

Women on the edge of crime: Crack cocaine and the changing contexts of street-level sex work in New York City

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Abstract. In this paper, we attempt to examine, engender and contextualize the theses that (i) “women’s emancipation escalates [women’s] crime and violence” and (ii) “women’s drug use escalates [women’s] crime and violence”, by drawing on ongoing ethnographic fieldwork in relation to women crack smokers and the changing contexts of street-level sex work in New York City. The paper attempts to illustrate how the position of women crack smokers can only be understood by locating their lives, their illicit drug use and their income-generating activities within the context of a specific set of localized socio-economic and cultural developments. We suggest that observations from our research refute the theses that women are becoming more criminal and/or violent in the context of either their consumption of crack cocaine or their alleged “emancipation”.

Introduction

Nowhere is the gendered relation between women and the law more apparent in America at the moment than with respect to the current “war on drugs”.¹ Perhaps the most startling and obvious example of this relationship is found in recent moves to “criminalize the pregnancies” of women who use illicit drugs. Such a strategy has been revealed as not only gendered, but racist and classist, being directed against a particular group of women who use a particular drug – i.e. poor minority women who smoke crack cocaine.²

The expanded interface between the criminal law and women’s lives afforded by the “war on drugs” has been accompanied by increased administrative regulation which, in labelling these women “unfit mothers”, has sought to remove their children,³ their welfare and medicaid benefits and their housing – usually in that order.⁴ In New York City this situation, compounded by recent budget cuts,⁵ has rendered women extremely vulnerable to exploitation and

victimization by men – be it in the context of the “freakhouse” scene⁶ or the street-level sex markets⁷ on which this paper focusses.

In this paper,⁸ we restrict our analysis to one aspect of a broader thesis,⁹ by elaborating the structural and “criminal” positioning of a group of women who smoke crack and engage in street-level sex work.¹⁰ We attempt to situate their consumption of crack, their “criminality” and their experiences of violence (both as perpetrators and victims) within the context of gender relations¹¹ and occupational opportunities as they exist in the informal economy.¹²

Our research suggests that, within this context, the confluence of at least four factors

- the prevalence of women crack smokers,
- the psycho-social consequences of women’s crack use,
- the nature, extent and impact of state regulatory response, and
- the positioning of women within the informal economy – has served to render women crack smokers both vulnerable to and dependent on, men.

The prevalence of women crack smokers

Although crack use is clearly declining,¹³ an emerging literature suggests that women may be more evenly distributed among populations of crack smokers than has historically been the case with respect to illicit drug use.¹⁴ There is also some evidence to suggest that, at least among arrestee populations in New York City, similar proportions of men and women who come into contact with the criminal justice system test positive for cocaine.¹⁵ In 1988, 43.3% of female drug commitments in New York State reported that the drug leading to their conviction was cocaine and only 30.6% reported crack. By 1989 however, 44.8% of women cited crack and only 33.9% cited cocaine as the drug leading to their conviction.¹⁶ In 1988, the New York City Department of Corrections identified 2,280 inmates “addicted” to crack – 56% of these inmates were women.¹⁷ In a recent study of 886 IVDUs and their sex partners in Harlem, women used crack approximately 50% more frequently than men, leading the author to conclude that, in this sample, “women appear to prefer crack over any other drug”.¹⁸

The psycho-social consequences of women’s crack use

Several studies have sought to document the psycho-social consequences of crack use.¹⁹ While research on treatment populations indicates that compulsive crack use is structured by the contingencies of the urban setting, there is clearly a paucity of research on women’s crack use. Earlier literature on

women and narcotics use suggests that the psycho-social consequences of drug use may be gender-differentiated. Studies suggest that women drug users have more social, psychological and physical health difficulties than men. Women IVDU's complain of more medical problems and women IVDU's in treatment have been documented to experience more medical problems than their male counterparts.²⁰

Women IVDU's are also thought to experience higher levels of stress, depression and anxiety and lower levels of self esteem.²¹ These factors are compounded by the clinical and psychosocial consequences of AIDS and HIV infection among female populations, including high rates of gynecological and obstetrical disorders, the acceleration of HIV as a result of pregnancy, the prospect of HIV babies and the impact of HIV status on reproductive choice, child-bearing and child-rearing.²² Research also indicates that women "addicts" tend to have fewer social supports and greater familial responsibilities than either non-addict women or addicted males.²³ Perhaps most importantly, women IVDU's are more likely to be subject to social stigmatization and alienation. Women appear to internalize negative social attitudes towards "female addicts" which are reinforced by the masculine norms and values of the addict subculture.²⁴ Moreover, the pervasiveness of the "commonsense" that drug use impedes maternal functioning serves to amplify the social stigmatization of women drug users.²⁵

A number of recent studies have also suggested that "chronic crack use" is strongly correlated with high-risk behaviours implicated in the spread of HIV infection and sexually transmitted diseases.²⁶ Women sex workers are already a high risk group for HIV infection²⁷ and women who are or have been partners of male IVDU's constitute a significant population of women at risk for AIDS.²⁸

Finally, our field observations to date suggest that not only are the psycho-social consequences of crack use particularly debilitating for women in the terms elaborated by previous research but, moreover, that crack use by poor minority women has served to stretch inter-generational relations and family resources to their limits – undermining traditional kin networks of care and domesticity among minority and particularly Black women.²⁹

The nature, extent and impact of state regulatory responses

On a national level, both the number of drug arrests and the percentage of all arrestees charged with drug offenses have increased dramatically since 1980.³⁰ In New York City, the number of drug arrests increased from 18,521 in 1980 [40% heroin and other opiates] to 88,641 in 1988 [44% crack].³¹ During 1989, there were 25,048 felony arrests for crack possession or sale in New York City,

constituting the largest single offense category besides robbery. An additional 18,194 misdemeanour crack arrests were made in the same year.³²

While the consequences of punitive state responses³³ to crack in the form of the “war on drugs” will be felt in the U.S. for generations, these effects will be especially detrimental for ethnic minorities, and, in particular, for poor minority women. Among all narcotic arrests in New York in 1987, women accounted for approximately 14% of crack and 12% of non-crack cocaine defendants.³⁴ In a 1986 sample of 9,057 arrestees in New York, women accounted for 10.4% of crack, 10.7% of powder cocaine and 10.4% of non-drug arrests. However, by 1988, a similar sample of 7,348 arrestees revealed that women accounted for 12.3% of crack arrests and 9.7% of powdered cocaine arrests and only 8.9% of non-drug arrests.³⁵

Between 1980 and 1986, an average of 22.3% of women incarcerated in New York were imprisoned for drug offenses.³⁶ In 1987 however, this proportion increased to 42.2% (340 women). By the end of 1989, 66.4% (1,059 women) were incarcerated for drug offenses in New York State. By comparison, in 1989 only 43.7% of the male commitment population were incarcerated for drug offenses. Of these 1,059 women, 49.7% (526) were Hispanic, 41% (434) were Black and 9.3% (99) were White. Approximately 75% of these women reported having at least one child. The average minimum sentence was 24.3 months.³⁷ New York State has spent nearly three hundred million dollars over the past three years to build and operate new prison space for women.³⁸

Moreover, while the imprisonment of women for drug related offenses clearly facilitates the fragmentation of families, the singling out of “mothers” who are crack smokers for criminal and administrative sanctions has special implications for urban minority families.³⁹ In New York State, where a positive toxicology screen on a newborn is considered presumptive evidence of neglect, child abuse and neglect petitions before the Family Court containing allegations of drug abuse quadrupled in the years 1986–1989.⁴⁰ At least 50% of identified toxicology positive infants are currently placed in foster care.⁴¹ The overloading of foster care systems has given rise to the phenomenon of “boarder babies” in many hospitals and institutions.⁴²

In response, a recent federal government report recommended that state and local agencies reduce “obstacles” to placing drug affected infants in adoptive homes, including the revision of existing laws on abandonment, expediting the termination of parental rights and inter-racial placements.⁴³ While the institutionalization of children in non-kin based foster care is deplorable, state responses such as the creation of a category of kin-based foster care specifically for “crack babies” may serve to exacerbate intra-generational conflict, delay the reunification of mothers and their children, and perpetuate children’s foster care status by promoting the commodification of relations between women crack smokers, their mothers and other female kin. Finally,

punitive state responses in the form of “harm maximization” have served to divert attention away from racism, sexism, poverty and the need for a comprehensive national health policy.⁴⁴

The positioning of women within the informal economy

This paper draws on work in progress⁴⁵ which suggests that the relationship between women and the income generating strategies afforded by the informal economy is mediated by the status and positioning of women within both the formal and informal economies – i.e. women are situated by social relations and structural processes that permeate both legal and illegal labour markets. While the position of poor minority women within the informal economy mirrors their positioning within the labour and income transfer markets of the formal economy,⁴⁶ we suggest additionally that the relations and processes which serve to disadvantage these women within the formal economy are exacerbated within the illegal context of the drug/crack economy. In particular, occupational hierarchies within the informal economy draw on gender, ethnic and class divisions within the localized formal economy and from this economy’s status both regionally and nationally. Within the informal economy, women are confined to a secondary “secondary labour market”⁴⁷ that centres in around the most saleable commodity they have – their bodies. These hierarchies serve to reproduce the gender, ethnic and class hierarchies that structure social relations at a more general level. Specifically, our analysis suggests:

Crack induced participation in the (sex segmented) informal economy. The widespread use of crack in many poor urban minority neighbourhoods has increased the number of women participating in street-level sex markets – often the only revenue generating strategy available to women within the informal economy.

Increased competition and hostility. Conditions of extreme competition and increased hostility between sex workers have exacerbated the atomization and social isolation of women crack smokers.

Changes in the price, structure and nature of sex work. Both crack-induced increases in the number of women sex workers and crack-accelerated shifts in the nature of the sex work (e.g. from vaginal intercourse to blow jobs, indoor to outdoor) have deflated the going rates for sexual exchanges.

Market conditions and the victimization of women. The price deflation of

sexual services has in turn spawned a self-selection process of cheaper “rougher” dates which has made the stroll itself “rougher”.

The emergence of “viccing” as a form of resistance. These cumulative processes have increased the level of violence within the market itself – the increasingly economically marginalized women “viccing” the dates (‘vic him before he vic you’), the male smokers viccing women smokers and some women smokers viccing other women.

These observations are supported and elaborated in section III by drawing on the women’s own voices.

