanding of 'profit' and gain and thus of 'harm' that is not evidence-based and lacks understanding of the social supply milieu (Coomber & Moyle, 2014).

Conclusion

The social supply of recreational drugs is, arguably, not just the 'other side of the coin' of normalised recreational drug use but is inextricably fused with it and/or a 'productive' outcome arising from it. One has created the other and as Parker (2000) suggests, once in place, each provides the other with opportunities to neutralise the perceived deviance present in either use or supply. In this sense, as normalised use has become relatively more accepted within these micro-sites of activity, then the less prevalent (in comparison to use) involvement in forms of social supply to friends and acquaintances has also grown with it. Whilst social supply (as with 'dealing proper' and also user-dealing; Coomber, 2015) is, perhaps unsurprisingly, relatively normalised within the micro-sites of use/transaction among those involved, there is both some visceral and other evidence that seeing *social* supply as 'real' supply, the kind associated with 'pushers' and 'evil drug dealers' (Coomber, 2006), is problematic for the wider public too. By the time of the publication of the 2012 Sentencing Council Guidelines in England and Wales, despite the actual guidelines being out of step with the reality of social supply and thus being only able to impact minimally on sentencing (Coomber & Moyle 2014), this none-the-less indicated a broader macro-level, relative

acceptance of social supply as a lesser form of crime than drug dealing proper. In this way we can see that the social supply of drugs has, to a large extent, become normalised within the micro-sites of everyday recreational drug use. At the same time, it has also become increasingly recognised by a broader community (that includes some popular media representation, policing activity and the courts) as something qualitatively distinct from 'real dealing'.

Declaration: There are no conflicts of interest related to this paper.

References

Aldridge, J., Measham, F., Parker, H., & Williams, L. (2011). Illegal leisure revisited: changing patterns of alcohol and drug use in adolescents and young adults. London: Routledge.

Bell, R., Pavis, S., Cunningham-Burley, S. & Amos, A. (1998). Young men's use of cannabis: exploring changes in meaning and context over time. Drugs: Education, Prevention and Policy, 5, 141-155

Biernacki, P., & Waldorf, D. (1981). Snowball sampling: Problems and techniques of chain referral sampling. Sociological methods & research, 10(2), 141-163.

Blum, RH and Associates (1972). The dream sellers. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

Coomber, R. (2003). There's no such thing as a free lunch: How "freebies" and "credit" operate as part of rational drug market activity. *Journal of Drug Issues*, *33*(4), 939-962.

Coomber, R. (2004). Drug use and drug market intersections. Addiction Research & Theory, 12, 6, 501-505.

Coomber, R. (2006). Pusher myths: re-situating the drug dealer. London: Free Association.

Coomber, R. (2015). A tale of two cities: understanding differences in levels of heroin/crack market related violence - a two city comparison. Criminal Justice Review, 40, 1, 7-31.

Coomber, R., & Moyle, L. (2014). Beyond drug dealing: developing and extending the social supply of drugs to 'minimally commercial supply. Drugs: Education, Prevention & Policy, 21, 2.

Coomber, R., Moyle, L., & South, N. (2016) Reflections on three decades of research on 'social supply' in the UK. In C. Bernard and B.Werse (Eds.), Friendly business - international research on social supply, self-supply and small-scale drug dealing. Heidelberg: Springer..

Coomber, R., & Turnbull, P. (2007). Arenas of drug transaction: adolescent cannabis transactions in England. Journal of Drug Issues, 37, 4, 845.

Cressy, D. (2014) The lingering questions. Nature, 513, 24-26.

Crime Survey for England and Wales. (2013) Drug Misuse: Findings from the 2012 to 2013 Crime Survey for England and Wales. London: Home Office.

Cullen, F. (2010). Two's up and poncing fags: young women's smoking practices, reciprocity and friendship. Gender & Education, 22, 5, 491-504.

Dorn, N., Murji, K., & South, N. (1992), Traffickers: drug markets and law enforcement. London: Routledge.

