

THE VICTIMIZATION–TERMINATION LINK*

SCOTT JACQUES

RICHARD WRIGHT

Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice
University of Missouri—St. Louis

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The life histories of drug dealers suggest that victimizations sometimes mark turning points toward the end of criminal careers, which is a criminologically important but neglected empirical connection that we label the “victimization–termination link.” We theorize this link thusly: When serious victimizations occur in the context of crime, a break from the customary provides an opportune situation for adaptation, and when victims have social bonds and agency, when they define the event as the result of their own criminal involvement, and when they find other adaptations unattractive, criminal-victims are likely to adapt by terminating crime. We illustrate this desistance process with qualitative data obtained through interviews with young, middle-class drug dealers. We conclude by exploring promising avenues for future work.

It takes only a minute to change one’s whole life course.

—Stanley (Shaw, 1930: 89)

To date, life-course criminology has focused primarily on the ways in which positive life events (e.g., marriage or gaining employment) can serve as positive turning points toward the termination of law-breaking and the ways in which negative life events (e.g., imprisonment, divorce, or losing employment) can serve as negative turning points that lead to or exacerbate criminal behavior (Laub and Sampson, 2003; Sampson and Laub, 1993, 1997). Less empirical or theoretical attention has been paid to the ways in which *negative* life events, under certain circumstances, can serve

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as *positive* turning points toward the termination of crime (for empirical examples, see Bennett, 1986: 93; Cusson and Pinsonneault, 1986: 73–5; Decker and Lauritsen, 2002; Haggård, Gumpert, and Grann, 2001: 1055–6; Laub and Sampson, 2003: 139; Sampson and Laub, 1993: 223–4, 230–1; Sutherland, 1937: 183–91).

Illicit drug dealers often experience victimization—a negative event—because they have little access to formal mediation and so are rational targets for predators such as robbers and burglars (Jacobs, 2000; Wright and Decker, 1994, 1997). Such victimizations can be contagious to the extent that they provoke retaliation (Jacobs and Wright, 2006). Retaliation is relatively common in illicit drug markets because criminal-victims are unlikely to contact the police or file a lawsuit in court (Black, 1983; Goldstein et al., 1997; Jacobs, 2000; Topalli, Wright, and Fornango, 2002). Nevertheless, the empirical fact remains that *victimizations do not always lead to retaliation* (Jacques and Wright, 2008a). Instead, some drug dealers respond to victimization by ending their own illicit entrepreneurial career.

This article contributes to criminology and life-course theory by exploring and explicating the role of one kind of negative event, victimization, as a positive turning point toward the termination of a negative trajectory, illicit drug dealing. The stories of drug dealers reveal that victimizations can mark turning points toward the end of criminal careers, a criminologically important but neglected empirical connection we term the “victimization–termination link.” We suggest a theory of this link that uses the logic of the life-course perspective (Elder, 1985) and Laub and Sampson’s (2003) age-graded theory of social control: When serious victimizations occur in the context of crime, a break from the customary provides an opportune situation for adaptation, and when victims have social bonds and agency, when they define the event as the result of their own criminal involvement, and when they find other adaptations unattractive, criminal-victims are likely to adapt by terminating crime.¹ We illustrate our theory of the victimization–termination link with qualitative data obtained through in-depth interviews with young, middle-class drug dealers recruited from the suburbs of Atlanta, Georgia.

We begin by briefly summarizing our theoretical lens (Elder, 1985; Laub and Sampson, 2003). We then explicate the use of life-course concepts and theory for making sense of the empirical connection between victimization and termination. After outlining our research method, we draw on qualitative data obtained from young, middle-class drug dealers to illustrate the theory. We conclude by discussing the implications of our findings for

1. As we note toward the end of this article, the proposed theory is not necessarily *the* explanation of the victimization–termination link but is rather one of many theoretical options for making sense of the relationship.

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future work in criminology. The primary goal of this article is to stimulate theorizing and testing aimed at verifying, explaining, or discrediting the empirical connection between victimization and termination.

LIFE-COURSE CRIMINOLOGY

The life-course perspective is arguably “the pre-eminent theoretical orientation in the study of lives” (Elder, Johnson, and Crosnoe, 2003: 3). The “pioneering study” (Elder, 1985: 24) of the life-course perspective is Thomas and Znaniecki’s (1918–1920) *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*. Since publication of that study, and especially in recent decades, the life-course paradigm has been applied to many forms of behavior (see Mortimer and Shanahan, 2003) and has been particularly fruitful in understanding onset, persistence, and desistance in crime (see, e.g., Laub and Sampson, 2003; Moffitt, 1993, 2006; Sampson and Laub, 1993).

Three key concepts in the life-course perspective are *trajectories*, *transitions*, and *turning points* (Elder, 1985). Any given life moves through various trajectories—“pathways or lines of development” (Laub, Sampson, and Sweeten, 2006: 314), and these may differ in direction, degree, and rate of change (Elder, 1985: 31). A person, for instance, may be on a more or less positive trajectory—such as having employment and a stable family life—or be on a more or less negative trajectory—such as engaging in criminal activity on a daily basis. Trajectories represent long-term patterns in life, whereas the notion of transitions refers to the “short-term events embedded in trajectories” (Laub, Sampson, and Sweeten, 2006: 314). Transitions, like trajectories, can be positive or negative; positive transitions, for example, include becoming married or employed, and negative ones include divorce, being fired, or being arrested. Transitions are important to understanding trajectories because “[s]ome events are important turning points in life—they redirect paths” (Elder, 1985: 35). “A major concept in [the life-course perspective] is the dynamic process whereby the interlocking nature of trajectories and transitions generates *turning points* or a change in life course” (Laub and Sampson, 1993: 304). In other words, some life events—negative or positive—mark an important change in the direction of a life trajectory.

“Adaptation to life events is crucial because the same event . . . followed by different adaptations can lead to different trajectories” (Laub and Sampson, 1993: 304). An important adaptation in understanding criminal trajectories, transitions, and turning points is the termination of crime that results from the process of desistance. The conceptual difference between termination and desistance is subtle but important:

Termination is the point at which one stops criminal activity, whereas desistance is the causal process that supports the termination of

offending. Although it is difficult to ascertain when the process of desistance begins, it is apparent that it continues after the termination of offending. That is, the process of desistance maintains the continued state of non-offending. Thus both termination and the process of desistance need to be considered in understanding cessation from offending. By using different terms for these distinct phenomena, we separate termination (the outcome) from the dynamics underlying the process of desistance (the cause), which have been confounded in the literature to date. The termination of offending is characterized by the absence of continued offending (a nonevent). . . . Desistance, by contrast, evolves over time in a process (Laub and Sampson, 2003: 21–2; also see Laub and Sampson, 2001).