Crack and the current study

Despite the media predilection for attributing a range of pre-existent social ills to crack cocaine, it is clear that the curbside distribution and consumption of crack remains overwhelmingly concentrated in neighbourhoods which were *already* experiencing profound economic and social destabilization and disorganization prior to the advent of crack cocaine. For the most part, these are neighbourhoods that, in the decades preceding the arrival of crack cocaine, suffered a massive exodus of human and economic capital. As Hamid has noted, crack was a latecomer into these neighbourhoods. Somewhat like a vacuum cleaner, it cleaned up most of the little that has been left behind.⁴⁸

The study sites for this research are located in precisely such neighbourhoods. The Southside, located in Williamsburg, has long been a site of highly structured organized drug distribution in Brooklyn. Ethnically, the Southside is dominated by Hispanics, although it is home to a sizeable enclave of Hassidic Jews. A well established major trucking route, the site of prostitution strolls for more than a quarter of a century, runs through the area. In recent years, the Southside has witnessed a gradual decline of housing stock and there are large tracts comprised almost entirely of abandoned and boarded up buildings. Crack distribution is modelled on the heroin markets which have been an entrenched feature of life on the Southside since the 1950s. Everyone who sells crack on the Southside is selling it for someone else. It is a highly structured and to some degree regimented marketplace of street-level distributors and consumers.⁴⁹

However, the Southside has undergone a number of changes since October 1989 when it was the subject of a “clean up” campaign by New York City’s Tactical Narcotics Team (TNT), a specialist policing unit entrusted with enforcing the “war on drugs” against street-level sellers. As Curtis⁵⁰ has pointed out, in many neighbourhoods TNT intervention served as a catalyst for a broader city-wide process of shrinkage and consolidation of drug mar-

kets. Rather than assuming a simple displacement effect, Curtis has sought to document both the market and non-market processes that prompted the demise of crack markets in Brooklyn. By 1988, the phase of street-level distribution and consumption had clearly peaked. With a decline in the overall number of users and the failure of crack to attract new initiates, many previously flourishing drug markets began to experience a sizeable contraction. Since 1989, this shrinkage “has led many hardcore distributors and users to concentrate themselves in pools which take on the appearance of a vortex: everyone is funnelled into small geographical areas where drug activity is heightened”.⁵¹

Bushwick, our second research site, is an example of such a vortex. Although no stranger to the drug trade, Bushwick had historically been a working class Italian neighbourhood which, over the years, generated a certain amount of mafia folklore. Since the late 1960s however, the area has gradually come to be dominated by low income Latino populations (predominantly Puerto Ricans) and, more recently, Dominicans and Columbians have begun to move in. The housing stock in the general neighbourhood is primarily one- and two-family housing, although the drug market area itself consists of run down apartment complexes and a lot of abandoned buildings set amongst a mix of light manufacturing and industry. The current vortex of active drug markets has evolved rapidly over the past two years and there are frequent confrontations over “turf” as drug dealing organizations compete to establish hegemony over respective markets.⁵²

Voices from the field

It is within this context that we now examine (i) the notion that women’s emancipation escalates participation in crime and violence and (ii) the notion that women’s crack use escalates participation in crime and violence.⁵³ We suggest that preliminary observations drawn from these study sites refute the theses that women are becoming more criminal or more violent in the context of either their consumption of crack or their “emancipated” status.⁵⁴

1. Crack induced participation in the (sex segmented) informal economy

The widespread use of crack in poor urban minority neighbourhoods has increased the number of women participating in street-level sex markets. As Hamid⁵⁵ has argued, populations of drug users are perhaps best viewed as a “type of laboring population whose income generation enables it to perform vital (but variable) functions for the overall community”.

Utilizing an (albeit stereotypical) example of a young woman who prior to her initiation into crack use might have “spent a typical day moping about the house, half-stupified by Olde English Ale and a ‘nickel bag’ of reefer”, Hamid illustrates how by 1984, this woman, entrenched in her consumption of crack cocaine, was

smartly dressed up, on the street, busily begging men in passing cars for a couple of dollars, abruptly assaulting and robbing a victim, busily running to the “crack spot”, exchanging dollars for crack, consuming crack, robbing family and neighbours while “beamed up” before returning to the street to begin the cycle again over and over for several days before she collapses.⁵⁶

Hamid’s point is that this woman “generates dollars . . . which she had not generated before and which nothing but crack would have induced her to generate”.⁵⁷ However, not only is she generating additional dollars as a result of crack (although probably not very many at that), but the broader social context in which she generates these dollars has shifted considerably. “Crack” has undoubtedly depleted her financial resources, affected her physical and perhaps mental health, brought her into contact with the criminal justice system and possibly rendered her homeless and an “unfit” parent in the eyes of the state. An assessment of the manner and extent to which the advent of crack cocaine has changed women’s lives – examined here through the lens of street-level sex work – entails an examination of opportunities for dollar generation and the way in which both gender relations and the history and nature of and interconnections between constituent sub-economies of the informal economy and the formal economy structure these opportunities.

In this instance, we are concerned with the inter-relation between the distribution and consumption of crack cocaine and street-level sex work. All of the women who participated in the current study agree that “crack” increased the number of women working the strolls and had a significant impact on the kind of work they did, the remuneration they received and the interactions that occurred in and around street-level sex markets.

Crack progressed more women out on the street. You see things you ain’t never seen before – girls changin clothes on the street, shit that females would never do, they do now – you know that you would never see before – in this day and time you see now. (Bay, 9 May 1991)

The people out here [in Bushwick] are worse than on the Southside – living worst – they’re thirsty. Out here you see your people livin on the street – you see people ain’t sleeping you know . . . they’re like cavemen – if they could eat each other, they would – if it comes down to that. That’s how this neighbourhood is getting – very thirsty – that’s what you call it. (Cookie, 7 June 1990)

You have got to look in back of you all while you walk out here. Because they'll rob from their mama. They don't care if you're pregnant. They don't care. Once they want that hit, they'll fuckin kill you. (Bay, 9 April 1991)

This inter-relation between income generating strategies within the informal economy and crack has also served to structure patterns of consumption and use.

[Is crack the main drug you use while you're working?] Yeah, because I can't go out sober on a date, because I don't like what I do and I do it for my [dope] habit. So I gotta be high on somethin before I get into that next car. [Do you think the crack does anything physically to you – does it like make sex any more/less enjoyable/bearable?] No, I don exactly enjoy what I do out there. I just, you know, caus it always has me like – I do my things quicker – I'm fast, I'm up. I just go in his car, do what I gotta do and I'm outta there already. No I don enjoy it. No way. (Vivian, 7 July 1990)

Some of the younger women who initiated drug use as crack smokers report subsequent initiation into heroin use in an attempt to moderate the effects of crack. As “Patricia”⁵⁸ told us, “Yeah because the crack gets so speedy and somebody tells you, I know how you can stop, you know, that speedy feeling – get a bag of dope” (Patricia, 12 June 1991).

Rather than assuming that women crack smokers “choose” sex work as the most desirable/convenient/lucrative way of financing their consumption of drugs, we began our fieldwork concerned to explore the range of opportunities for income generation available to women in the informal economy. Most of the women with histories of heroin use prior to initiation into crack reported having engaged in shoplifting or “boosting”. As Rosie's account attests, this was not usually done in a random or indiscriminate way. Rosie's “boosting” – always in conjunction with males who “taught her everything” – can be seen as firmly embedded in a local context in which shoplifting was both possible and “tolerated” because of the function it performed in redistributing scarce resources.⁵⁹ Rosie's account illustrates how the nature and strength of both the formal and informal economies within given neighbourhoods structure opportunities for income generation. The fact that Rosie and her male cohorts knew *who* to approach shows how “crime” – as a form of redistribution – produces “complex chains of interaction resulting in local tolerance and shelter . . . for illegal activities”.⁶⁰

[What kinds of things would you steal?] Les see, the coat – you know the feather one? [The down?] Yeah, is easy to sell. Let's see, some people buy, you know, they would go to the store to buy a coat, right, so we would say you know, we could get it for you, you know, get it for you – give us less money [Which people – other junkies or . . .?]

No no, no, regular people that, they was lookin in the store to buy so we would say you know, we could get that for you, just wait outside and you pay us less money . . . What do you want – we can get it for you . . . they be waiting . . . [This was before the electronic tags came? Did that change it – has that changed?] Oh yeah, for they put that thing it's difficult to steal you know. [So back then you would steal stuff from the store – what other things, anything else? What about like robberies, robbing stores and robbing people?] No, only stealin', I'm not gon hurt nobody. (Rosie, 23 May 1991)

Similarly, Natalie had a male “ripping and running” partner. Together they'd go boosting, do the malls – Kings Plaza, Coney Island – all over. “I would steal it, he would sell it. We'd split the money evenly and get high together”. Things are different today however. Natalie has a heavy heroin and cocaine habit and smokes crack. She supports her consumption by working the stroll. As she puts it, “Once you're here, it's a rut, I don't think you can get out” (Natalie, 18 April 1991). Tina is a 23 year old white woman from Long Island. She was introduced to heroin by her boyfriend and used to go “boosting” with a girlfriend out in the malls. Tina eventually moved to the Southside and ended up living with one of the Puerto Rican street sellers. With no car to go boosting, Tina became dependent on this guy to support her habit. After about a year, he was arrested and went to jail, and Tina began to work the stroll in order to finance her consumption. As she put it,

I'd rather go out and get mine and be with someone for fifteen minutes than hang out with one of those spics. You know what I'm saying? Suck their dicks, excuse the – you know – suck their dicks all night for the same amount. You know what I'm saying. I'm not down – you know. I'd rather do it the way I do it, than like do all the neighbourhood guys. (Tina, 24 April 1991).

Neither Tina or Natalie shoplift anymore. Down here, where the bodegas are at least three to a block, fast food, condoms and Bic lighters are the only legal commodities that do a roaring trade. There is nothing to boost and no malls to boost from in these neighbourhoods. Patricia recalled how once-upon-a-time she and another girl used to steal chains from people as they came out of a now defunct grocery store once a busy avenue. They would take the chains to a local jeweller (who has since been murdered) who “fenced” them in exchange for cash. Her account indicates how the nature of the formal economy determines to a considerable degree the opportunities for revenue generation that are available in the informal economy.

There's a girl, now she's in jail, name Raka. We used to do things like that over here – snatched a police officer daughter chain right here on D. We didn't know she was a police officer daughter. [How is it that you and she got together?] She was robbin this

guy with this other girl and the girl ran and she couldn't see nobody and I was just standing there watching them and she goes "yo, Patricia" and she was surprised that I responded, you know, and I blocked the guy and threw a bottle at him and hit him in the head and he ran and then, after that, like a couple of days, like everytime seem like we always be sick together. Somebody rich come out and she say, "I'm gonna push you into this guy, push you into him and snatch his chain, we'll run and I'll pass it." After like five or six times we started hangin out together. [Who you did this to?] These were people maybe comin out the grocery store, in front of P. When that store opened a lot of people used to stop there and we used to wait for them to come out. [Where you used to take the chains to?] Used to be the place where the guy got killed right across the street from you . . . no gunshots or nuttin, just stabbed and killed him. (Patricia, 12 June 1991).

Relations between the formal and informal economies clearly impact on, and are impacted on by, opportunities for income generation and reinvestment and redistribution provided by discrete and localized contexts for drug distribution and consumption. In examining differences in the rates, volumes and methods of income generation between marijuana and cocaine, Hamid concludes that the "feature of crack distribution which most differentiates it . . . is the upward and outward flow of capital from the study population".⁶¹ Unlike some earlier drug enterprises, cocaine revenues have been neither reinvested or redistributed at the local level.

We asked the women a series of questions designed to elicit their perceptions of the kinds of revenue-generating opportunities open to them within the local informal economy. It clearly emerged that gender relations are an important axis which serves to structure opportunities for income generation at the local level. The women's responses demonstrate the construction of gendered social meanings from both broad and localized patterns of interaction.

[What about, do girls do the sort of things that, you know, guys do out here – strip cars, steal cars or break into houses – do girls get involved in that?] It depend . . . on the neighbourhood, on the individual, how bad they're stressin and how bad you're sick. If I'm sick, I'm gon do anything to get my money, I don't care. I don't think I bop a little ol lady walking down the block . . . could be my moms, but I might think about takin one of the other bitches off. (Candy, 10 May 1991)

[Why don't girls strip cars, scrap metal – you think guys get upset if you started doing that?] Yeah, they would probably try and get over if I came along . . . but it's too heavy and I don't have the tools . . . some girls can do that but with a guy, the one girl I know who strips cars by herself is a dyke – she's a mack truck mechanic . . . most of these girls don't know nuttin about cars. (Suzie Q, 18 April 1991).

