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### Inside Look at the Life of a Confessed Drug Dealer

People behave in seemingly unique ways; a lot of the time they appear both random and unexpected. I believe there is more to these behaviors than meets the eye. These behaviors may not actually be completely unique but instead something deeper, something almost programmed into them by their genes, peers, experiences, and media. While interviewing a young man named Matt, twenty-two years old, I have come across many levels of personality and behavioral aspects that interfere with the simple idea of people making decisions on their own terms. By taking a look into the mind of a confessed drug dealer, we are able to get a better idea of why some people act they way they do.

Matt is now in a halfway house, which is a housing unit that is a stepping stone back into the real world for people getting out of prison. Matt has committed a series of crimes since the tender age of twelve years old. I asked Matt a series of questions concerning his childhood and how he was brought up, his friends, his influences, his actions and his thoughts:

I asked, "What kind of childhood would you say you had?"

Matt responded, "A very, I don't know...Difficult, would be the word to describe it; eventful."

"Why was it difficult or eventful?"

"Probably because I changed schools a lot. I think I went to seven or eight different schools...never really got to make or keep a steady group of friends. That doesn't include family issues."

“What family issues?” I asked.

“Parents getting divorced and not being...I don’t know. We didn’t have money, which affected me in school being ‘the poor kid.’ Kids picked on me from first, second, third, fourth until fifth grade.”

As we continued talking about his childhood, he disclosed to me about his relationship with his parents, particularly his father, Steve. Matt described Steve as “controlling” and “verbally abusive,” which led to low self-esteem. At the age of five years old, Matt was on a children’s wrestling team and his father would call him names when he lost, and even just because he felt like it. His father was also incapable of being a role model, showing no moral or sense of right and wrong because of his drug and alcohol abuse. Matt explained, “It would be a short order list of drugs he didn’t use. I saw him drink a lot and smoke weed.” He described his relationship with his mother as “always good.” After his parents got divorced, his mother had full custody of Matt and his younger sister and younger brother.

It is understandable that not everyone has a childhood filled completely with love and respect, but it can be a challenge for some to be able to move past the hardships of life and not let the pits of their childhood bring them down. A well-known psychologist, Alfred Adler, created the Adlerian Theory, also known as the Theory of Individual Psychology, which states, “everyone is born with feelings of inferiority. Life is seen as a constant struggle to overcome these feelings; failure to do so leads to neurosis” (Kindersley par. 3). Adler also believed that a “misbehaving child is a discouraged child” and a child’s parents or supervisors need to make children feel valued and significant, as well as competent; it really helps the child deal with their unruly or

difficult behavior. The Adlerian Theory makes a great point: if we are already born feeling inferior, and fighting for our place in society, it can be very detrimental to a child's self-esteem for his or her parents to subdue them with harsh or unrealistic criticism, negativity, or mental, emotional, and physical abuse. In the case of Matt, this theory seems to play out. Matt was constantly put down and controlled, making him feel more inferior than most other children his age were probably feeling. Matt's mental health was being broken down by his father and there was nothing seemingly being done to save him.

I asked, "Moving on to your teenage years, were you tempted to try any drugs or alcohol? [If so] at what age?"

Matt responded, "I tried drugs and alcohol at twelve...Consistently using both. Just weed, oh and um, and that's when I first tried prescription drugs too."

"What kinds?"

"Pain killers, Vicodin. That's when I first got expelled from school for drugs, when I was twelve [and selling these drugs]."

"What about high school? What drugs did you use then?"

Matt replied, "I still mainly, just say its weed and prescription drugs and then hallucinogens."

"Did your parents know about your drug and alcohol use?"

"Um, they knew of my weed use and my alcohol use, slightly, they never fully knew."

Matt and I went on to talk about how his mother did remarry when he was about ten years old. Steve hated Matt's stepfather Jack because Jack was "the exact opposite of him. He's possibly jealous in ways." Jack is a great role model and father figure for Matt, causing an internal rift within Steve. I asked Matt if he is still in contact with Steve and

Matt said he didn't know where he was, and did not care to know where he was. Matt described the last time he saw his father as a physical altercation due to physical violence, as well as verbal abuse, of Matt's girlfriend at the time while Steve was heavily intoxicated. "I knocked all his teeth out, well not all of them, like four of them [because that was all he had]," and apparently that was almost all his father's teeth because Steve's teeth had rotted away from years of alcohol abuse, as well as his constant use of crack-cocaine. Matt also noted he had never before seen crack cocaine until he lived with his father briefly. Matt had begun using crack after living with his father; he learned everything about crack, crack use, and crack paraphernalia while living with Steve.