Laub and Sampson's (2003) revised, age-graded theory of social control attempts to make sense of why some persons desist from crime and others persist in their criminal careers. According to that theory, the three causal influences on desistance and the resulting termination of crime are social bonds, routine activities, and human agency.² Simply put, Laub and Sampson's theory predicts that criminal involvement varies inversely with the strength/quantity of social bonds, structured routine activities, and human agency—"purposeful execution of choice and individual will" (Sampson and Laub, 2005: 176). Thus, termination of crime should result from events and transitions that increase social bonds, structured activities, and human agency; conversely, criminal activity should increase as a person loses social bonds, structured activities, and human agency. In sum, differences in social bonds, routine activities, and human agency are the factors that produce variable adaptations to life events and transitions, which, in turn, alter life trajectories. (For a review of the empirical validity of the theory, see Laub, Sampson, and Sweeten, 2006: 324–7.)

THEORIZING THE VICTIMIZATION–TERMINATION LINK

Existing social bonds, routine activities, and human agency may not always be powerful enough to prevent the onset or result in the termination of crime (Laub and Sampson, 2003; Sampson and Laub, 1993). Control theories seek to explain why people do not commit crime (see, among many others, Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990; Hirschi, 1969; Laub and

2. A fourth factor in desistance and persistence in crime is "random developmental noise," which "conceives of development as the constant interaction between individuals and their environment, coupled with the factor of chance" (Laub, Sampson, and Sweeten, 2006: 323).

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Sampson, 2003). The experiences of some middle-class drug dealers suggest that victimizations experienced in the context of drug dealing can be turning points toward termination—a life trajectory with more control.

We suggest the following line of reasoning: “Opportune situations for modifications or a change in course are those which represent a break from the customary, a disturbance of habit in which customary behavior can no longer be maintained” (Elder, 1985: 42). For drug dealers who are victimized in the course of their work, a “break from the customary”—being in control of drugs—is experienced, and this may lead to “a disturbance of habit in which a customary behavior can no longer be maintained,” namely drug dealing. “[A]daptations to crisis situations are ways of dealing with resources and options in order to achieve control” (1985: 42). An adaptation that may flow from personal victimization (a negative event) suffered while engaging in drug dealing (a negative trajectory) is the termination of drug dealing (a positive turning point and transition). By terminating (controlling) one’s drug dealing, the probability of victimization is reduced (the crime of others is controlled), and the life course experiences a turning point toward a more positive trajectory.

According to Elder, the outcome of turning points cannot be appraised without taking into account four sets of variables: “(1) the nature of the event or transition, its severity, duration, and so on; (2) the resources, beliefs, and experiences people bring to the situation; (3) how the situation or event is defined; and (4) resulting lines of adaptation as chosen from available alternatives” (1985: 35). We suggest that termination is an adaptation that follows severe victimizations of drug dealers (first variable) with social bonds and agency (second variable) who define their victimizations as the result of their own criminal involvement (third variable) and find other adaptations, such as retaliation, to be unattractive (fourth variable).

In sum, then, given the existence of social bonds and human agency (Laub and Sampson, 2003), serious victimizations that drug dealers define as the outcome of their own law-breaking can increase the probability of termination. Although victimization is a negative event, *if the experience occurs while participating in crime*, then it may serve as a turning point toward the termination of offending because termination is an adaptation that allows persons to gain control over their lives and to reduce the probability of future victimization. In this respect, negative life events can be positive turning points that mark a transition to a new life trajectory with more control.

After reviewing our research method, this article draws on the experiences of young, middle-class drug dealers to illustrate the theoretical process described above. To be clear, the objective here is not to test our theory but rather to demonstrate that dealers themselves associate social

bonds, agency, and victimization with their termination and, therefore, that the victimization–termination link seems to be a fruitful line of inquiry for future criminological work.

METHOD

“[M]uch research on criminal careers has been quantitative. While it has generated important insights, more qualitative work is needed into subjects’ lives” (Piquero, Farrington, and Blumstein, 2003: 481). “Qualitative data . . . are crucial in uncovering the social processes underlying stability and change in criminal and deviant behavior” and “are particularly useful in suggesting important areas for future research consideration” (Sampson and Laub, 1993: 251–2; see, e.g., Giordano, Schroeder, and Cernkovich, 2007; Laub and Sampson, 1993; Maruna, 2001; Shaw, 1930, 1931, 1938; Shover, 1996; Sutherland, 1937).

This article relies on the in-depth analysis of interviews with two drug sellers, Pete and Christian, drawn from a larger study of drug dealers in Atlanta and St. Louis (for details, see Jacques and Wright, 2008a: 224–5, 2008b). Pete and Christian both are white. At the time of the interview, both were in their early 20s, enrolled in college, and had never been arrested. According to the Census Bureau, the town in which Pete and Christian went to high school is about 90 percent white, 90 percent of adults have a high-school degree or higher, and the median household income is almost \$70,000.³

Pete and Christian were recruited using a straightforward purposive sampling strategy; we approached and asked for their cooperation because we knew they were formerly involved in drug dealing. They were not compensated for participation. The interviews lasted about 1 hour, were semistructured, and were conducted in an informal manner. The contours of individual interviews varied, although each ultimately addressed the preidentified focal topics of the project.

As with any study based on interviews, ours, too, raises concerns that Pete and Christian may have resorted to lying or distortion. To minimize such concerns, they were promised confidentiality and made aware of their rights as research participants through an informed consent protocol that was read at the beginning of the interview. Comments initially deemed unusual or unfounded were probed to reveal and, if possible, resolve inconsistencies. Despite these safeguards, it is possible that the participants lied or embellished their accounts.

3. To protect the confidentiality of participants, we cannot reveal the name of the town. Accordingly, we have not provided a full reference for the source information on the town’s statistics.