Dorn, N., & South, N. (1990). Drug markets and law enforcement. British Journal of Criminology, 30(2), 171-188.

Duff, C. (2003). The importance of culture and context: rethinking risk and risk management in young drug using populations. Health, Risk & Society, 5, 3, 285-299.

Duff, C. (2005). Party drugs and party people: examining the 'normalization' of recreational drug use in Melbourne, Australia. International Journal of Drug Policy, 16, 3, 161-170.

Duffy, M., Schafer, N., Coomber, R., O'Connell, L., & Turnbull, P. (2008). Cannabis supply and young people: 'It's a social thing'. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Dunn, M., Degenhardt, L., Campbell, G., George, J., Johnston, J., Kinner, S., Matthews, A., Newman, J., & White, M. (2007). Findings from the Ecstasy and related drugs reporting system. NDARC Monograph 61. Sydney: National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre.

Drummond and Upson. (2014). Electronic cigarettes. Potential harms and benefits. Annals of the American Thoracic Society, 11, 2, 236-242.

Economist, The. (2015). Daily chart: mapping marijuana. January 20th, The Economist.

http://www.economist.com/blogs/graphicdetail/2015/01/daily-chart-11

accessed April 26th 2015.

EMCDDA. (2015). The internet and drug markets, EMCDDA:

http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/technical-reports/internet-drug-markets

Ferrell, J. (2012) 'Outline of a Criminology of Drift,' in S. Hall and S. Winlow, (eds), *New Directions in Criminological Theory*. London: Routledge,

Gilliard-Matthews, S., Stevens, R., Nilsen, M., and Dunaev, J. (2015). You see it everywhere. It's just natural: contextualizing the role of peers, family and neighbourhood in initial substance use. Deviant Behavior, 36, 6, 492-509.

Gouldner, A. W. (1960). The norm of reciprocity: A preliminary statement. American Sociological Review, 25, 2,161-178.

Hamilton, J.P. (2005). Receiving marijuana and cocaine as gifts and through sharing. Substance Use & Misuse, 40, 361-368.

Hammersley, R., Jenkins, R., & Reid, M. (2001) Cannabis use and social identity. Addiction Research & Theory, 9, 2, 133-150.

Hirschi, T. (2002). *Causes of delinquency.*. London: Transaction publishers.

Jacinto, C., Duterte, M., Sales, P., & Murphy, S. (2008), I'm not a real dealer: the identity process of ecstasy sellers. Journal of Drug Issues, 38, 2, 419-444.

Matza, D. (1964). Delinquency & drift. New Jersey: Transaction Publications.

Mauss, M. (1990). The gift. New York: Norton.

McPhee, J. I. (2012). The intentionally unseen: exploring the illicit drug use of non-treatment seeking drug users in Scotland. PhD Thesis, University of Stirling

Measham, F., & Shiner M. (2009). The legacy of 'normalisation': the role of classical and contemporary criminological theory in understanding young people's drug use. International Journal of Drug Policy, 20, 6, 502-508.

Measham, F., & South, N (2012) Drugs, alcohol and crime. In M. Maguire., R. Morgan & R. Reiner (Eds.), The Oxford Handbook of Criminology. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mohamed, A., and Fritzvold, E. (2010). Dorm room dealers: Drugs and the privileges of race and class. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.

Moyle, L. (2013). An exploration of how the social supply and user-dealer supply of illicit drugs differs to conventional notions of drug dealing and consideration of the consequences of this for sentencing policy. PhD Thesis, University of Plymouth.

Moyle, L., Coomber, R., & Lowther, J. (2013). Crushing a walnut with a sledgehammer? analysing the penal response to the social supply of illicit drugs. *Social & Legal Studies*, *22,* 4, 553.

Murphy, S., Waldorf, D. & Reinarman, C. (1990). Drifting into dealing: becoming a cocaine seller. Qualitative Sociology, 13, 4, 321-343.

