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In the last issue of the *Bulletin*, we examined the frequency with which drug users make cash and non-cash transactions to acquire drugs. Here we more closely examine some features of cash transactions for marijuana and crack cocaine,<sup>1</sup> so that we might better understand the dynamics of retail drug markets. In particular, we describe three characteristics of cash transactions: how the buyer initially contacts the seller; whether the seller is the buyer's regular source, an occasional source, or a new source; and the type of the location—indoors or outdoors—in which the transaction takes place. We also analyze the associations among these transaction characteristics to identify the modal types of transactions, and we examine whether transactions take place inside or outside of the buyer's neighborhood.

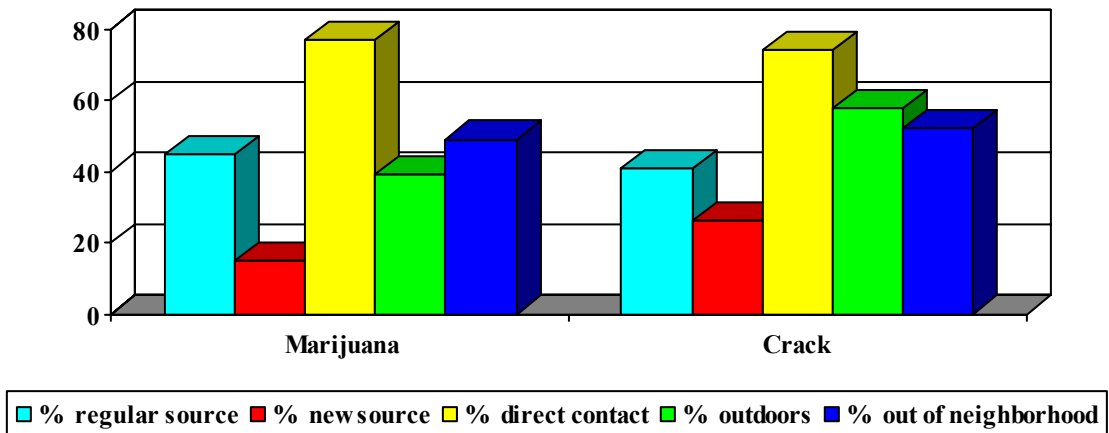
As Figure 1 shows, 45 percent of the marijuana transactions involve a regular source, while only 15 percent are from a new source. Forty-one percent of the crack transactions are from a regular source, while about one quarter are from a new source. We might suppose that extent to which drug buyers rely on new sources is indicative of the ready availability of a drug and the ease with which it can be acquired. The more that drug users can complete transactions with new sources, we might infer, the easier it would be for any one user to find a willing seller—i.e., one who does not insist on direct

personal knowledge to determine that the buyer is not an informant or an undercover officer.

Buyers can contact sellers through various means: directly, by going to the seller's house or approaching the seller in public or in another social setting; or indirectly, by paging or calling the seller on the phone. Indirect contacts are probably associated with transactions that are less conspicuous, and hence less vulnerable to enforcement efforts. We might also suppose that indirect contact is indicative of an established relationship between buyer and seller. As Figure 1 shows, in the majority of marijuana and crack cocaine transactions—77 and 74 percent, respectively—the buyer contacted the source directly.

Drug transactions may take place indoors – in a house, apartment, or some other public building – or outdoors – in a street, alley, road, abandoned building or some other outdoor area such as a park or parking lot. Transactions that occur indoors may be more discreet and therefore less noxious to the persons residing in the area; outdoor transactions are probably more vulnerable to police activity. In this respect, it appears, Capital District marijuana markets differ from crack cocaine markets: 37 percent of marijuana users made purchases outdoors, compared to 55 percent of crack users (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 Characteristics of Drug Transactions



These characteristics of drug transactions are, not surprisingly, associated with one another, and by forming all twelve of the possible combinations of these characteristics, we identified five modal types of marijuana transactions, and six model types of crack transactions (see Table 1), which comprise nearly four fifths of all of the transactions. Many of the transactions—one third of the marijuana transactions, and one quarter of the crack transactions—involved a regular source, contacted directly or indirectly, and completed at an indoor location. Such transactions may be characteristic of a drug market that is more “closed,” and not readily accessible to new buyers. But one sixth of the crack cocaine transactions involved a new source, contacted directly, and completed at an outdoor location. Such transactions may be characteristic of markets that are “open,” accessible to any user, and also in many instances a source of neighborhood nuisances and perhaps a catalyst for violence.

We also ask ADAM respondents whether he made his purchase inside or outside of his neighborhood. Slightly under 50 percent of the marijuana transactions, and 52 percent of crack transactions, are made outside of arrestees’ own neighborhood (see Figure 1).

One might expect that users whose neighborhoods are not the sites of retail drug markets, and who must go elsewhere to make their purchases, would be more likely to rely on a new source, contacted directly, at an outdoor location, but no well-marked pattern can be detected in the data.

Variation in these types of transactions is patterned to some degree by characteristics of the buyer or the purchase. African-Americans are somewhat more likely than whites to complete transactions outdoors, with regular or occasional sources, contacted directly. Transactions that involve larger sums of money tend, not surprisingly, to be completed indoors, with regular or occasional sources. Unexpectedly, however, heavy drug users, and the drug dependent, do not display a distinctive pattern of drug transactions, except insofar as they are more likely to rely on regular sources. Nor could we detect distinct patterns across age categories.

We believe that by analyzing the characteristics of drug transactions, it may be possible to learn more about the ways in which drug markets function in the Capital District, and also to better formulate and assess strategic interventions to regulate and control drug markets. Variation in the features of drug transactions across space—in different jurisdictions, or different parts of one jurisdiction—and over time may form the partial basis for decisions about how to intervene, and about the success of the interventions.

**Table 1 Modal Types of Drug Transactions**

Type of Transaction	Marijuana	Crack cocaine
Regular source, direct contact, indoor location	20.0%	14.8%
Regular source, indirect contact, indoor location	13.6%	9.1%
Regular source, direct contact, outdoor location	10.6%	14.3%
Occasional source, direct contact, outdoor location	17.4%	13.2%
Occasional source, direct contact, indoor location	16.3%	10.4%
New source, direct contact, outdoor location		16.7%
All other	22.1%	21.5%

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Notes

1. Each respondent who reports having completed one or more cash transactions in the 30 days preceding the interview is asked a set of questions about the *most recent* cash transaction, and

that is the transaction on which we analyze data here. We concentrate on marijuana and crack transactions because the numbers of heroin and powder cocaine transactions on which we have data are fairly small.



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