[Do you think that it's harder for a guy to make money out here than a girl?] No, caus

if they so bad, they go and stick somebody up. [What a woman couldn't do that?] I wouldn't. I may go in somebody pocket you know, like when I was out on the street but I wouldn't, not just cold blooded stick somebody up. [What other kinds of opportunities do women have to make money besides work on the stroll?] I don't know. The avenue is the only opportunity that comes to my mind. (Patricia, 12 June 1991)

Sweetie is a 21 year old Puerto Rican crack smoker, currently homeless, who has recently started skin-popping dope. Sweetie is somewhat unusual in that, prior to her initiation into crack use, she was taught a set of “masculine” crime skills by her brother. Although she clearly retains these skills, she supports her crack use by sex work, hustling from her nearby extended family and sporadic bursts of street-level selling. Sweetie mentioned in a conversation about types of motor cars that she used to steal cars with her brother out in Coney Island. We had said we would like to do an interview with her about this.⁶²

Anyway, I used to steal cars . . . I wanna talk about the cars I told you about. My brother teach me how to steal cars when I was what, 14. We used to go to Coney Island every Winter. We used to break all the game, into all those stores, all those new stores on Coney Island, we used to break them up. Candy stores from Coney Island, the rides, the smoke stores for Coney Island, and any other stores for Coney Island. The rides, the go-carts, we used to steal them. We steal a lotta shit from there and then we start stealin ah Buicks – real cars. Used to take the hangers and pull em through the window and open doors. We used to take the screwdriver and pop the lock, the thing that go from the ignition key. We used to put the two wires together, sometimes we used, used to pop the ignition key. We used to go to the bottom and take out the wires and attach them together and used to brrrm brrrm, turn on the car, and we used to take off with the cars . . . The junk yard man did give us a hundred dollars, an sometimes he used to give us \$125, or if we take it apart for them they used to give us \$150. That's the one over here and there used to be one over there way back but no more . . . Brand new, used to give us a \$125 . . . sometimes you don't even get a hundred, just get \$50 . . . for us that's what wrong. (Sweetie, 23 May 1991)

Both Sweetie's acquisition of these skills and the fact that she no longer uses them in the context of her current street life and crack use confirm that women's options within the informal economy are funnelled or structured by gendered constructions of social meaning and appropriate behaviours.

Bay is a 26 year old African-American woman who, at the time of writing, was seven months pregnant and had a bad case of syphilis. Bay is a sex worker and has sold drugs in the past. She claims she has never stolen from anyone but her family. (Unfortunately, this is typical of many of the women). She says that she would not sell drugs again because, as she puts it, “I don like their (the managers') attitude, like if you come up short, they take it out on you. A lot of

people will rip you off, be a dollar short for a vial – what can you do?” (Bay, 9 May 1991). Bay currently alternates between sleeping on the streets and in a shelter for pregnant women. She has been cut off welfare and is finding it difficult to get sex work because of her pregnancy. One of us recently spent a day hanging out with Bay as she “hustled” for cash and crack. Watching her panhandle change whenever she could, con a junkie out of a stolen bedspread for \$1 and re-sell it for \$2, get free condoms from health workers and sell them to girls on the stroll, and, finally, try for over an hour to pick up a date, I was left with the indelible impression that, in the absence of sex work, it was difficult, if not impossible for women to “get paid” in this neighbourhood.

[Why do you think women stick to, like, boosting and turning tricks when they could do like rob people and shit, do all the things that men do?] That ain’t their style, it’s not their style – the guys would get pissed and the guys would start robbin the girls – they take it now, rob the girls, you know it, they take the shit, like the money they make from trickin and stuff, guys rip em off, they be bad out here. (Bay, 9 May 1991).

2. Increased competition and hostility

“Candy” is a 41 year old Euro-American woman who grew up on the Southside. She started using dope at 15 because, as she puts it, “People I used to hang out with – like the guy I was in love with – he used to do it and never have time for me” (Candy, 30 August 1990). Candy currently shoots heroin and cocaine and smokes crack. Her health is deplorable. At 41, she is eight months pregnant as a result of having been raped by a client, her legs and breasts are abscessed, and she has a heart condition and a fluid retention problem – both exacerbated by her pregnancy for which she receives no prenatal care. She is also HIV positive. Somehow she manages to retain a great wit and a strong sense of empathy for others, which she struggles to keep covered up. Candy has been a sex worker, or as she puts it, a “ho” for about seventeen years “on and off” in both research sites. She is well placed to describe recent changes in the contexts of street-level sex work in these neighbourhoods. As she told us:

Many moons ago I started off on D and P down by the Star Diner. There was three girls – Jo, Ellen and myself. O.K. By the train station, there was three of us out there . . . That was about fifteen years ago when it was real discrete . . . we had to do all the talkin, you know . . . it’ll cost you a few dollars, you can give us a present if you want, you know, you can give us money for a meal you know. It was so much different and more fun back then too. [Did you have friends among the other girls then?] Those were friends – now these girls out here are just for the drug and theirselves – no friendship, everyone’s out to cut everyone’s throat. [Back then were you all using drugs?] Of course, that’s mainly what the whole deals about – drug using, you know

what I'm sayin. You not out there caus you need love, you can get that any damn where, you know what I'm sayin . . . (But) we were friends and we'd help one another out whether we were right or wrong . . . We'd stick together, it's like I said, do a favour, call somebody up, go get a bag of dope . . . These people don't know how to be ho's. (Candy, 10 May 1991)

The absence of friendship is a recurrent theme in the women's conversations. Most of the women characterize their relationships with other drug users as "associates", even though these relations are more complex and perhaps less instrumental than they initially appear.

A few women but friendships, no. Some of them say people come before drugs. That's bullshit caus there's a lot of people I really care about – family and stuff – that I put the drugs before – you tryin to tell me I'm gonna put some street junkie before them? (Tina, 24 April 1991)

Patricia is a 32 year old African-American woman who currently shoots dope and coke and smokes crack. She came down to Bushwick about three years ago. Prior to that she had worked a "Black stroll" in nearby Bedford Stuyvesant, where the dates were predominantly Black and most of the girls had pimps.⁶³

[Do you think girls on the stroll over here compete more or less here than they did over there?] More, caus there's more drugs around so you need more money. There's more girls and less dates. [What about steadies on this side?] I have a few steadies but not like before. . . we startin to get a lot of foot dates. (Patricia, 12 June 1991)

Rosie is a 31 year old Dominican woman who, at the time of writing, was seven months pregnant with her fourth child. When Rosie came down to Bushwick in about 1988, she had been using heroin and doing speedballs for about fifteen years, but had not yet begun to smoke crack. Rosie walked onto a stroll dominated by crack smokers. She saw herself as different then and, despite her current crack use, still does.

[So you were working on the stroll with other girls who were smoking crack but you weren't smoking crack – what kind of a situation was that?] Yeah, it was problem because you know, they want get a hit and you wanna get a dope you know . . . they ones that crackhead, they even go for fi dollar, three dollar. Yeah, we charge fifteen caus we need it. Like now I always try to get twenny-five because like, I remember the crack, the coke, the dope and I try to get more. But the one only smokin crack they don't care to go for fi dollar, because right there they got a bottle . . . [Do the dates all wanna go with them caus they're cheap? And so what did you girls do about

this?] Yeah, we fight or watch them go out and when they come back rip 'em off. Two of you together and we say I share with you whatever she got. [But if you had like friends on the stroll down here? (interrupted).] Believe me, there's no friend around here. [No friends – sorry – associates on the stroll, but would they be like crack women or dope women?] Well most the people in this days they be doing the dope and the crack, now I be all three, now I do all three [You've been working on the stroll lately – how's it going?] Now not too great caus I'm pregnant, it's hard to get a customer you know. [But if it's just a blow job, it shouldn't make any difference?] That how I see but I guess they don't see it that way. (Rosie, 23 May 1991)

Rosie's account is illuminating for a number of reasons. First, in these days when "poly-drug use" has become a fashionable catch-all, her distinction between crack smokers and poly-drug users suggests the need for an analysis of both the social and economic relations of poly-drug consumption, and, in particular, how poly-drug use relates to sex work and high risk behaviours. Secondly, Rosie's account verifies that not only are there "no friends out here" but that relations between women on the stroll today are certainly "not like they used to be". Increasingly, some of the interactions between the women are characterized by mutual hostility and competition – to the point where, when they are not "vicced" first by dates or male users, some will even "vic" each other for increasingly hard-to-get cash and drugs. Finally, Rosie's experience of her pregnancy illustrates the relationship between sex work and constructions of femininity and sexuality. Although there is no good reason why Rosie could not continue to perform blowjobs, most dates clearly do not wish to engage pregnant sex workers.⁶⁴

Although the connection between women's drug use and their relationships with men does not appear in this sample to be as direct or unmediated as much of the literature suggests, the initiation of many of the women into drug use, sex work and street life was facilitated by intimate involvements with males.⁶⁵

[Who brought you down here?] Same guy, he know everything . . . he dead now . . . [What was your relationship with him?] Well, was my pimp and then we was started doing relationship you know . . . [He was like your boyfriend or your ripping and running partner?] Both – first we was only rippin people – friends right – but then you know, we start to do a little better. [But he didn't start as your boyfriend, he started just as your partner?] Uh huh, then we came in bed, did boyfriend and everything together . . . about four years, and he's the one who show me everything, all the trick and everything you know. I felt very sorry that he die. (Rosie, 23 May 1991).

Gender relations with intimates, where they survive the rigours of daily drug consumption by both partners, tend to be characterized by a reciprocal flow of violence between the street and the "home" (or other makeshift domestic setting). As Patricia attests:

Last night I went up there [to the stroll] – you know I tricked . . . took me about an hour and I made money and I have to tell him how much I made. I made forty-five dollars . . . I said I made forty-five dollars here, I'm gon give you, you know caus he had got me straight yesterday. He doesn't have a dope habit – he doesn't never had one, he don't know what its like. He call me dope friend in front of everybody and lowlife bitch, bitch, suckin on white face dicks, you know, and this the same money that I share with him . . . I mean . . . after I gave him twenty-five dollars, I took twenty and you know that he smoked it all up right. I bought me a one on one [heroin and cocaine] and a crack, right. I had to give him half of my one on one so he wouldn't jump on me and beat me up – after I gave him twenty five dollars, then I had my crack, right . . . and he want half my crack and caus I didn't give it to him, he jumped on me and beat me up and my sweater is all bloodied up from him beatin on me . . . He knows I got no place to go. (Patricia, 25 May 1991)

On the street, the tenuous relations between genders – intimate or not – are undergirded by the same threat or reality of male violence and reinforced by the lack of any collective solidarity between the women. As Bay puts it:

The guys, they stress the females. The guys out here kick the girls' ass. That's where the girls got to watch okay? You got the girls competitioning each other, and you got the guys victimizing them, see? That's the line out here. [How come the girls don't get together and kick the boy's ass?] Because they're having their little rival, you know, all the girls are rivals. They're tryin to out-beat each other. (Bay, 9 April 1991)

Well, it's more rugged here (in Bushwick). It's more rugged turf, because you have a lot of vultures that walk around. You know, the guys that wait on the girls to come out of the cars to rob them . . . Girls are always gettin beat up. [Do the guys that do this use drugs or are they just in it for the money?] Crack, yeah caus they're feeding it – they're like maniacs. (Mary, 31 January 1991)

In particular, the women are conscious of the multitude of ways in which male crack users “disrespect” them.