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Data were analyzed manually. Transcripts were read and hand-coded, using the life-course perspective and theory (Elder, 1985; Laub and Sampson, 2003) to guide the organizational framework. It is important to point out that we are not using the data to test any aspect of life-course theory. Our objective is more exploratory than confirmatory: to use qualitative data to demonstrate that dealers themselves associate social bonds, agency, and victimization with their termination and, therefore, that the victimization–termination link should be explored more in future work.

EVIDENCE FOR A VICTIMIZATION–TERMINATION LINK

We suggest above that victimizations that occur in the context of crime provide drug dealers with an opportune situation for adaptation and that the adaptation of termination follows from 1) severe victimizations of drug dealers, 2) who have social bonds and agency, 3) who define the victimizations as the result of their own crime, and 4) who find alternative adaptations, such as violent retaliation, to be unattractive. In this way, a negative life event, victimization, can be a positive turning point that marks a transition toward a life trajectory with more control and less crime.

SOCIAL BONDS + VICTIMIZATION → TERMINATION

“In its most general sense, ‘social control’ refers to the regulation of human behavior” (Sampson, 1986: 276). As observed in the work of Hirschi (1969) and Sampson and Laub (1993), the control tradition in criminology is especially concerned with persons’ “bonds to family, school, and community, which affect or embody the social controls that account for the costs of delinquency” (Kornhauser, 1978: 25). Crime can be contained through internal (self-invoked) or external (other-invoked) controls and direct (purposeful) or indirect (by-product) actions (1978: 24). This article is interested in how direct internal controls and direct external controls serve as mechanisms that intertwine with victimization to lead to termination.

“Direct internal controls are manifested in guilt and shame, the products of effective socialization, which varies across persons and over the lifetime of a person. . . . Direct external controls are the products of scrutiny, supervision, and surveillance, designed to preclude, deter, or detect deviance” (Kornhauser, 1978: 24). When a person experiences direct internal control or is subject to direct external control, the social bond of the person is strengthened. If a dealer’s victimization leads to shame or regret or promotes greater levels of supervision and intervention by family, then that victimization has interacted with social control and strengthened the social bond. If a dealer’s bond before victimization is “strong” but not

“strong enough” to control crime, then the strengthening of the bond that follows victimization may result in the termination of drug dealing.

Pete’s story is illustrative of how victimization can interact with direct internal controls, namely shame, and direct external controls, namely supervision and punishment applied by family. Before termination, of course, comes onset, and Pete’s termination can be better understood by knowing the conditions surrounding the onset of his drug dealing career:

Pete: The first time I bought an ounce [28 grams of marijuana], I bought it for 350 bucks and sold all of it but an eighth [3.5 grams, typically worth \$50 at the retail level] . . .

Interviewer: Why did you decide to get an ounce and sell it like you did?

Pete: So I didn’t have to pay for the weed I wanted to smoke . . .

Interviewer: So take me along this time line of selling.

Pete: Once I bought one for \$350, and then the next time I bought an ounce for like \$325; I got it cheaper. And, actually, I made like 50 bucks and got to keep a sixteenth [1.75 grams] of it for free [to smoke]. And then I started trying to make profit, and profit, and profit. I’d buy an ounce—try to make a little more money, buy an ounce—try to make a little more money. And then eventually when I had enough money, I started buying two ounces, and then more and more, gradually and gradually When I started it was for free drugs, and then as I went along it was like, “Wow, the more I buy, the cheaper I get it, and the more I sell, the more money I can make and the more I can smoke.”

Interviewer: How old were you at this point?

Pete: 17, a senior in high school.

The drug-dealing life was “good” to Pete, but, as they say, all good things must come to an end. Having sold marijuana for almost 6 months, the desistance process for Pete began on the night he was “set up” and violently victimized in the parking lot of a neighborhood pool:

Pete: I was looking for a QP [quarter pound], and most of my regular guys [suppliers] didn’t have it. I got a call from a kid that I thought was my friend, and he told me he could get it for me: “I hear you’re looking for some weed, and I can get you a QP.” I said, “Yeah.” He was like, “Well come pick me up, and we’ll go get it.” So I went and picked him up, met these people They said, “You got the money?” I said, “Yeah, I got the money.” They were like, “Okay, let me see it, and I’ll go get it.” I was like, “I don’t think so. I’ll come with you, or you can go and get it and come back.” So I got out of the car [and then] got hit in the side of the face I acted as though I was knocked out and lay on the ground face down. I had the money in my

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jacket pocket . . . and I felt somebody drag me and roll me over to try and get the money, and when they did that, I grabbed them, pulled them down, got up, and got in my jeep and drove off.

Interviewer: Really?

Pete: Yeah.

Interviewer: How did you pull him down?

Pete: Just grabbed his shirt and pulled him.

Interviewer: OK.

Pete: They were wearing masks.

Interviewer: How many were there?

Pete: Two of them.

Interviewer: Where did you meet them up at?

Pete: We met at a neighborhood pool.

Interviewer: So once it was done, you just left, you said?

Pete: Yeah.

Interviewer: And what did you do? What were you thinking to yourself?

Pete: "Shit, that sucks."

Interviewer: Were you hurt?

Pete: I didn't have any broken bones or anything. I think I dislocated one joint, but that's about it. And I was beat up, dude. I was black and blue all over.

Interviewer: What did you decide to do? Like, what were you going through in your head? Were you thinking about trying to get back at these guys? Did you know who it was?

Pete: I dunno, man. I really can't even tell you what I was thinking when it happened. I was thinking . . . well, I didn't even realize I was getting jumped until I got hit in the face about three times. First time I got hit, it made me like dazed, you know. Then I was like, "Shit, shit, they're trying to steal my money." . . . I got out and started driving off, [and] I was like, "What the fuck? What the hell? What the hell's going on?" And I was at a party at one of my friend's houses just before. Not a party, but we just had a little get-together, so I went back over there, went to his house, [and] got in the shower 'cause I was bleeding everywhere. And, yeah, then we were trying to find out who did it.

Interviewer: What do you mean, "We were trying to find out who did it?" How did you do that?

Pete: Me and my friends.

Interviewer: And how did you go about trying to find out who did it?