Growing up with a parent(s) or friends using alcohol or drugs in excess can leave a heavy and lasting impact on a child, which often leads to mirroring the parent(s) or friends with their alcohol and drug abuse. According to one survey, during the time Matt was a preteen, 1999, marijuana was considered easy for kids to get by 57% of surveyed youth between ages twelve and seventeen. The survey also showed that children who had friends who smoke weed were 30 times more likely to use marijuana; this accounted for 17% of surveyed youth ages twelve through seventeen ("Obtaining Marijuana Easy for Youth, SAMHSA 1999" par. 9). According to statistics presented on Drug Abuse.org, 1,000 deaths occur each year in the United States due to the excess consumption of alcohol, and age plays a large role in dependence on alcohol. Children with family history have an increased chance of alcoholism, including certain risks:

Long-term heavy drinking also increases the risk of developing certain forms of cancer, especially of the esophagus, mouth, throat, and larynx. Heavy alcohol use

also increases risk for cirrhosis and other liver disorders and worsens the outcome for patients with hepatitis C. Drinking also may increase the risk for developing cancer of the colon and rectum. Women's risk of developing breast cancer increases slightly if they drink two or more drinks per day. ("Drug Abuse Statistics")

Matt's peers were also contributing to his delinquency by encouraging his behavior while also doing drugs and drinking alcohol as children and teenagers. As stated in *Constructions of Social Deviance: Social Power, Content, and Interaction*, Matt's behavior patterns were "structured in relation to definitions to crime, and within this context people engage in actions that have relative probabilities of being defined as criminal" (Adler 55). This statement means because of Matt's actions he was labeled as deviant and he took notice of this, even admitted to gaining more friends because of his actions, and let this almost define him as an adolescent—people expected this behavior; well, maybe not his parents.

"Theories of Deviance," a section of *Constructions of Deviance*, explains that Structural Functionalism pertains to society as a moral phenomenon, encompassing the idea of moral beliefs and ideas being taught to children, the good and bad or the right and wrong within each individual society leading a person in a certain direction and factoring how a person is going to behave, what they desire, and who they eventually become as a person. When people become distant, a sense of belonging lacks and the society's norms and expectations become less known, ultimately leading to a lack of social integration and deviance. For Matt, the Structural Functionalism in his environment has meant a lack

of understanding of right and wrong. Some of this can be linked to his father's way of raising Matt. Society was also labeling Matt as deviant, which led to a lack of social belonging only to push him in a negative direction. This led to loss of knowledge of social norms and expectations, therefore ending in deviance once again.

Moving on within our interview, Matt began talking more about his life as a drug dealer, the money he made and spent, some of the crimes he got involved with, etcetera.

I asked, "When did you sell other drugs besides the pharmaceuticals and marijuana?"

Matt replied, "Probably when I was about sixteen, started selling very various amounts of coke, teners [1.5 g] and balls [3.5 g]."

"How much money does that amount to?"

"A gram is worth \$65 at the time; [I got] them for \$40.

"Were you friends with other drug dealers?"

"Yeah, that's how I got my drugs."

I asked, "Describe a basic day when you started selling larger amounts of cocaine."

"Wake up and look at my phone. My phone was basically my business...I would call back all the people who called or texted me. I would sell around an ounce [28 grams] of coke a day; which is like \$700-\$1,000.

“What other drugs did you sell?”

Matt responded, “What drugs didn’t I sell? I sold anything I could profit from. If someone wanted something, I could 99.9% of the time get it; from the dirtiest weed to the best heroin.”

“Did you use any of your product?”

“Yep, I sampled all my product.”

“What would you say made you decide to sell drugs?” I asked curiously.

Simply put, Matt said, “Easy money.”

“Did you ever worry about what problems you may have been causing by selling drugs, as in how it may affect your family, friends, or strangers?”