(Men are) bitches . . . because since they got on crack, I learnt that they ain't no self respect for nobody. They threat you like shit – straight up, like shit. Disrespect – they lose all respect – treating them like a dog – word. (Bay, 9 May 1991)

Me and a guy had a beef you know, shit because he wanted to pay me two dollars to get him off on the sidewalk – c'mon I'm not that stupid. And, I tells D (her husband) you know, about the beef. Little do I know that dude gave D a hit of crack and D told him “Fuck the bitch”, right – “Just don't tell her that I said” . . . (Patricia, 25 May 1991).

Finally, pregnancy provides a particularly interesting site from which to view the shifting and fragmented social relations of and among crack smokers.⁶⁶ Historically, Anglo culture has placed a high premium on pregnancy as a time when social and gender relations are restructured – people got married, left work, stopped exercise and limited social interaction – all because they were pregnant. Many of the social conventions attached to pregnancy by the dominant culture have remained intact. However, being pregnant, for the most part, does not appear to afford women special status on the street. As noted earlier, Rosie is currently seven months pregnant and, while she is having a hard time getting sex work because of her pregnancy, her fellow drug users do not appear to view or treat her any differently.

[You think people out here like treat you different if your're pregnant – do they like watch out for you?] No. they don't give a damn. Believe me, there's no friend in dis neighbourhood. Dey all friend because you got somethin, you don't got nothing, you don't want to see me say hello to you. First thing they say – “Hey hi, what you got – you gotta hit? On no, oh okay, see you later.” [But if you have something?] “Oh yes, oh how you doin? How the baby?” They all, you know, hypocrite. (Rosie, 23 May 1991)

While Rosie claims that she is not treated differently by other drug users, the dates appear to have internalized social norms dictating that we view and treat pregnant women differently. Social norms prescribe a view of pregnancy as the paradigm benevolent relationship. Women drug users with swollen bellies are in flagrant breach of widely held notions of pregnancy and mothering as the paradigm female nurturant activity. This is exemplified in the drugs literature by what we call the “myth” of pregnancy as the ideal time for treatment intervention.⁶⁷ The “natural” instincts of the woman toward her foetus are expected somehow miraculously to surface and to over-ride the psycho-social realities of women's lives. However, the reality for women drug users is often more complex, as Rosie's responses when I talked with her about the impending birth indicate.

[Are you scared what's going to happen?] I don't think about it . . . [You don't like to think about it?] I be too busy thinkin about how I'm going to get the money for the drug and . . . [So, you when the time comes, you'll just go in the hospital . . . What do you think will happen if they take the baby?] [Pause] . . . I don't think they're gonna give it to me caus I don have a place to stay. [But you know they test the baby now at all the hospitals?] Well, I'll just see what happens [Yeah, but you didn't think about going into treatment now – you know, for the baby?] I'm not ready yet I don't think. For what I'm gonna lie, you know? [Well, I think caus a lot of women are pregnant they think they have to say that they're thinking about going into treatment and everything]. Oh, not me, I be honest wit you . . . [Do you feel guilty sometimes when

you do drug caus of the baby?] Yes I do, but you know, only for a moment. (Rosie, 23 May 1991)

3. Changes in the price, structure and nature of sex work

Crack-induced increases in the number of women sex workers and crack-accelerated shifts in the nature of sex work (e.g., from vaginal intercourse to blow jobs, from indoor to outdoor) have both deflated the going rates for sexual exchanges and increased the levels of violence associated with the strolls. As Crystal put it recently, since the TNT intervention, there is “less drugs and more violence” on the Southside. She explained that this has led to a situation where “a lot of girls is taking off dates and the dates is getting mad”. Crystal, a 31 year old Puerto Rican crack smoker and methodonian (whose mother was also a junkie and prostitute on the Southside), told the story of how she got stabbed in the back. She picked up a “walking date” and took him to a nearby parking lot for a blow job. When they got there, he started pushing her around and accused her of taking his money. She told him she’d never seen him before and that this was a mistake. He said “what the fuck”, she was “gonna pay” for what “the other girl” did to him anyway – they were “all the same” (Crystal 19 March 1991).

We got similar accounts from most of the women when we introduced a series of questions designed to elicit information about whether, how and why the strolls which they worked had changed in recent months. Asked about the Southside, women suggested a confluence of factors post-dating the TNT intervention. Most notable were the recurrent themes of crack’s effect on the prices for sex work and increases in violence.

[What has changed most about your work out here?] I’d be gettin more then that I’m gettin now, caus of this crack shit . . . or they wanted to get laid more than they do now caus of this AIDS thing okay . . . And you know, like they try to get over – you get a date and then all of a sudden they’re in the car with you and now they wanna go to their house. Now they don’t want to pay no more than \$10 and you don’t want no more. (Candy, 30 August 1990)

[Why do you think the stroll has gotten so slow up here (the Southside) – any idea?] I think it’s because a lot of the girls rippin off the dates. Yeah, caus there are black girls down here that like to rip em off, set them up. (Roxanne, 11 December 1990)

[What was the Mustard factory?] That was where the girls would all go and that’s where we would get high and some of them would bring their Johns over there and it was a factory where – yeah, yeah, we used to do everything over there and ya know what happened once these girls they took advantage of things and they started robbin

the men there and doin things that shouldn't be done, so that when they closed it up. (Debbie, 10 November 1990).

Although they all smoked crack, the women pinpointed it as the prime culprit in limiting their ability to make money. "Crack" was repeatedly identified as having lowered the going rates for sex work and increased the numbers of "asshole dates" and male crack heads.

The difference between here (Bushwick) and Manhattan is the guys are *so cheap* over here. All these bitches around here is crack heads so every trick you get now wanna give crack fare. [They don't wanna give you cash?] No, I'm saying "crack fare" because they know these bitches be doing – every bitch over here is a crack head so they just wanna give you that amount [\$5] . . . These girls go out there just for crack fare. When it's over, when they want another crack, they go back – so why not let's just do this right from the beginning and we don't have to keep goin back an forth. (Kizzy, 14 June 1991)

[Some of the girls were telling us that it's a lot harder to make money down here because, you know, it's only like five dollars down here?] "It's true – over here I have gotten a lot of – you know, a couple of people stopped me and tell me fi dollars for a fuck, you know. It bums me out because . . . I stress sometimes but never to the point where I'll go and lay with somebody for fi dollars – I'd rather stay out there for a couple of hours and get my twenny-fi or twenny dollars – there's girls out here that will do it for a hit – not even fi dollars – just for a piece out of a bottle . . . It's cheaper and they get beat you know. And they're gettin hurt by their customers or when they go to cop man, they wind up gettin ripped off by the time they get to the dealers. (Vivian, 7 July 1990)

Very thirsty out here – I mean, hardly any white boys comin down here no more – they grab the white boys – every single white boy that come – they scalp him – they let him cop . . . before he gets to P or when he gets to – that's it – he's gone – they take all his shit and plus they beat him up . . . Pretty soon we ain't gonna have no walkin dates. They go on the Avenue and under all the lots that we take the dates – the tracks – they go back there and they wait for them . . . The majority of them are crackheads. They be takin the shit from the dopeheads. (Cookie, 7 June 1990)

[Is it harder down here than it was up on the Southside?] There's no money out here. I haven't even got a date – imagine – you know I would over there. Down here, I been out for like two hours. There's fuckin customers but I don't know what they're looking for. They got a lot of girls over here. (Lisa, 30 May 1990)

[I've heard it's much cheaper down here than it was on the Southside] I don't go out for less than twenty-five – over here, anywhere. I'll let twenty cars pass me, they can go. I don't know them. They don't know me, they can go. Two dollars. They go out for two dollars. I mean if I was sick – don't get me wrong – if I was dopesick and I

needed a bag of dope, I'd go for ten dollars. I'm so sure I would. I'm sure any junkie would. (Mary, 31 January 1991)

Oh man, they be go so low as a cap [\$5 vial of crack] – dependin on how bad the person is stressin – they lose all the respect of yourselves – just totally bizarre if you ask me . . . The dates are rougher and nastier too – you're always gonna run into an asshole out there but there's more assholes now. With the girls, it's let's see who can beat each other, the majority of women try to challenge each other. It's pathetic . . . it's just fucked up, they just want that hit so bad – they're not pathetic, they're sick. (Bay, 9 May 1991)

[The stroll is much harder over here?] Not for me. Yeah the girls over here – that's what they say . . . it's a poor excuse for a stroll. I mean, only sometimes I go out there to make stupid dollars, I mean, real fast. (Cookie, 7 June 1990)

Normally you try to ask for fifteen for a blow job. These girls do it for five – less. That's, that's – you know – that's self degradation. You can't even blame the men because of course if you can get a blow job for five instead of ten or fifteen, you're going to take it. It's like someone selling me a bag of dope for five dollars; of course I'm going to buy your dope instead of the dope for ten, you know. (Tina, 24 April 1991)

[Since you've been out here, it's gotten cheaper?] Yeah . . . we got a girl we call “Two Dollar Mindy”. She go out . . . Mindy will stay with a date forty-five minutes and come back an she wanna get down on (share) a crack. [You mean she got less than five dollars?] . . . Two Dollar Mindy don't care about nobody, nuttin – long as she got two dollars. I've never seen a girl stay that long in a car an come back an she wants to get down. On a good date, she got four – she come back and she need a dollar.” [What do you girls think about her doing that?] Oh they be talk, that's why they call her Two Dollar Mindy. Why would you pick up a girl for ten when you can get one for two? (Patricia, 12 June 1991)

While the drop in price was prompted in the eyes of some women by a drop in standards on the part of the “girls”, it was clearly exacerbated by an increase in expectations, or “bang for the buck” on the part of the dates, which many women viewed as insulting and disrespectful (see subsection 5). In fact, “viccing” by women was often precipitated when individual dates behaved in this way. Such expectations on the part of dates are not surprising, given that anyone who read the newspapers in the New York area could hardly have avoided repeated reports that in some neighbourhoods, blowjobs could be had for as little as 50 cents. As Candy put it,

You don't have to be beautiful, can be the ugliest bitch on the street, bitch on the corner look like a million and you can look like a Bowery bum and he'll pick you up

and she's standing there . . . They call themselves men and some of the girls out there really look like shit . . . I'm no raving beauty but there's a way to do everything – take care . . . I'm out there most of the time . . . and here comes a girl looking dynamite really stecked out, she can't pick up a date for jackshit and here comes this stank bitch looking terrible and dirty and she'll pick up a date faster than I will . . . A lot of Johns are afraid today because there's diseases goin around . . . but then again you'll get a guy who'll pick somethin like that up and leave me hangin there – I be there for hours and don't make a dime and here's this filthy bitch making money left and right. (Candy, 10 May 1991)

In contrast to the emerging literature on women and crack cocaine which repeatedly asserts the primacy of sex-for-crack exchanges,⁶⁸ we found that women generally resist the lure of such exchanges. This is not surprising, given the fact that, within the current context of a deflated sex market, it is both time consuming and arguably more dangerous to support consumption through sex-for-crack transactions. For the most part, these exchanges were strongly contested by the street level sex workers in our sample.