Pete: We called the kid that set me up, and he lied and said . . . you know, he bullshit us and said, "Oh, I got hit in the face, too. I don't know what happened. Blah-blah-blah." . . . He said, "Dude, I don't know what happened, man, because I got hit in the face, too, 'cause

the guy's not really my good friend. I just kind of know him a little bit. Blah-blah-blah. I can't believe they did that to us." I'm like, "All right, man." I sort of believed him at first 'cause I didn't think he would do something like that to me, but he did. . . . I was like, "Well, alright, but I'm gonna find out who did this." Basically, . . . I didn't really care. . . . I didn't know if these guys were trying to kill me or what, you know. I was just glad that I was fucking alive 'cause I had bigger things on my mind.

Receiving a black eye and almost losing more than \$1,000 in cash were not, according to Pete, the only, or even the worst, negative events he experienced that week—a week that marked a turning point toward a more conventional trajectory. As evidenced in the story below, a victimization experienced in the context of drug dealing can be a turning point toward termination by contributing to the production of direct internal controls, such as regret, guilt, and shame, and direct external controls, such as supervision and shaming by family members.

Pete: I had to go to my grandfather's funeral the next day, in front of all my family, beat the fuck up because I was trying to sell weed. . . . That's the thing in my life that I regret most in my life ever, having my whole entire family having to see me all beat up because I was selling weed.

Interviewer: Did they know that?

Pete: They knew.

Interviewer: How did they know?

Pete: I told them someone tried to steal my car and blah-blah-blah. I told them a bullshit story, but everyone knew.

Interviewer: Who did you tell a bullshit story to?

Pete: My whole family, my parents, everybody. My parents didn't buy it. Everyone else was like, "Oh, really, that's awful!" But I know everyone in my family, and they knew I was bullshitting to them.

Interviewer: So you never told your parents what happened?

Pete: Eventually, I told my parents what really happened.

Interviewer: How long did it take you to tell them?

Pete: About a week after that happened. . . . Christmas Eve. . . .

Interviewer: And what brought that on?

Pete: My mom asked me if I was selling drugs because she knew nobody was going to steal my fucking car. . . . She said, "I know you're selling weed." I was like, "Why?" She said, "Because of this," and she showed me . . . \$1,000 I had and just a stash of cash [I had] in my room.

Interviewer: So what did you say?

Pete: I was like, "Damn." I got mad at first and said, "No, I've just been saving up money" and just kept trying to lie.

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Interviewer: Why did you do that?

Pete: 'Cause I didn't want my parents to think that I was selling drugs.

Interviewer: Why not?

Pete: Because I didn't want them to be disappointed in me.

Interviewer: Why would they be disappointed in you if you were selling drugs?

Pete: . . . it's just the concept of "He's a drug dealer," you know. All these . . . women say, "Oh, he's a drug dealer, he's a drug dealer, scum of the earth," like that's the fucking title given to drug dealers, and I didn't want to be that, and I didn't want anybody to know that's what I was.

Interviewer: And yet you still sold drugs?

Pete: Yes, because I didn't think that I was [a bad person]. I still don't think I was, for selling weed. . . . I wasn't a bad person. Yeah, I sold drugs that were illegal—I mean, I don't think they should be illegal, but that's not what it's about. I dunno, I just don't think I fit the description of what everyone thinks a drug dealer is—what everybody makes out a drug dealer to be.

Interviewer: Which is what?

Pete: Like a violent person who steals, fucking has guns, is sketched out, all tripped out on drugs and all, [and] has no self-control.

Interviewer: Oh, OK. So did you quit dealing then? When did you quit dealing?

Pete: I quit like 2 weeks after I had that confrontation with my mom.

Interviewer: So you got jumped and you quit dealing?

Pete: No, I got jumped, and then I kept trying to buy the weed, and then I found the weed, and then my mom was like, "Yeah, you're selling, blah-blah-blah," and I sold the rest of the weed I had.

Interviewer: Which was how much?

Pete: Like a QP. I bought a QP and sold it in ounces, and then I had that confrontation with my mom, on Christmas Eve. I was down and felt like shit. My parents knew that I was selling weed, and my parents thought that I was a bad person because of it. . . . My dad said I was an idiot. . . . He just talked down to me like I wasn't a person, you know, like I was a fucking dog or something. For about a week, 2 weeks, I felt like shit. . . .

Interviewer: And what about your mom?

Pete: My mom was like, "I can't believe this has happened, but it's alright. I still love you." . . . She said I was lucky they didn't kill me. Mom was just scared.

Interviewer: And she told you that or you just felt that?

Pete: She told me that.

Interviewer: OK, and do you have any other family members like brothers or sisters?

Pete: Yeah.

Interviewer: What do you have?

Pete: I have two sisters and a brother. . . .

Interviewer: And what did they say about it?

Pete: They said that I'm stupid.

Pete was victimized in an act of violent predation, and although this act did not result in immediate termination, the incident did spur the desistance process that resulted in termination. The victimization led Pete to experience greater levels of social control, and so his bond was strengthened. When Pete's extended family saw his black eye at the funeral and consoled him, Pete experienced internal direct control, namely, regret and shame (see Kornhauser, 1978: 25). Pete said, "That's the thing in my life that I regret most in my life ever, having my whole entire family having to see me *all beat up because I was selling weed*" (emphasis added). Shame and regret related to victimization and drug dealing strengthen the social bond and thereby reduce the probability of future drug dealing.

The victimization also led Pete to experience greater levels of direct external control, such as "scrutiny . . . and surveillance" (Kornhauser, 1978: 25). Pete's parents were suspicious that their son was involved in crime because victimization is a rare event in their community. For that reason, Pete's mom engaged in surveillance by going into his room and searching for evidence of deviance, which resulted in her finding more than \$1,000 in cash. After finding the suspected drug money, Pete's mother and father scrutinized and shamed their child (Braithwaite, 1989; Sampson and Laub, 1993: 68). Pete's father told him he was an "idiot" and treated him as if he "wasn't a person" and like "a fucking dog or something"; his siblings simply told him that he was "stupid." Pete's mother, however, applied social control through expressions of caring and concern. The direct external control applied to Pete by his family resulted in greater levels of internal direct control, as he felt "down" and "like shit" for a couple weeks after the victimization and confrontation with his family. Direct external control and direct internal control strengthen the bond, and Pete's victimization led him to experience greater levels of control on both fronts, thereby becoming more tied to society.