“Yeah, but I didn’t care about that; at the time.”

“How did your parents react to this?”

Matt reflected and believed, “They definitely weren’t proud of me, but they didn’t shun me, but they didn’t approve of me. I also didn’t talk to them much either.”

“What acts did you go to prison for?”

“I got caught with two ounces of coke, \$7,000 [cash], and [was driving] a stolen car.” [He borrowed the car, but knew it was stolen.] It could have been much worse because two or three hours before I had a total of six ounces of coke.”

“How did you feel about yourself at that time, did you take any time to think about that?” I asked.

“No, I didn’t, it was just a bump in the road. I just went on to sell harder drugs for better money.”

“How much money were you making, before you got taken to prison?”

“I was buying \$4,900 of coke a week. And so the amount I was making...\$8,000-\$9,000 a week, but I would spend it as fast as I would make it.” [Matt was fronted or loaned money and would pay the money back after selling drugs.]

Matt would spend his money on various things; he was blowing his money on drugs, clothes, alcohol, whatever he felt like buying for himself and his friends so that all of them could get “fucked up.” However, he didn’t have a license, so he was unable to buy himself a car. Matt also described his relationship with his siblings as basically non-existent; his sister highly disapproved of his actions and his brother “envied” him. Matt believes that everyone envies it, “in one way or another. People just don’t do it because it is illegal. People would probably do it if it was legal because you can make large amounts of money in a short amount of time.” He also described his weed use costing more than people would make in a year.

Everything Matt was describing, in some way, relates to “Differential Opportunity Theory,” which deals with varying approved goals within the different social structures of various social classes within a community and asserts that those goals are unevenly distributed to citizens—mostly based on social class. This inequality leads to delinquency



and criminal acts; everyone, however, can have the ability or opportunity to engage in illegitimate careers or pursuits that may lie within various deviant subcultures (Adler 62). Matt did explain how he was not of a higher social class and was friends with other deviants and drug dealers; therefore, he had access to these deviant opportunities. Matt's crimes when he was underage included two felonies (possession of a controlled substance with intent to distribute, and cultivation of marijuana) and ten misdemeanors (four counts of minor in possession, three counts of possession of paraphernalia, one count of graffiti, and he cannot remember the other two.) As an adult his crimes consisted of two felonies (possession with intent to distribute and cultivation of marijuana) and three misdemeanors (underage consumption, possession of narcotic equipment, and trespassing).

Some of his crimes he was not caught for were stealing from a police vehicle; this crime included stealing a crime scene investigation kit, a bulletproof vest, handcuffs, and roadside flares. Matt was unable to steal any firearms because they were locked. Matt also came into possession of military-issued live hand grenades, military issued flash grenades, and countless firearms, along with flares. From the age of twelve until the age of twenty-one, Matt sold skunk weed, prescriptions pills, chronic weed, cocaine, mushrooms, ecstasy, ketamine, LSD, meth, oxycontin, and heroin. His life was out of control, even with a loving mother and a very good male role model, his stepfather Jack, in his life. Matt still was stacked with the odds against him. He only began to change his life and move in a forward direction after being incarcerated for about a year; he had plenty of time to go over his life and reflect on every aspect of it, and although he claims

none of his past is surprising, he wouldn't change a thing because it has made him the man he is today.

After prison and moving into the halfway house to start over, he realized the drawbacks from his life as a deviant were affecting his job search. Matt described having a felony as having a disability; you can only work and live in certain places and it makes things a lot harder. He also described how his relationship with his family has changed; they talk more and have a lot less conflict, and life in general is just better. Matt also has two jobs, as a manager at a pet daycare and a cook at an upscale pizza restaurant. He makes a satisfying income and has been doing great on staying sober and clean. He has a good reason to, because life is less of a hassle and if he was to get in trouble again he would go back to prison and not get out until he is in his forties. His last words were, "If you want to make a lot of money, sell drugs. If you want to party, sell drugs. There is no such thing as a successful drug dealer. If you want to go to prison, sell drugs." This is a warning to those who feel that life as a drug dealer is a better alternative to a "normal" or "acceptable" job. You will eventually lose the game; it is ultimately inevitable.

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