[A lot of them want to do that – pay you in crack?] Oh yeah, a lot of them want to go out. Got a guy who say well I've got two bottles of crack and we'll smoke that and you give me a blowjob. What you mean, *we'll* smoke that you sonofabitch. It's \$10 at least for a blowjob – you got two on you, who say *we* gonna smoke it, *we* ain't doin jackshit. *I'll* smoke it if it's gonna be that way – you know what I'm sayin – or you pay me cash. (Candy, 10 May 1991)

Or you get a guy pull up to you and say, “Do you um um um, you goin out, I just wanna smoke, do you have a pipe?” Yeah, but “Do you smoke?” No I carry a fuckin pipe around for dicks like you and get busted. I've got a pipe of course I must smoke you stupid ass. And I tell the guy, okay, hey honey if you wanna turn me on that's lovely but that's not gonna be my payment, you have to pay me cash up, I'm a ho. (Candy, fieldnotes, 10 May 1991)

Moreover, as Kizzy – a 32 year old African American woman who worked as a “professional” prostitute in Chicago for many years before coming to New York – told us, sex-for-crack exchanges or “smokin dates” as the women refer to them, are both dangerous and “unprofessional”.

They fail to realize that crack affect everyone different – you know what I'm sayin. Whereas I might take a hit and sit here an' be cool, another person might take a hit and get to trippin, you know what I'm sayin, they might think anything – flip out. (Kizzy, 14 June 1991)

Sometimes some women do exchange sex for crack, but neither frequently, readily nor easily. Initially, most are extremely reluctant to elaborate just

when and under what circumstances they would do it or have done it in the past. Over a long period of observation and several interviews, in which considerable relations of trust and support had been established. Candy gave us the following account.

Okay. If I was stressin real bad and a guy tell me he's got two or three caps I might do it. I'm sorry, I'm no better than anyone else – shit, I don't put myself on a pedestal, if I was stressin bad enough I'd do it. But then after I do it – I think – you motherfucker man you give me two bottles and I gotta suck your dick . . . And I get so mad at myself sometimes I'll tell the guy your time is up and he ain't come yet and he ain't had time – you pay me half, only gettin half a job. And he'll go – “I'll pay you more” – but nah, he ain't gettin nuttin yet, caus he so eager to pop that nut – “I'll pay you after” – okay great – “I'll get some money” – no you up it now my man . . . “Oh, I ain't got my wallet with me.” Uh uh, ain't no fool, you up it now . . . It's gonna go down for a while, I'll get it right back again – pay me now – right or wrong, you know what I'm saying . . . I ain't no new kid on the block baby . . . “I'll pay you when it's done” – *suuure*. (Candy, 10 May 1991)

Part of their resistance to sex-for-crack exchanges is couched in the inevitability of street-level gender relations whereby men constantly “get over women” and end up getting both “the head and the drugs”. As Candy told us:

He smokin so lovely everytime he tell you okay you can take a pull, you take a pull an he wants you on the dick right away – let me enjoy the fuckin hit if you want me to smoke wit you. You take a hit and you're down there and ain't even let the shit out your mouth yet. You know what I'm sayin, he fuckin smokin lovely while you're just suckin rubber lovely. (Candy, 10 May 1991)

Despite recent crack-induced shifts in the price, structure and nature of street-level sex work, for the women in this sample, money still defines the nature of the interaction. Although prices are deflated and their work devalued, sex remains “work”. For the most part, the women resist attempts by dates to mix “business and pleasure”.

4. Market conditions and the victimization of women

The price deflation of sexual services has in turn spawned a self-selection process of cheaper “rougher” dates which has made the strolls themselves “rougher” and more violent places to work. Despite the fact that they are often victims themselves, some of the women are reluctant to “blame” the dates. Rather, they attribute increases in victimization to crack-induced carelessness. As Kizzy told us:

You can just about tell which guys be up to something. [But a lot of the girls obviously can't, because they be gettin all messed up out here now?] A lot of them be thirsty too and they be, they ain't got no time to judge you know. (Kizzy, 14 June 1991).

Since we have been working in these neighbourhoods at least four women sex workers have been killed. One woman was hurled into a parking meter from a van being chased by the police; another was murdered and her decapitated body minus her breasts, was found over by the railway tracks. Another woman, a "friend" of Patricia's, was beaten to death by a date.

That's the one I'm a witness for in the case. She was workin. She was a crack head and he used to flip, used to go buy a bunch of crack right, give it to the girl and then, you know, do what you want but then he would flip out and then he'd beat em up. That was her date. (Patricia, 12 June 1991)

On a recent Sunday evening, one of the women, Juanita was repeatedly stabbed and, again, her breasts were mutilated. At the time of writing, she remains in intensive care in a local hospital.

I know Juanita from my old neighbourhood. I heard she got a hundred stitches. He cut her breasts off . . . He was hangin out in the lot. I can't understand – why would you take somebody from the lot where everybody's there? You know, if he do something to you all you gotta do is scream – and bring them to some secluded area – two people. [But they were white guys we heard?] That why she went. To Hispanic and Black people, if is white, it's okay – that's bull. (Patricia, 12 June 1991)

Another woman – Tessie – was found dead in an abandoned lot where many of the women sleep. She had two bullet holes in her head.⁶⁹

For many of these women, victimization on the streets merely extends a continuum of violence that began at home. These are women who, for the most part, experienced victimization and abuse as children. Candy was brutally raped in the shower by her father when she was eight years old. Her father attempted to rape her a second time, but Candy escaped and told her sister, who in turn told her grandfather. The grandfather "beat the shit" out of the father and kicked him out of the house. In 1990, she was raped by a date who drove her down to the waterfront and "beat the hell" out of her.

I saw his face and I saw my father at the same time . . . We were right by the waterfront, okay, water again and I got raped, I was in the shower takin a shower and my father raped me . . . so it was like . . . Yeah I've done everything, I lay, blowjobs, that and the other thing, I mean I'm not . . . [crying] . . . you know . . . I was still feeling dirty and . . . still it's a different feeling, different feeling . . . now I'm gettin

raped, it's different to me . . . It just don't feel right . . . no matter what I am. (Candy, 25 May 1991)

People say to me how did you get raped? . . . You don't have to be a hooker to get raped, you can be anybody and get raped . . . They laugh, you got raped, you're a hooker, you're a ho, you're a whore whatever they want to call you, you know, now you all kinds of shit. The same sonofabitches that's knockin you callin you all kinds of names right down here lookin for pussy at night, you know what I'm sayin . . . Here's that same guy call you a whore, a ho and the sonofabitch right out there buying some pussy. (Candy, fieldnotes, 10 May 1991)

I got punched in the mouth not too long ago they [two dates] ripped me off – they wanted their money back after we finished – threw me off the van naked – then he hit me with a blackjack caus I jumped back onto the van because I wanted to get my clothes. It was freezing outside so I jumped back onto the van to try and get my clothes and he smacked me with a blackjack on my eye. (Cookie, 15 December 1990)

[The stroll now has changed a lot now. You don't find too many girls working up on this side anymore?] No, there's not – there's not that many. I guess they're onto L. I tried it there, but I don't like it. [Why is that?] caus I got ripped off. I was outside – standin outside and this guy came and took my jacket off me. I had a leather – like up to here and they took it off me. And not only that, I got beat up by four guys too – I was standing on the corner and they went up to my friend and they were bothering her and so I got scared and I started running so I heard one of them say, "Let's chase her caus she's running". They chased me alright, and they got me. (Roxanne, 11 December 1990)

I got shot twice since I bin here . . . was a car pulled up, two guys in it, they was like – "C'mon go on a date". I wouldn't go with that so they came back around and shot me . . . in the leg and up here. (Kizzy, 14 June 1991)

Tina, who recently moved down to Bushwick, had been raped four times while working on the Southside. Suzie Q, a 32 year old Jewish woman, is a former S&M Queen who lived in California for nine years. She has several porn videos to her credit and claims to have freebased at Hugh Hefner's playboy mansion. However, these days are behind her and Suzie now works the stroll in Bushwick. She has been raped, and recently lost all her teeth as a result of a pistol whipping in East New York when two men tried to rob her and a friend for a dollar. Suzie is not alone. Most of the women report having been raped in the context of sex work and all of them report having been beaten in relation to either sex work or drugs.

[What happened yesterday? (She had a cut face and eye.)] "Well, somebody tried to rip me off, two black guys, right there, they came from nowhere I didn't give up the

money, they hit me, police came on time (they were goin by) but you know, hey I wasn't givin the money so I told them, you can kill me. They saw me gettin out of the [date's] car . . . They hit me . . . cut me, with a ring or something. I went to the Precinct, I was bleeding. (Rosie, 23 May 1991)

Although many of the women are currently homeless which exacerbates their vulnerability to street predators, some are simultaneously victims of intimate abuse or [sic] domestic violence. As Patricia's story attests.

And, um, I can imagine myself like waitin til D go to sleep and killin him – caus – I promise myself once I get grown, nobody was gonna beat on me no more. Caus I can't take it. I don't want nobody beatin on me no more. I said, when I get grown nobody's gone ever hit me again . . . Now, it's startin to happen all over again . . . (sobbing) I'm scared, I'm gon kill him, I can't take it . . . I have no place to go, I got no place to go . . . Caus um, you know, he just takes an hit me for nuttin sometime. I mean it just bring back memories you know, and I be askin him “Why are you hitten me?” and then he'll say the same thing my mother say, “Just shut up” – and I cant fuckin take it . . . If there's a god, why, why is he makin me suffer like this? . . . I go in my pocket and give people my last, if I see people sick (dopesick). I share – I share with them. I sell my body and I give him. So, I can't take it . . . either I kill him or I kill me . . . and if I went through all the hell with my mother and I'm still alive, why should I kill me man? . . . He's not worth it – first of all, look at him okay – I can do better than that and I know I can – I know . . . I got a lot on a lotta people. Nine years of, even with my education – I'm talkin about street knowledge. Okay. Caus when they was out here gettin pampered, I had it hard baby, I mean I had it fuckin hard you know. You know what it's like to walk in your house and as soon as you get in you get fuckin beat and you don't know why (really distressed). (Patricia, 25 May 1991)

5. The emergence of of “viccing” as a form of resistance

The term “viccing” has become as much a part of the lexicon of crack use as more familiar phrases such as “beaming up”, “talking to Scotty”, “on a mission”, “klingons”, and “nickelonians”. However, the use of robbery as a means of supporting drug consumption by women is not a new phenomenon, nor is it exclusive to crack use.⁷⁰ Some women have a long history of robbing dates within the context of income generation for drugs. Rosie told us of her “dope-fiend” days up in the Bronx:

Then I was like robbin more people. [How would you do that – how do you rob somebody?] Well, I was goin with guys, you know, maybe they want to go out and we used to set em up and I used to take em to a place and the guys would take the guy off . . . two guys or one . . . Well, I used to go on the street like, you know stand on the corner, guy come and say “Hey you go out?” [work as a prostitute], and I say yeah

and take him to a place . . . to rob them . . . About 1986 . . . I startin gettin sick. [How much dope were you doing?] A bundle. [A day?] Yeah, caus all the money I was gettin . . . for dope. I wasn't even thinkin about clothes or food. (Rosie, 23 May 1991)

Felicia also recounted a long history of robbing dates:

[Where were you getting that kind of money?] I work. I jostle. I pickpockets. That's what I do now – you think I take all them mothers an suck dick? My fingers go skinny-dippin every nite baby. My toes go to walkin. [Where would you jostle mostly at that time?] Manhattan . . . There's a ho stroll over there, – bunch of hos over there. [But whose pocket could you pick?] When those motherfuckers stop and they act like they like me and I'm gon act like I love them . . . I was clever. I was gettin big bucks or big dough. I used to come home with a thousand or more – or more, two thousand if that motherfucker was drunk . . . if he had a Rolex on his arm, he didn't have it. (Felicia, 21 May 1991)

Nonetheless, these women clearly distinguish between robbery, sex work and viccing.