Although social bonds are an important ingredient in the termination equation, some lives, such as Pete's, require the addition of another ingredient that serves to "kick start" social control and strengthen social bonds. Victimization, at least in the life of Pete, was that ingredient—it enhanced social control and, in turn, social bonds. Pete's victimization resulted in him experiencing regret and shame and being subjected to greater levels of surveillance and scrutiny by his family. Victimization, a negative event

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in Pete's life, provided an opportune situation for a positive adaptation and change in his life—the termination of drug dealing. Victimization and social bonds interacted in a way that produced Pete's desistance from drug dealing and the termination of that activity. Without social bonds, the victimization may have not been followed by termination. Without victimization, Pete's dealing career may have continued longer than it did.

AGENCY + VICTIMIZATION → TERMINATION

Agency is another mechanism that interacts with victimization to produce termination. Nagin (2007: 262) defines agency as “a decision-making process, however crude or faulty, that reflects the benefits, costs, and risks of alternative courses of action.” Elder, Johnson, and Crosnoe (2003: 11) think of agency as the process through which “[i]ndividuals construct their own life course through the choices and actions they take within the opportunities and constraints of history and social circumstance.” To be clear, “the concept of human agency cannot be understood simply as a proxy for motivation. Rather, the concept of agency has the element of projective or transformative action within structural constraints” (Laub, Sampson, and Sweeten, 2006: 323). When a dealer is victimized, there is reason to reweigh the costs and benefits of dealing, owing not only to the chance of future victimizations but also to one's stake in conformity and to the potential penalties attached to breaking the law.

The interplay of drug dealing, agency, victimization, and termination is evidenced in the life of Christian. Christian's drug-using career began in the ninth grade with a hit of marijuana. His marijuana-dealing career began after completing high school:

[I] started talking to this kid on my [sport] team, and we decided, me and my friend, that we'd go in together with our graduation money and buy some quantity [of marijuana] and we'd start selling, right when we graduated from high school. . . . [W]e graduated from high school and . . . what we did is we went and bought a scale [and] bought an ounce for like [\$]325, maybe we bought 2 ounces, but I think we bought one. . . . We worked together . . . and . . . it went well.

All was well, at least for a while. Eventually, however, Christian became the victim of a fraudulent trade—one without violence but with misinformation between traders (Jacques and Wright, 2008a). The following quote illustrates the relationship among victimization, agency, and termination:

Interviewer: Was there any one factor that led you to quitting?

Christian: Well, I remember, we [my family] go to [place name] for vacation because that's where we're from. And I remember being in the . . . airport about to come back, and I had been gone for like 10 days . . . and didn't bring my cell phone with me or anything, but I

remember sitting in the airplane . . . and I remember thinking to myself, “When I go back, do I want to keep doing this?” ’cause I knew I was 18 and that if I got caught I was fucked.

Interviewer: So you managed to get some time away from it?

Christian: Basically, yeah, 10 days away from it and just thought it out. . . . I basically decided that when I got back that I needed a change. . . . I was going to stop dealing. And the other thing is, I knew I was coming to [college]. Like I remember thinking to myself that I’m going to [college], and I’m not going to make enough money [dealing drugs] to make it worth basically fucking up your life and not being able to go to [college]. ’Cause it was basically like I was on the right track, and I was done with high school, and it was finally time for me to go off and make something of myself. And I just knew that if I was going to continue to deal, I was going to put that at a heavy risk, and it just wasn’t worth it. I mean having the money was nice, but the rest of my life wasn’t worth the money. . . .

Interviewer: So there was no incident that made you quit?

Christian: Well, I remember before I left [for vacation], this is like a week or 2 before I left, I . . . got jacked. . . . [W]hat happened was I was working out at the [gym], and some guy called me up and asked me if I’d meet his friend, and I was like, “Yeah, tell him to meet me outside the [gym] in like an hour.” And I talked to this guy who came up to meet me, and it’s a public space or whatever so I’m not really concerned about him jumping me or whatever, and he doesn’t know where my stuff is anyways. So he’s like, “I want a quarter,” and I was like, “Alright, let’s do it.” And he was like, “No, follow me to my house ’cause I don’t want to do it here.” And I was like, “No, I’m pretty sure we can do it right here. What’s the big deal? Break that money out, I’ll give you the stuff, and it’s over.” And he’s like, “No, no, I don’t want to do that,” and I continued the conversation with him, and I don’t know why. And he starts telling me he had just got out of jail, and he doesn’t want to get caught or anything. And I look in his front seat, and there’s a bat and a fucking crowbar. And I look at this, and I say to him, “Why do you have a bat and a crowbar?” And he doesn’t really give me an answer, so I kinda knew what was up, but I didn’t want to believe that this kid actually intended to get me to his house and beat the shit out of me, which was obviously his plan, but whatever. So I continued this conversation with him for like 20 minutes, and I don’t know if it’s ’cause I actually enjoyed a conversation that was this retarded because the conversation was going nowhere. And so finally, I was like, “Whatever, I’m gone, give me a call later or something.” And so he calls me back like hours later looking for a half ounce, and I should have known when he upped the

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weight that this is definitely not right, but we decided to meet at [a local business]. . . . I still remember the ride over there and where we met, and the whole ride I was like, “Why the fuck am I doing this? I’m about to get robbed. Why the fuck am I doing this?” . . . so, whatever, I meet him, and, this is one of the most embarrassing stories I have, I knew he was going to rob me. It’s like I just let it happen. I have no idea why. But he opens the door, and I was like, “You got the money?” And he throws down a roll of bills with a 5 on the outside, and I’m like, “Alright, here’s the weed.” [He] runs off, and, sure enough, I open it up and there’s \$18. . . . my loss on it was \$142 or something, if I remember correctly.

A full appraisal of any turning point requires consideration not only of the “resulting line of adaptation,” which in Christian’s case is ultimately termination, but also the “available alternatives” (Elder, 1985: 35), such as the escalation of crime through violent retaliation. Christian’s immediate reaction to his victimization, coupled with his thoughts about his propensity to engage in violence, shed light on why vengeance did not take place and, thus, why termination was a more likely adaptation:

[S]o I was like, “He can have it ‘cause it’s not worth getting shot,” ‘cause this is somebody I didn’t know, and he had just gotten out of jail, and he had a crowbar and a bat. So . . . at this point, it’s like, “It’s not worth getting shot.” . . . I’ll pay somebody \$150 not to shoot me. . . . I’ve never been in a fight. Like I’ve always thought, like I remember being 8 years old and thinking, “If I get in a fight I’m kinda screwed ‘cause I don’t want to hurt somebody.” Like I can’t imagine punching somebody in the face and hurting them, and I’ve always been like that. So it’s like the idea of physical violence as retribution has never been something I wanted [to do], particularly when I’m not going to get my money back.