Murphy, S., Sales, P., Duterte, M., & Jacinto, C. (2004). A qualitative study of ecstasy sellers in the San Francisco Bay area. Final Report, National Institute of Justice: http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/209267.pdf

Nicholas, R (2008) The Impacts of Social Networks and Not-For-Profit Illicit Drug Dealing on Illicit Dug Markets in Australia, Tasmania: National Drug Law Research Fund

Parker, H. (2000). How young Britons obtain their drugs: drugs transactions at the point of consumption. Crime Prevention Studies, 11, 59-82.

Parker, H., & Measham, F. (1994). Pick 'n' mix*:* changing patterns of illicit drug use amongst 1990s adolescents. Drugs: Education, Prevention & Policy, 1, 5–13.

Parker, H. J., Measham, F., & Aldridge, J. (1995). Drugs futures: changing patterns of drug use amongst English youth. London: Institute for the Study of Drug Dependence

Parker, H., Aldridge, J. & Measham, F. (1998). Illegal leisure: The normalization of adolescent recreational drug use. London: Routledge.

Pavis, S., Cunningham-Burley, S., & Amos, A. (1997). Alcohol consumption and young people: exploring meaning and social context. Health Education Research, 12, 3, 311-322.

Pearson, G. (2001). Normal drug use. Substance Use & Misuse, 36, 1-2, 167-200.

Pearson, G. (2007). Drug markets and dealing: from 'street dealer' to 'Mr Big'. In M. Simpson, T. Shildrick & R. MacDonald, (Eds.), Drugs in Britain: Supply, consumption and control. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Police Foundation, (2000). Drugs and the law: Report of the Independent Inquiry into the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. London: The Police Foundation

Potter, G. (2009). Exploring retail level drug distribution: social supply, 'real' dealers and the user/dealer interface. Demetrovics, T., Fountain, J. and Kraus, L., (Eds.), Old and new policies, theories, research methods and drug users across Europe. Lengerich: Pabst.

RSA. (2007). Drugs – the facts: The Report of the RSA Commission on Illegal Drugs, Communities and Public Policy. London: Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce.

Shearer, J, Johnston, J., Fry, C. L. & Collins, L. (2007). Contemporary cocaine use patterns and associated harms in Melbourne and Sydney, Australia. Drug and Alcohol Review, 26(5), 537-543

Shiner, M. & Newburn, T. (1997). Definitely, maybe not? The normalisation of recreational drug use amongst young people. Sociology, 31, 3, 511.

Shiner, M & Newburn, T. (1999). Taking tea with Noel: the place and meaning of drug use in everyday life. In N. South (Ed.), Drugs: Cultures, controls and everyday life. London: Sage.

South, N. (1999). Debating drugs and everyday life: normalisation, prohibition and 'otherness'. In N. South (Ed.), Drugs: Cultures, controls and everyday life (pp. 1-15). London: Sage.

South, N. (2004). Managing work, hedonism and 'the borderline' between the legal and illegal markets: Two case studies of recreational heavy drug users. Addiction Research & Theory, 12, 6, 525-538.

Sykes, G. & Matza, D. (1957). Techniques of neutralization: A theory of delinquency. American Sociological Review, 22, 6, 664-670.

Taylor, M., & Potter, G. R. (2013). From 'social supply' to 'real dealing': drift, friendship, and trust in drug dealing careers. Journal of Drug Issues, 43, 4, 392-406.

Triggle, N. (2014). E-cigarettes: Debate - and confusion - is natural. BBC News, Health, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-29071004

USA Today (2014). http://www.usatoday.com/story/money/business/2014/03/15/marijuana-vaporizing-gains/6042675/; http://www.entrepreneur.com/article/241548)

Ward, J. (2010) *Flashback: drugs and dealing in the golden age of the London rave scene.*

Crime Ethnography Series . Willan Publishing, Cullompton,

Winstock A, Griffiths P and Stewart D (2001) Drugs and the dance music scene: A survey of currentdrug use patterns among a sample of dance music enthusiasts in the UK. Drug and Alcohol Dependence 64(1): 9–17.