There I started doing you know, started workin like a hooker, you know. I mean I was doing the job – I was gettin paid. [Where you were *really* working like a hooker, you weren't robbing or doing stuff?] No, no no – just doing the job and gettin paid you know. (Rosie, 23 May 1991)

While on face value, “viccing” dates appears to be nothing new, a further examination reveals that it is closely connected with crack-induced shifts in the context of street-level sex work. The fact that the act itself is little different to any other instrumental robbery belies the reality that the motivations undergirding it are more complex and, indeed, are intimately linked with women's collective sense of the devaluation of their bodies and their work. Viccing can be viewed as a way of contesting this devaluation and simultaneously as a means of adaptation to the changed conditions of street-level sex work post-crack.

I robbed a guy up here not too long ago – 5 o'clock Sunday morning . . . a real cheek gonna tell me \$5 for a blowjob and that pisses me off – arguing wit them. I don't argue no more – jus get in the car sucker, he open his pants and do like this and I do like this, put my hand, money first. He give me the money I say “See ya, hate to be ya, next time motherfucker it cost you \$5 to get me to come to the window” . . . Ain't give em shit for five bucks, you can't get nothing for five bucks . . . I rip off someone if he gonna be cute like that, but I don't rip anybody off . . . I haven't done that often, making a habit, but that guy got me so pissed off. Sunday morning I'm hungry, I'm stressin like a son of a bitch, I got my ride here stressed with me because he ain't done a blast and here come a sucker offer me five bucks an got pocket full of money . . . That's the guy that's *insulting* you and I don't like that . . . Like sorry, if I'm hungry or

I'm stressin and I want a blast bad enough. I'll get in the car for \$2 if I'm short, don mean you gon get your dick sucked . . . I was hungry, I wanted breakfast and I did it and my girlfriend, she's comin down the block . . . She said I know I saw you do the quick action . . . She said how much you get, I said \$2, shit what, I said I'm hungry bitch. Two dollars she said, yeah I'm hungry too – so I bought some potato chips for 50 cents and two bags of 25 cent cookies . . . We both had breakfast for \$2 . . . Two bucks he wanted to get laid . . . sonofabitch, imagine that shit and that sucker sit around for about two hours ridin around cursin me out for that two dollars. (Candy, 10 May 1991)

There are, however, consequences attached to viccing dates – not the least of which are “cutting your own throat” and the ever present threat of retaliation.

Like I lost a steady, he was a \$30 blow job, used to come once a week and I was so ill this one day I took him in the bathroom and he paid me and I said “Not this day baby, I'm sorry” and I just took the money and ran down the stairs and he said “Where you goin?” and I said “I'm sorry I'm not in the mood today – later” . . . Now I lost that customer but at that point I didn't give a fuck, I was that sick . . . I just wanted to get mine, get straight and that all I cared about. Now I hurt because I miss that thirty bucks on that Wednesday morning you know. (Candy, 10 May 1991)

I had to change my wig and everything. I do too much, do too much wrong – you know, I do too much stealin, rippin off motherfuckers – if dey identify me, I have to change up . . . [Down here, do the other girls get mad if you rob the dates?] Some of them, stupid bitches . . . My hairstyle, my style, have to look different . . . for my safety, do too much wrong . . . dey guys that I robbed. [Tell me about the other girls on the stroll – what do they do to you if they find you robbin dates all the time?] No, caus I don play like dat, if dey on somebody, if they talkin to somebody I just come over here and do sumpin – it's cuthroat. I get's my own . . . or dey come over to me. Or even if dey might be talkin to that broad, dey just come over to me, ain't nobody own no trick, that ain't my husband, ain't her husband . . . I work by myself, I don' need nobody to work with. (Felicia, 21 May 1991)

Discussion

In many ways, recent changes in the structure, functioning and locales of drug markets⁷¹ can be seen as constitutive of changes in the prostitution markets that provide the context for street-level sex work. The city-wide “drying up” and consolidation of drug markets into “drug vortices” is mirrored by parallel shifts in the structure, functioning and locale of sex markets.⁷² For example, the “drying up” of drug markets on the Southside has taken its toll on the once busy sex trade and many of the women who worked the stroll on the Southside have followed the drugs down to Bushwick.

The sex markets on which this research focusses have undergone considerable changes in the last two years. The processes elaborated in this paper serve to illustrate the interconnections or relations of mutual determination both amongst the constituent sub-economies of the informal economy and between the informal economy and the formal economy. They also serve to illustrate how gender relations are conceived and structured within a specific social space. Heightened and exacerbated by the “war on drugs”, negative social attitudes towards women are expressed in the victimization of women crack smokers by dates, male smokers, police and neighbourhood youth.⁷³ As Cookie’s account indicates, male youth in particular appear to have internalized the sexist and racist social messages of the “war on drugs”.

[You were telling us that a lot of the young kids out here are beating up and harassing a lot of the crackheads?] Crackheads, dope addicts, and especially prostitutes – they don’t like prostitutes . . . You know how much it hurts, you have to stay hit from a lil 11 or 12 year old kid – it happened to me that day . . . and all because they came up on the Avenue that night and I was the only one workin that corner. And they wanted to feel me – they wanted to feel my breasts, feel my ass, you know and then come on – “Let me get some of this, get some of that”. You know, “I got my money man, I’ll give you \$5 for a blowjob” . . . I didn’t know anything about them – I never seen em before in my life – all I knew was I wasn’t about to let no little boy feeling my body you know. So I hit four of them . . . and I got into my dates car and I got away . . . Later on that evening, I’m on D and we’re sittin on the ground you know – me and a friend of mine – we smokin and I was turnin him on and I got my back towards P – they came up on me, about six or seven of them . . . Somebody smacks me from the back and I turn around – there’s a little kid on me you know – he just started pow pow pow you know, hitting on me and I’m on the ground – that block was full of more people than there’s there now – about thirty people – dealers, crackheads, even the ones that just sit around there bullshitting, you know what I mean – everybody – you name it, was there. My people, *my so-called people* – nobody did nothin – everybody. Truly, walked away. In less than a minute, that garage door was empty. I was the only one there and it was the little kids beatin up on me. (Cookie, 7 June 1990)

What we have tried to illustrate is the need for both women’s use of crack and their income generating strategies to be situated within the contexts of [particular] women’s lives. In our sample of street level crack smokers, this has necessitated a consideration of the relationships between gender, crack, crime and violence as they are played out within the sex markets of the informal economy.

Recent increases in rates of participation by women in “criminal” activities such as robbery and assault may appear on face value to suggest a shift away from traditional female involvements.⁷⁴ However, our observations and interviews suggest that they may more accurately reflect an innovative “solu-

tion”, albeit one that is deeply immersed, entrenched even, in the most traditional category of all – prostitution. If crack use results in, if not initiation, then greater commitment/attachment/dependence or consolidation into prostitution (the “narrowing options” view of addiction⁷⁵), then this process reflects the conditions of crack-saturated street-level sex markets and their positioning within the informal economy. Within a context where blow jobs can be had for as little as two or three dollars, robbery, assault and petty larceny are going to be pretty common events – committed against dates and other vics – but committed within a context provided by prostitution as the primary labor market/main hustle for women drug users. Viccing dates, conning guys, and retaliating when male crack users try to intimidate, harrass or rip them off may be forms of adaptation to a fucked [sic] market.

Thus, these forms of illicit income generation, which appear to reflect extended criminality and excursions into the male domain, more accurately reflect these women’s continued subjugation – not only their marginalization within prostitution, but the impact of recent changes in the sex markets themselves which have exacerbated women’s vulnerability to violent victimization and necessitated adaptations in order to survive. Viccing has emerged as a response to these conditions. Rendered peripheral by the sex segmented labour markets of the informal economy and the crack accelerated commodification and devaluation of their bodies, these women make the most of the opportunities that come their way.⁷⁶

If we are correct in assuming that the women in this sample commit their robberies and assaults within the context of (the deteriorating conditions of) their “main hustle” (prostitution), it becomes important to illustrate their resistance to both localized and broader processes which serve to circumscribe their options – “no way, I won’t do a blow [job] for three bucks” or “yeah, sometimes I’ll get mad and rip off the date who insults me” or “maybe I’ll vic the white guy who gave me money to go cop for him”. These women have merely sought to utilize the limited opportunities available to them, within the context of prostitution as a main hustle, to create additional opportunities for “getting paid”. By viewing and responding to their actions as lawbreaking, we neglect the conditions of their existence and criminalize what are in effect, women’s survival strategies.

Conclusion

The advent of crack cocaine can in no way be seen as “emancipatory” for women drug users.⁷⁷ Within the informal economy, women have neither been “masculinized” nor have opportunities for illicit income generation expanded or opened up where women are concerned. Within the context of curbside

crack distribution and consumption studied here, women remain, for the most part, confined to marginal roles in the drug trade and traditional, even stereotypical, categories of female lawbreaking – prostitution, shoplifting, fraud and theft. Any apparent or even “real” indicators of shifts away from traditional categories of female crime reflected in increased rates of robbery and assault by women in some jurisdictions must be examined in the light of:

- changing perceptions of women, and in particular, women crack smokers;
- changes in law and enforcement practices;
- changes in the procedures involved in collecting crime statistics; and, most importantly,
- changes in the contexts in which these women live their daily lives and the structures in which they are situated with respect to both their drug use and opportunities for income-generation.

In this context, both their “criminality” and their violence can be seen as responses to the threat or reality of victimization (which arguably may exacerbate their drug use).

The women we see and interact with neither strip cars nor fight turf battles. Men still very much control the informal economy in these neighbourhoods and the street drug scene in which social and occupational relations are increasingly embedded. Our observations suggest that men tend to monopolize opportunities both for income-generation and violence within the informal economy. Moreover, our research lends support to broader theses which suggest that women’s “violence” can only be understood within the social and economic context of male dominated structures and relations.

In concluding, we suggest that the connection between either emancipation or crack cocaine and women’s “criminality” and violence is revealed as simplistic and acontextual. This is certainly nothing new to either feminism or the sociology of law. Explanations of women’s lawbreaking and deviance have historically been both constructed and couched in terms of pathology – either daft psychological or offensive biological accounts.⁷⁸ To assume that the complexity of women’s [or men’s] lives – including their crimes, violence, and drug taking – exists in a singular monocausal relationship to biology, psychology or pharmacology that can be “read off” aggregate indices is simply to miss the point. Moreover in New York State, even official indices do not support the thesis that women crack smokers are indeed a “new” breed of “violent female criminals”.⁷⁹

In relation to women street-level sex workers who smoke crack, it appears that any relationship between drug use and violence is overwhelmed by the relationship between masculinity and violence. Street-level sex work has long been recognized as a high risk occupation for violence. As Silbert and Pines have argued, “abuses on the job” constitute more than an occupational hazard and are a form of victimization of street prostitutes.⁸⁰ What we have attempted

to illustrate are the ways in which the advent of crack cocaine, as an integral part of New York City's expanding informal economy, has accelerated the risks of violent victimization for women sex workers. In particular, the "war on drugs" and the internalization of social messages which denigrate "crack heads" as the lowest form of drug lowlife are given expression in the victimization of women sex workers by (male) dates, (male) crack smokers, (male) neighbourhood youth and (male) police. In addition to reinforcing the persistent correlation between masculinity and violence in Western cultures, our research suggests that it is not the advent of crack per se nor its "behavioural effects" that precipitates the violent victimization of these women and their "criminal" responses or resistances. Rather, the stigma which is indelibly attached to being a women crack smoker and in particular, a "crack ho" or a "crack bitch" serves to sanction and reinforce at the local level the social legitimacy of violence against women.