Christian’s drug dealing trajectory took the following path: He began his marijuana-selling career after completing his high-school career and concluded it before beginning his college career. According to Christian, the termination of dealing flowed from two key events in his life: his victimization in a fraudulent trade in which he lost almost \$150 worth of marijuana and his choice to make something of himself and discontinue dealing.

Christian was victimized in a fraud. Just before being victimized, Christian recognized that he had lost control and said to himself, “Why the fuck am I doing this? I’m about to get robbed. Why am I doing this?” Christian could not find the strength to stop himself from doing a drug deal that he predicted would result in his own victimization. After being victimized,

he could have tried to find the offender and exact vengeance, but Christian did not want to take the chance of getting shot. What is more, “physical violence as retribution has never been something [he] wanted” to partake in, and so he did not find the adaptation of retaliation to be an attractive option. Although victimization did not result in Christian instantly terminating his illicit activity, the desistance process was set in motion because he started to reevaluate the benefits and costs of dealing in relation to alternative lines of action available to him.

The victimization and subsequent vacation provided Christian with an opportune situation to reflect on his current and potential future life trajectories. Christian made a decision while on the plane “that reflects the benefits, costs, and risks of alternative courses of action” (Nagin, 2007: 262). Christian considered that he was 18 years of age and thus no longer a minor, that he was going to college soon, that the profit of dealing was not large enough to offset the risks, and that it was time for him to go and make something of himself. In the end, Christian decided that dealing was too hazardous and that termination was the best course of action.

In sum, the two most important factors that, in Christian’s mind, facilitated his termination of drug dealing were being victimized in a fraudulent trade and his *choice* to make something of himself and avoid the negative consequences of acting criminally. Without agency, the victimization may not have been followed by termination. Without victimization, Christian’s dealing career may have continued longer than it did.

IMPLICATIONS FOR CRIMINOLOGY

Examining the qualitative and quantitative aspects of any given transitional event alongside the sociological and psychological conditions surrounding the affected person enhances our understanding of how and why various adaptations lead to new life trajectories (Elder, 1985: 35). What the qualitative data outlined above suggest is that—when coupled with social bonds and agency (Laub and Sampson, 2003)—victimizations that occur in the context of illicit activities may mark turning points toward a life trajectory with less crime. Termination of drug dealing is an adaptation to victimization to the extent that it allows drug sellers to gain more control over their resources, health, and reputation by reducing the probability of future victimization (controlling the crime of others). So what are the implications of this possibility for the future of criminology? We suggest that theoretical specification and formal testing are important avenues for future work.

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THEORETICAL SPECIFICATION

Appraising and explaining the outcome of any given turning point requires consideration of four sets of variables: “(1) the nature of the event or transition, its severity, duration, and so on; (2) the resources, beliefs, and experiences people bring to the situation; (3) how the situation or event is defined; and (4) resulting lines of adaptation as chosen from available alternatives” (Elder, 1985: 35). In this section, we suggest possible ways in which theorists may want to specify how conditions relevant to the above variables affect the victimization–termination link.

Because “the nature of the event or transition, its severity, duration, and so on” (1985: 35) affects turning points, theorists should explicate how qualitative and quantitative variability in victimization influence termination. Quantitatively, the theory presented above states that the more serious the victimization, as measured by money, drugs, or violence, the more likely is termination to occur. What we do not know is whether violence or the loss of resources (money or drugs) has a larger effect on the termination of crime. Is money less important than health, or vice versa, in determining life trajectories? As relates to the “nature” (quality) of victimization, our theoretical principle is restricted to the influence of victimizations that occur *in the context of crime* rather than applying to all victimizations across time and place. But what follows from victimizations that do not occur in the context of crime? Also related to the quality of victimizations is whether they are predatory or retaliatory in nature (Cooney and Phillips, 2002; Jacques and Wright, 2008a). Are predatory victimizations more or less likely than retaliatory ones to result in termination?

As relates to the “resources, beliefs, and experiences” brought by the dealer to the victimization situation, this article has argued that dealers with social bonds and agency are especially likely to terminate drug selling after being victimized. Important questions left unanswered are as follows: Are some social bonds more important than others in contributing to the victimization–termination link? Do social bonds *and* agency both need to be present to produce termination after victimization, or is one alone sufficient? The nature of our data precluded exploring the effect of routine activities on crime (Cohen and Felson, 1979), which is a component of the revised, age-graded theory of social control (Laub and Sampson, 2003), and so future work should develop the theoretical implications of routine activities theory for making sense of the victimization–termination link.

The definition of an event influences its effect on the trajectory of a life. For a victimization to lead to termination, the dealer must define it as a product of her or his own criminal behavior. Otherwise, no logical link is found, in the dealer’s mind, between selling and being a victim, and thus

no impetus is felt by the dealer to *choose* a different path or feel shame and embarrassment for being victimized. Similarly, if an agent of social control, such as a parent, does not identify a drug-related victimization as the outcome of the victim's own law-breaking, then social control will not occur, social bonds will not be strengthened, and the likelihood of termination will not be enhanced. Future work should delve deeper into how variability in definitions of victimizations affects termination. For instance, it seems to us that the world of middle-class dealers is in many respects different from the one inhabited by lower-class, urban drug dealers (see, e.g., Jacobs, 1999), who often live in neighborhoods where victimization is a way of life regardless of your criminal involvements and where legitimate opportunities for success are limited (see Wilson, 1987, 1996; Wright and Decker, 1994, 1997). Do offenders who live in crime-saturated communities less often define their victimizations as the result of their own criminal involvement? If so, does this reduce the likelihood of termination after victimization occurring in the context of crime?