Much feminist research has been concerned to demonstrate how women's apparent crime, deviance or other "unacceptable" behaviours, acts, omissions, shortcomings and deficits can be viewed in the context of physical, sexual and economic abuse. To utilize research to point this out is not, however, to take away from women's agency – to present women as mere "effects", rendered "victims" by overarching structures – but rather, to contextualize their agency within the terms of the sometimes conflicting and often complementary structures of patriarchy, racism and capitalism.

Our reading of these women's lives suggests that they are becoming neither more violent nor more "criminal". What they are becoming – within the contexts in which their daily lives and their drug use are situated – is both more vulnerable and more victimized.

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Notes and references

1. For a review and critical analysis of the "crack epidemic," see C. Reinerman, and H. Levine, "The Crack Attack: Politics and Media in America's Latest Drug Scare," in J. Best (eds), *Images of Issues: Typifying Contemporary Social Problems* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1989).
2. For a review, see L. Maher, "Criminalizing Pregnancy: The Downside of a Kinder Gentler Nation," *Social Justice*, 1990 (17:3), 111–135 and D.E. Roberts, "Punishing Drug Addicts

who have Babies: Women of Color, Equality and the Right of Privacy," *Harvard Law Review*, 1991 (194:7), 1419–1482.

3. As historians and legal scholars have pointed out, Black women's experience of mothering must be situated within the context of white regulation. The removal of Black infants from Black mothers and Black families has a long coterminous history in the U.S. and elsewhere with slavery and institutionalized racism. See D.G. White, *Ar'n't I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1985); M.A. Burnham, "An Impossible Marriage: Slave Law and Family Law," *Law and Inequality*, 1987 (5), 187–225. See also Roberts, *op. cit.*
4. L. Maher, "Punishment and Welfare: Crack Cocaine and the Regulation of Mothering," in C. Feinman (ed), *The Criminalization of a Woman's Body* (New York: Haworth Press, 1992). Also published as *Women and Criminal Justice*, 1991 (3: 1–2).
5. See, e.g., *New York Times*, 5/18/91.
6. "Freakhouses" are perhaps the most recent context in which crack smoking in New York City can be located. Basically, a freakhouse is a house or apartment where men go to "freak" – both to "smoke lovely" [crack] and to engage in sexual exchanges with any number of women, for which the women receive either crack or money, or both. Freakhouses vary in form, composition and the kinds of exchanges that occur within. Theoretically, they could be highly instrumental money-making operations. More likely is a less structured arrangement which puts older men with homes or apartments in positions of relative power over homeless and crack-smoking women. Being "with home" affords these older men the opportunity to live out their wildest fantasies and earn the respect of other men who flock to the house. Their structural position vis a vis the women enables them to provide women with places to sleep, eat, cook, wash etc. as well as to purchase, exchange and smoke crack. When women have lost their children, their incomes and their homes, freakhouses often present an alternative to squatting in derelict buildings, sleeping on the streets, in hallways and parks, or in the increasingly dangerous city shelter network. More recently, we have come across crack smoking households where sex appears takes a back seat to basic survival arrangements – i.e. sleeping, washing etc. See also A. Hamid, *Beaming Up: Contexts for Crack Smoking*, (forthcoming).
7. We use the term "sex market" to suggest the relations of exchange that occur within the context of street-level prostitution and sex-for-drugs exchanges. These relations are structured by market and non-market forces operant at the local level, including social ecology, gender and ethnic composition, opportunities for income generation and the nature and strength of links between the formal and informal sectors.
8. The paper draws from on-going ethnographic research conducted in and around prostitution strolls situated in two adjacent Brooklyn (New York) neighbourhoods. The observations and interviews utilized here were conducted between May 1990 and June 1991. A rich body of literature attests to the ability of ethnographic methods to document systematically the social organization of "deviant" or extra-legal activities at the local level. See, e.g., E. Preble and J.J. Casey, "Taking Care of Business: The Heroin User's Life on the Streets," *International Journal of the Addictions*, 1969 (4:1), 1–24; B. Johnson et al., *Taking Care of Business: The Economics of Crime by Heroin Abusers* (Lexington, MA., 1985); M.L. Sullivan, *Getting Paid: Youth Crime and Work in the Inner City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989).
9. See L. Maher, "Women and Crack Cocaine," Ph.D. Dissertation, Rutgers University, School of Criminal Justice (forthcoming). Consisting of an ethnographic study of women who smoke crack cocaine, this research is concerned to "engender the [crack] epidemic" by explicating the relations between the material and ideological conditions of these women's lives (i.e. by examining social, drug, lawbreaking and victimization histories; social networks; gender relations; inter-generational relations; parenting; sexuality; status, positioning and

- participation within the informal economy; extent, type and experiences of state intervention; experience of treatment) and their consumption of crack cocaine.
10. This research consists of repeated observations of and interviews with 25 women who were drawn from larger neighbourhood samples over the course of an eighteen month period. Of the 25 women in the deep sample, 11 are African American, 10 are Latina and 4 are white. During the course of the research period, three of the women were killed, one is currently in a critical condition in hospital as a result of an attempted murder, one died of AIDS, one disappeared and three were arrested on felony drug charges.
 11. We use the term "gender" (rather than sex) here in order to distinguish differences between men and women as social categories. Gender relations are seen to arise from the way in which particular societies organize people into male and female categories and the construction of meanings around those categories. Such differences and categories are neither pre-given or natural. Rather, they are socially realized, socially named and socially contested and negotiated. Specifically, we are interested to explore the social practices and social relations that, in constituting gender divisions, create the category "women crack users."
 12. As Hamid has noted in relation to the crack economy, the manner and extent to which various "substrata" are formed and the nature of their involvement in "criminal or deviant lifestyles", varies widely across regions, between neighbourhoods and "even between genders." See A. Hamid, "Crack: New Directions in Drug Research," *International Journal of the Addictions*, 1991 (26:8), 839.
 13. See, e.g. Drug Abuse Warning Network (DAWN), 1990; *New York Times*, 7/1/90; 7/23/90; 12/27/90; 1/1/91.
 14. See, e.g., J.A. Inciardi, "Beyond Cocaine: Basuo, Crack and Other Coca Products," *Contemporary Drug Problems*, 1987 (14), 461–492; B. Frank et al., *Current Drug Use Trends in New York City: December 1987* (New York: New York State Department of Substance Abuse Services, 1987); P. Bourgois, "In Search of Horatio Alger," *Contemporary Drug Problems*, 1990 (16:4), 619–649.; M. Clatts, "Sex for Crack: The Many Faces of Risk within the Street Economy of Harlem," paper presented at the Second Annual AIDS Demonstration Conference, Bethesda, MD.
 15. Drug Use Forecasting, *Drugs and Crime in America* (Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Justice, 1990).
 16. New York State Department of Correctional Services, *Female Drug Commitment Population 1987–1989* (Albany, New York: Department of Correctional Services, Division of Program Planning, Research and Evaluation, March 1990).
 17. B. Frank and W. Hopkins, "Current Drug Use Trends in New York City: June 1989," in Community Epidemiology Work Group, *Epidemiologic Trends in Drug Abuse: Proceedings* (Rockville, MD.: National Institute of Drug Abuse, June 1989).
 18. Clatts, *op. cit.* Of the 388 women included in this study, 250 were IVDUs and the remaining 138 were sex partners of IVDUs.
 19. See, e.g., A.M. Washton et al., "Crack: Early Report on a New Epidemic," *Postgraduate Medicine*, 1986 (50), 52–58; J. Strang et al., "Crack and Cocaine Use in South London Drug Addicts," *British Journal of Addiction*, 1990 (85), 193–196; Y.W. Cheung et al., "Experience of Crack Use: Findings from a Community-based Sample in Toronto," *Journal of Drug Issues*, 1991 (21:1), 121–140.
 20. J. Mondanaro, *Treating Chemically Dependent Women* (Lexington, MA.: Lexington Books, 1988).
 21. J.B. Cohen et al., "Women and IV Drugs: Parental and Heterosexual Transmission of Human Immunodeficiency Virus," *The Journal of Drug Issues*, 1989 (19:1), 39–56; C. Robbins, "Sex Differences in Psychological Consequences of Alcohol and Drug Abuse," *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 1989 (30), 117–130.

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23. V.J. Binion, *Women's Drug Research Project, Addicted Women: Family Dynamics, Self-perceptions and Support Systems* (Rockville, MD: Services Research Monograph Series, National Institute of Drug Abuse, 1979). See also M. Rosenbaum, *Women on Heroin* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1981).
24. See, e.g., Binion, *op. cit.*, Rosenbaum, *op. cit.* See also J. Covington, "Gender Differences in Criminality among Heroin Addicts," *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 1985 (22:4), 329-354.
25. See, e.g., E.S. Gomberg, "Historical and Political Perspective: Women and Drug Use," *Journal of Social Issues*, 1982, (38), 9-23.
26. See, e.g., M.T. and R.E. Fullilove, "Intersecting Epidemics: Black Teen Crack Use and Sexually Transmitted Diseases", *JAMA*, 1989 (44:5), 146-153; B. Sowder and G. Weissman, "NADR Project Revealing New Data on High-risk Behavior among Women," *NADR Network*, 1989 (1:2); D. Worth, "Minority Women and AIDS: Culture, Race and Gender," in D. Feldman (eds), *Culture and AIDS* (New York: Praeger, 1990); A. Kronliczack, "Update on High-risk Behaviors among Female Sexual Partners of Injection Drug Users." *NADR Network*, (Special Issue), 1990; J.A. Inciardi, "Trading Sex for Crack among Juvenile Crack Users: A Research Note," *Contemporary Drug Problems*, Winter 1989; J.A. Inciardi et al., "Prostitution, IV Drug Use, and Sex-for-crack Exchanges among Serious Delinquents: Risks for HIV Infection," *Criminology*, 1991 (29:2), 221-235; Pivnick et al., *op. cit.*; M. Clatts, "Poverty, Drug Use and AIDS: Converging Lines in the Life Stories of Women in Harlem," in B. Blair and S. Cayleff (eds), *Wings of Gauze: Women of Color and the Experience of Health and Illness* (Wayne State University Press, in press).
27. See e.g., Mondanaro, *op. cit.*
28. In New York City, where AIDS is currently the leading killer of women aged between 24 and 34 (New York City Department of Health, 1988), at least 120,000 current or former IVDU males live with women in heterosexual relationships. See S. Staver, "Minority Women Grappling with Growing AIDS Problem," *American Medical News*, November, 1987; Cohen *op. cit.*
29. See e.g., C.B. Stack, *All Our Kin: Strategies for Survival in a Black Community* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1974).
30. S. Belenko et al., *Crack and the New York Courts: A Study of Judicial Responses and Attitudes* (New York: New York City Criminal Justice Agency, 1990).
31. S. Belenko, et al., "Criminal Justice Responses to Crack," *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 1989 (28:1) 33-54.
32. Belenko et al., 1990 *op. cit.*, point out that the bulk of felony crack sale arrests in New York State are for a "B" felony which entails "possession of any amount of an 'narcotic' drug with intent to sell, or one-half ounce or more (aggregate weight) of a substance containing narcotics."
33. A recent study which compared a sample of 3,403 New York City crack arrests with a sample of powdered cocaine arrests found that crack arrestees had a higher probability of pretrial detention, felony indictment and jail sentence. This led the authors to conclude that "crack

- offenses are met with a relatively stringent criminal justice system response, regardless of prior criminal justice system involvement.” Belenko et al., 1989, *op. cit.*
34. F. Solomon, *1987 Narcotics Division Arrests: Arrestee Characteristics and Criminal Court Case Processing* (New York: New York City Criminal Justice Agency, 1988).
 35. Belenko et al., 1990 *op. cit.* at 80.
 36. New York State Department of Correctional Services, *Female New Court Commitments 1976–1987* (Albany, New York: Department of Correctional Services, Division of Program Planning, Research and Evaluation, 1988).
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 39. See, e.g., Maher, 1992, *op. cit.*
 40. J.R. Fink, “Reported Effects of Crack Cocaine on Infants,” *Youth Law News*, 1990 (11:1), 37–39.
 41. Office of the Inspector General, *Crack Babies* (Washington, D.C.: OIG, June 1990).
 42. A. Bussiere and C. Shauffer, “The Little Prisoners,” *Youth Law News*, 1990 (11:1), 22–26.
 43. Office of the Inspector General, *op. cit.*, at 15.
 44. Maher, 1990, *op. cit.* For a full elaboration of these issues, see A. Noble, Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Davis, forthcoming.
 45. Maher, forthcoming, *op. cit.*
 46. For example, a recent analysis of 1988 DUF data indicates that, while male arrestees in New York had the highest rate of unemployment in 20 cities (57%), female arrestees’ rate was even higher, with almost 81% of women arrestees in New York City unemployed. Drug Use Forecasting. *op. cit.*
 47. P.B. Dorienger and M. Piore, *Internal Labor Markets and Manpower Analysis* (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath, 1971).
 48. A. Hamid, “Nickels Markets in Flatbush,” paper prepared for publication, under contract with the Social Science Research Council/Guggenheim Foundation Working Group on the Ecology of Crime and Drugs Nationwide, 1991.
 49. For a detailed analysis and history of the evolution of drug markets in Williamsburg, see R. Curtis and L. Maher, “Highly Structured Crack Markets in the Southside of Williamsburg, Brooklyn,” paper prepared for publication, under contract with the Social Science Research Council/Guggenheim Foundation Working Group on the Ecology of Crime and Drugs Nationwide, 1991.
 50. R. Curtis, “An Ethnographic Study of the Effects of the Tactical Narcotics Team on Street Level Drug Markets in Three Police Precincts in Brooklyn, New York,” Ph.D. Dissertation, Columbia University, (forthcoming).
 51. *Id.*, at 49.
 52. This is reflected in the increase in reported homicides in the neighbourhood. In 1988, 58 homicides were reported in Bushwick. By 1990 this figure had increased to 77 – a jump of more than 35% in a two year period.
 53. This thesis gained widespread publicity in 1975 with the publication of F. Adler’s *Sisters in Crime: The Rise of the New Female Criminal* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1975). In this book, Adler posits the existence of a causal nexus between changes in the social roles of women attributed to the women’s liberation movement and shifts in patterns and rates of women’s lawbreaking. The argument basically runs that as women are liberated and begin to assume male social roles, they will become “masculinized”/adopt “masculine” behaviours – i.e. become aggressive, violent and “criminal”. The same year, R.J. Simon published *Women and Crime* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1975) advancing what has become known as the

- "opportunity" thesis. Rather than claim that women's "emancipation" would lead to their "masculinization", Simon hypothesized that as the employment patterns of men and women became more similar, women's increased "opportunities" would be reflected in an increase in women's participation in property crimes. Numerous critiques have been made of these theses, including several which utilize empirical data and more recently, qualitative studies concerned to interrogate the material conditions of women's lives. The bulk of this research clearly indicates that neither the status of women lawbreakers nor patterns of female offending have changed in the wake of women's "liberation". See, e.g., C. Smart, *Women, Crime and Criminology: A Feminist Critique* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976); L. Crites (eds), *The Female Offender* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1976); C. Smart, "The New Female Criminal: Reality or Myth?", *British Journal of Criminology*, 1979 (19), 50-59; J.R. Chapman, *Economic Realities and the Female Offender* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1980); D. Steffensmeier et al., "Trends in Female Violence 1970-1977," *Sociological Focus*, 1979 (12:3), 217-237; D. Steffensmeier, "Sex Differences in Patterns of Adult Crime 1965-1977: A Review and Assessment," *Social Forces*, 1980 (58), 1080-1108; S. Box and C. Hale, "Liberation and Female Criminality in England and Wales," *British Journal of Criminology*, 1983 (23:1), 35-49; M. Chesney-Lind, "Women and Crime: the Female Offender," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 1986 (12:1), 78-96; D. Cook, "Women on Welfare: In Crime or Injustice?", in P. Carlen and A. Worrall (eds), *Gender, Crime and Justice* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1987); A. Morris, *Women, Crime and Criminal Justice* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987); N. Naffine, *Female Crime: The Construction of Women in Criminology* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1987); K. Daly, "Gender and Varieties of White Collar Crime", *Criminology*, 1989 (27), 769-794; L. Maher and E.J. Waring, "Beyond Simple Differences: White Collar Crime, Gender and Workforce Position," *Phoebé: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Feminist Scholarship, Theory and Aesthetics*, 1990 (2:1), 44-54.
54. Rather, applying the insights of recent economic analyses which reveal the inadequacy of gender as a single "lens" through which to view women's economic lives, we argue that even were one to accept the notion that the "generic" women may more be emancipated today than she was thirty years ago, the women in our sample experience ongoing economic oppression by virtue of the inter-relationships between gender, ethnicity and class in determining economic activity. See, e.g., J. Malveaux, "Gender Difference and Beyond: An Economic Perspective on Diversity and Commonality among Women," in D.L. Rhode (eds), *Theoretical Perspectives on Sexual Difference* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); M.C. Simms and J. Malveaux (eds), *Slipping Through the Cracks: The Status of Black Women* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1989); S. McLanahan et al., "Sex Differences in Poverty 1950-1980," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 1989 (15:1), 102-122; T.L. Amott and J.A. Matthaei, *Race, Gender and Work: A Multicultural Economic History of Women in the United States* (Boston: South End Press, 1991).
 55. Hamid, 1991, *op. cit.*
 56. *Id.*, at 833.
 57. *Ibid.*
 58. Names and details of places have been changed in order to protect the anonymity of the women.
 59. As Preble and Casey noted (*op. cit.*), heroin addicts in poor communities typically receive local level support for their income generating activities in exchange for providing a supply of cheap goods.
 60. M.L. Sullivan, *Getting Over: Economy, Culture and Youth Crime in Three Urban Neighborhoods*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Columbia University (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1986) at 386.
 61. Hamid, 1991, *op. cit.*, at 86.

62. Sweetie was unusually keen to tell us about her “cars”. Although she had been half asleep during the initial conversation when the topic came up, Sweetie did not forget that we wanted to talk to her about this and had repeatedly harassed us about doing the “car interview”. It was almost like this was her moment of glory – like some people talk about college or the good ol’ days!
63. In contrast, very few of the girls who work the strolls on the Southside and in Bushwick today have pimps. Recent shifts in the economics of sex work have arguably made pimps redundant – i.e. prices are too low to support the functions traditionally associated with pimping structures.
64. This was confirmed by many of the women in the current study, as well as by women in another Brooklyn site where research was undertaken by the authors on sex work and sex-for-crack exchanges in the context of freakhouses.
65. See, e.g., E.M. Miler, *Street Woman* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); K.B. Sears, *The Significance of Relationships with Important Male “Others” in the First Conviction of Female Offenders*, Ph.D. Dissertation, The Fielding Institute (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1989).
66. During the fieldwork period, at least ten of the 25 women in this sample have been pregnant. Six have subsequently given birth to infants, all of whom have been placed in foster care (two with kin). Three of the women were pregnant at the time of writing and one is no longer pregnant.
67. See, e.g., Rosenbaum, *op. cit.*
68. See, e.g., Fullilove and Fullilove *op. cit.*, Bourgois *op. cit.*, Clatts *op. cit.*, Inciardi *op. cit.*, and Inciardi et al. *op. cit.*, However Clatts *op. cit.*, found that in a sub-sample of 388 women IVDUs and sex partners of IVDUs, money ($p < 0.001$) was more significantly associated with prostitution than was drugs ($p < 0.05$).
69. To the best of our knowledge, none of these incidents was reported in the mass media.
70. See, e.g., P.J. Goldstein, *Prostitution and Drugs* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1979).
71. See Curtis, *op. cit.*, The point is that what appears on face value to constitute a “New Jack City” is really a conglomeration of several “Old Jack Cities”, where for the most part, players have assumed the same social roles as before.
72. As we see it, New York City has what can be described as a two-tiered system of street-level prostitution: an “exclusive” market concentrated in parts of mid-town Manhattan and a hierarchy of second-tier street-level sex markets dispersed throughout the city. Most recently however, the hierarchy of sex markets within this second tier appears to be breaking down in tandem with the breakdown of street-level drug markets in many neighbourhoods. Some of the second tier sex markets have dried up, while others have been forced to absorb displaced women, resulting in an increasingly heterogeneous population of street level sex workers (i.e., in terms of ethnicity and age). This process has arguably widened the gulf between the two tiers.
73. See, e.g., *New York Times*, 7/23/90; 9/25/90.
74. See, e.g., D. Baskin, Proposal to the Guggenheim Foundation, unpublished, 1989; I. Sommers and D. Baskin, “The Situational Context of Violent Female Crime,” paper presented at the Annual Meetings, American Society of Criminology, San Francisco, November 1991.
75. See, e.g., Rosenbaum, *op. cit.*
76. Within this context, housing appears to be a crucial variable structuring the conditions of women’s survival. The recent eviction in Bushwick of one woman from her apartment also rendered homeless her boyfriend and four other African-American couples who were staying in the four room apartment. Or as Lucy (a longtime crack smoker from another neighbourhood who has managed to keep her apartment) puts it: “The price of pussy has gone down here tremendously. To \$3 for head and \$5 a fuck. Man, I got \$600 rent to pay, you

- cannot give me \$3 – I'm \$597 short – move the fuck away from me. I'm \$597 short – why the fuck you give me \$3 – I'll give you \$5" (Lucy, 9 July 1990). See Maher, forthcoming, *op. cit.*
77. cf. Bourgois, *op. cit.* and Clatts, *op. cit.*
 78. See, e.g., E. Abelson, "The Invention of Kleptomania," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 1989 (15:1), 123–143.
 79. Despite recent increases in the rates of incarceration for women in the State of New York, the percentage of women committed to state prison for violent felonies has declined from 50% of total admissions for women in the early 1980s to only 17% of admissions in 1990. The great bulk of the recent increase in women's imprisonment can be attributed to state and local responses to drug related crime in the wake of the "war on drugs." In 1990, 73% of women in prison were incarcerated for non-violent drug offenses (possession or sale). Their felony imprisonment status is the result of the 1973 Rockefeller Laws which mandate prison sentences for all repeat felons, regardless of the nature of the offence or the background and motivation of the offender. Exacerbated by the "war on drugs," the effect of this statute has been the mandatory imprisonment of thousands of low-level non-violent drug sellers and users – most of them minorities and many of them women. See Correctional Association Reporter, *op. cit.*; New York State Department of Correctional Services, 1990, *op. cit.*
 80. M.H. Silbert and A.M. Pines, "Occupational Hazards of Street Prostitutes," *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 1984 (8:4), 395–399.