Also important to understanding the victimization–termination link is generating information bearing on the causes of alternative adaptations and, in turn, how those adaptations affect life trajectories. “[A]daptations to crisis situations are ways of dealing with resources and options in order to achieve control” (Elder, 1985: 42), and “[a]daptation to life events is crucial because the same event or transition followed by different adaptations can lead to different trajectories” (Laub and Sampson, 1993: 304). Besides termination, another adaptation to victimization is retaliation, which achieves control both by providing victims with retribution and by deterring future victimizations (Topalli, Wright, and Fornango, 2002). To the degree that dealers find retaliation to be an unattractive adaptation, then termination will occur, and vice versa. Although drug dealers are mostly thought of as violent people, we believe that some drug dealers simply do not have a “cognitive landscape” (Sampson and Wilson, 1995) conducive to retaliation. A cognitive landscape refers to “ecologically structured norms . . . regarding appropriate standards and expectations of conduct” (1995: 46). The middle-class dealers we have interviewed did not grow up in neighborhoods with broken windows, nor did they see bullet-filled bodies on street corners; instead what they saw everywhere were well-kept homes, pharmacies, restaurants, grocery stores, and other staples of suburban life. In the streets, the smallest conflict may lead to retaliation (see Anderson, 1999; Cooney, 1998), but in the suburbs, conflict usually leads to avoidance or toleration (see Baumgartner, 1988). Whereas lower-class persons from urban areas may witness serious acts of violence and suffering on a regular basis, most middle-class “kids” are entirely insulated from violence, and so they develop a cognitive landscape devoid of violence and permeated with peaceful forms of conflict management. When

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middle-class dealers are victimized, their nonviolent cognitive landscape inhibits them from enacting physical vengeance, and therefore, termination (and other adaptations) becomes more likely to occur. The cognitive landscape theory is but one approach to understanding alternative adaptations; theorists should develop other explanations of alternative adaptations and explain how those alternatives affect change and continuity in life trajectories.

ALTERNATIVE THEORIES

Regardless of whether the mixing of social bonds, agency, and victimization affect the likelihood of termination, it may be useful to develop alternative explanations of the victimization–termination link. Five alternative theories of crime that seem to hold promise for explaining the victimization–termination link are deterrence theory (see, e.g., Beccaria, 1995 [1764]; Bentham, 1988 [1789]), social learning theory (see, e.g., Akers and Jensen, 2006; Moffitt, 1993), identity theory (see, e.g., Giordano, Cernkovich, and Rudolph, 2002; Maruna, 2001), reintegrative shaming theory (Braithwaite, 1989), and strain theory (see, e.g., Agnew, 1992; Merton, 1938). A theory that does not seem to hold much promise for explaining the victimization–termination link is self-control theory (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990). We explore the implications of these theories for understanding the victimization–termination link, in turn.

Deterrence theory argues that as sanctions associated with behavior increase, the prevalence of that behavior decreases, all else equal (Blumstein et al., 1986; Cook, 1980; Nagin, 1998; Paternoster, 1987; Pratt et al., 2006; Zimring and Hawkins, 1973). “Political sanctions” and “popular sanctions” (Bentham, 1988 [1789]: 24–5) have both been found to reduce crime (Cook, 1980; Nagin, 1998), but “physical sanctions” also influence criminal careers, at least in theory.

Physical sanctions are . . . those consequences of behavior that follow automatically from it. . . . It turns out many criminal or deviant acts are sufficiently risky or inherently difficult that they are, at least to some extent, naturally limited. . . . Such consequences of course tend to deter people from committing the acts in question. For example, intravenous drug use apparently produces great pleasure, but it also carries with it a large increase in the risk of accident, infection, permanent physiological damage, and death. (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990: 6)

The idea that illicit drug dealing has inherent risks above and beyond those associated with “everyday” life is far from new (e.g., Goldstein et al., 1997; Levitt and Venkatesh, 2000; Reuter, MacCoun, and Murphy, 1990). These risks are sometimes related to conflicts over right and wrong, but

the risks can also be physical (not moralistic) (see, e.g., Jacobs, 2000; Wright and Decker, 1994, 1997). If a drug dealer is victimized for reasons unrelated to social control, then that dealer has suffered a physical sanction or “predatory victimization” (see Jacques and Wright, 2008a). What this all suggests is that deterrence theorists and researchers may want to explicate how variability in victimization, both physical (predatory) and popular (moralistic), affects the costs, benefits, and prevalence of drug selling.⁴

Social learning theory explains behavior as the outcome of differential associations, definitions, imitation, and differential reinforcement (Akers and Jensen, 2006). As relates specifically to drug dealing, this theoretical perspective suggests that persons who use drugs and/or know drug dealers (differential association) and hold positive attitudes toward drug-related behavior (definitions) will learn how to deal drugs and then begin dealing themselves (imitation), and the costs and benefits of that behavior will determine persistence and desistance (differential reinforcement). Social learning theory would explain the empirical connection between victimization and termination as the consequence of differential reinforcement, or the sum of rewards and punishments that follow from a behavior. “Whether individuals will refrain from, or commit, a crime at any given time (and whether they will continue, or desist, from doing so in the future) depends on the balance of past, present, and anticipated future rewards and punishments for their actions” (Akers and Jensen, 2006: 39–40). Victimization, in the language of social learning theory, is a “punishment,” and so, in theory, it reduces the probability of whatever behavior or context it is associated with in the mind of the victim. Whether victimization is followed by termination or persistence depends not only

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4. Among others, questions that could be addressed are as follows: 1) Does an increase in the objective severity and certainty (S&C) of victimization reduce drug dealing? 2) Does an increase in the objective S&C of victimization increase the perceived S&C of victimization? 3) Does an increase in the perceived S&C of victimization reduce drug selling? 4) Do the general (vicarious) and specific (personal) effects (Paternoster and Piquero, 1995; Stafford and Warr, 1993) of victimization differ, and, if so, how? 5) Do victims experience a “resetting effect” (Pogarsky and Piquero, 2003), and how does this affect termination? and 6) What are the effects of political and popular sanctions on the S&C of victimization, and vice versa?

Also note that the effect of victimization on criminals is important for calculating the “costs” of victimization to society. As mentioned by Cohen, Miller, and Rossman: “It is possible that intentional injury will result in offsetting social benefits. For example, suppose a career criminal is robbed at gunpoint and fatally shot. The social cost of this murder might be partially offset by the reduced cost of other future crimes the victim was likely to commit” (1994: 75). The above insight suggests that “social benefits” flow from victimizations of criminals to the degree that those events lead to the termination of crime.

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on the costs of the victimization but also on past learning experiences and structural constraints. Social learning theorists should stipulate the various hypotheses that emanate from this theoretical lens for explaining the victimization–termination link.

A less positivistic approach to understanding the victimization–termination link is identity theory (see, e.g., Giordano, Cernkovich, and Rudolph, 2002; Maruna, 2001). Building on labeling theory, phenomenology, and symbolic interactionism (see, e.g., Blumer, 1969; Lofland, 1969), this perspective asserts “that human life is essentially and fundamentally narrated and that understanding human interaction, therefore, requires some understanding of these stories” (Crewe and Maruna, 2006: 109). The focus of identity theory is how people tell the story of their own lives, how stories are made sense of, how stories are affected by structural constraints, and the effect of persons’ stories on their subsequent behavior. Identity theorists may suggest that victimizations in the context of drug dealing facilitate cognitive transformations and narrative reconstructions. After victimization, dealers may begin to wonder: “Who am I, a drug dealer or a good kid? Can I be both at the same time? Should I continue selling drugs, or is it time for me to go off and make something of myself?” In this way, victimizations may lead to cognitive transformations and narrative reconstructions that produce identity change and the termination of drug dealing. To the degree that identity theorists take up the challenge of producing their own theory of the victimization–termination link, criminology will benefit.

Braithwaite’s (1989: 102) theory of reintegrative shaming argues that interdependency and communitarianism increase the likelihood that individuals will be susceptible to shaming, and when the shaming is reintegrative, as compared with stigmatizing, the chance of future crime is reduced because “disapproval is dispensed without eliciting a rejection of the disapprovers, so that the potentialities for future disapproval are not dismantled.” Reintegrative shaming theorists typically have examined how the discovery and pronouncement of crime by the government leads to shaming situations and reintegration into the community. Differently, the story of Pete—the dealer who was robbed and then confronted by his family—shows that victimization can lead to shame and reintegration if it reveals the criminal behavior of the victim, and then the family or larger community responds with disapproval but also with “words or gestures of forgiveness” (1989: 100). Recall what Pete’s mother said to her son after finding out about his drug-dealing career: “I can’t believe this has happened, but it’s alright, I still love you.” Theorists working in the reintegrative shaming tradition may want to outline the implications of victimization for shame and its effect on subsequent crimes.

At first glance, Agnew's (1992, 2006) strain theory does not seem capable of explaining the victimization–termination link. According to strain theory, “a range of strains or stressors increase[s] the likelihood of crime. . . . These strains may involve the inability to achieve positively-valued goals . . . , the loss of positively-valued stimuli . . . , and the presentation of negatively-valued or aversive stimuli. These strains make people feel bad and they may cope through crime” (Agnew, 2006: 101). Any given victimization of a drug dealer can involve the application of negatively valued stimuli (pain or suffering) and the loss of positively valued stimuli (drugs or money) and may stop the dealer from achieving positively valued goals (buying something or getting high). The logic of this theory suggests that victimizations should result in more strain and, for that reason, more crime, such as violent retaliation or “working more hours” to make up for the loss (for empirical examples, see Topalli, Wright, and Fornango, 2002). However, Agnew (1992: 69) is careful to specify that under certain conditions strain will not lead to crime: “Behavioral coping may assume several forms. . . . Individuals . . . may seek to . . . *terminate* or *escape* from negative stimuli.” Agnew notes that this prosocial coping strategy is more or less likely to occur under several psychological and social circumstances (1992: 71–4; for a test, see Broidy, 2001). Strain theorists should focus their attention on specifying the conditions conducive to “escape” from victimization through termination.

In contrast to the theories discussed, Gottfredson and Hirschi's (1990) self-control theory seems unable to explain the victimization–termination link. Self-control theory asserts that low self-control is the cause of crime and that self-control is invariant across the life course. The theory also posits that events analogous to crime, such as being victimized, are the outcome of low self-control. If self-control is invariant across time and is the cause of crime and victimization, then it logically follows that there can be no victimization–termination link because victimization cannot increase self-control and, thus, cannot lead to termination.⁵ In short, the logic of self-control theory suggests that victimization has no influence on crime other than, perhaps, an incapacitative one.

FORMAL TESTING

The foregoing discussion suggests that the theory we explicate in this article (also see Elder, 1985; Laub and Sampson, 2003), deterrence theory (Nagin, 1998; Paternoster, 1987), learning theory (Akers and Jensen, 2006; Moffitt, 1993, 2006), identity theory (Giordano, Cernkovich, and Rudolph, 2002; Maruna, 2001), reintegrative shaming theory (Braithwaite, 1989),

5. Given that injury from the victimization does not physically incapacitate the criminal and thereby reduce opportunity.

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and strain theory (Agnew, 1992, 2006) may “make sense” of the victimization–termination link, whereas self-control theory (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990) cannot. The incongruence of theories’ predictions about the victimization–termination link is valuable to criminology because it provides an opportunity for evaluating which theory is “better” than the others: If victimization does not affect crime at all, then self-control theory gains credibility; if victimization produces termination under the conditions specified in this article or by deterrence, learning, identity, reintegrative shaming, or strain theories, then they gain credibility, and the assertions of self-control theory perhaps become more questionable.

Qualitative data are valuable in prompting new lines of theorizing, but quantitative data and statistical analyses are necessary to put hypotheses to the test. Unfortunately, data suitable for testing theories of the victimization–termination link are extremely limited (Lauritsen and Laub, 2007). Before researchers can test the effect of victimization on termination and the mechanisms that result in that empirical relationship (or inhibit it from occurring), it will be necessary to collect longitudinal data on social bonds and agency, costs and benefits of drug dealing, shaming in communities, strains experienced by dealers, and dealers’ self-control. Given the existence of such data, it will then be possible—and we believe worthwhile—for researchers to use statistical analyses to determine whether, to what degree, and under what circumstances victimization has a significant and substantive effect on the termination of drug dealing and other forms of law-breaking.

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Scott Jacques is a PhD student in the Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice at the University of Missouri—St. Louis and assistant to the editor of the *British Journal of Sociology*. He is currently analyzing data from interviews with middle-class and lower-class drug dealers in the United States, and also working on a field study of drug dealers in Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

Richard Wright is Curators' Professor and chair of the Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice at the University of Missouri—St. Louis and editor in chief of the *British Journal of Sociology*. His most recent book, coauthored with Bruce Jacobs, is *Street Justice: Retaliation in the Criminal Underworld* (2006: Cambridge University Press).

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