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Tara Rose Abrahams
Missouri State University, Abrahams23@MissouriState.edu

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COMPARING THE MOTIVATION OF AUTO THIEVES AND CARJACKERS

A Master's Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate College of

Missouri State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science, Criminology and Criminal Justice

By

Tara R. Abrahams

May 2022

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COMPARING THE MOTIVATION OF AUTO THIEVES AND CARJACKERS

Criminology and Criminal Justice

Missouri State University, May 2022

Master of Science

Tara R. Abrahams

ABSTRACT

Motor vehicle theft is a popular crime with hundreds of thousands of vehicles stolen each year. Two common MVT methods are auto thefts and carjackings. Auto thefts occur solely as property crimes, in which an offender steals an unoccupied vehicle. Carjackings are interpersonal crimes, in which the offender steals the vehicle from the driver by force or coercion. This study compares the motivation of the two offender groups. Utilizing 28 in-depth semi-structured interviews with active offenders, this study explores why they chose to commit crimes, why they chose vehicle-related crimes, and why they chose their preferred method. Although both offender groups target vehicles, there were differences in motivation. Money-making was the most popular reason, with pleasure being the second most notable reason. Auto thieves also stole as a means of transportation regularly, but this was not noticed with carjackers. Offenders stole vehicles to sell and earn quick large amounts of money for survival and necessities, as well as to spend on luxury items, drugs, alcohol, and women. Most auto thieves chose to avoid interpersonal crimes to reduce the need for violence or the chance of heavier consequences, but carjackers rarely used their weapons as anything more than a scare tactic. After the crime occurred, carjackers disposed or separated from the stolen vehicles almost immediately, but auto thieves often kept them for several days. Stolen vehicles were most often disposed of by stripping them of parts and abandoning them on the side of the road by both offender groups.

KEYWORDS: auto theft, carjacking, motor vehicle theft, motivation, offender decision-making, active offenders

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Approved:

Aida Hass, Ph.D., Thesis Committee Chair

Michael Kyle, Ph.D., Committee Member

William Sandel, Ph.D., Committee Member

Julie Masterson, Ph.D., Dean of the Graduate College

In the interest of academic freedom and the principle of free speech, approval of this thesis indicates the format is acceptable and meets the academic criteria for the discipline as determined by the faculty that constitute the thesis committee. The content and views expressed in this thesis are those of the student-scholar and are not endorsed by Missouri State University, its Graduate College, or its employees.

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I dedicate this thesis to everyone who has made an impact on me... This is just the beginning.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Motor vehicle theft (MVT) is a serious crime in the United States. MVT involves the attempted or completed thefts of automobiles, sport utility vehicles (SUVs), motorcycles, personal or commercial trucks, or any other type of motor vehicle. The Federal Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime Report for 2020 stated there were 810,400 vehicle thefts nationwide (U.S. Department of Justice, 2021). Most (74.0%) of the vehicles stolen were automobiles. Statistics showed the rate of MVT increased 11.8% in 2020 when compared to 2019 estimates. Although many stolen vehicles are returned to their legal owners, the crime comes with a significant cost. In 2020, the thefts resulted in $7.4 billion worth of losses and averaged $9,166 per theft (U.S. Department of Justice, 2021). These thefts can occur solely as property crimes, in which an offender steals an unoccupied vehicle without confronting the owner, or as interpersonal crimes, like robbery, where the offender steals the vehicle by force or coercion.

Key Terms

Before proceeding further, it is important to address the definition of key terms relevant to this study. Each of these terms will be discussed in detail in the literature review; the key terms section is only intended to give a brief definition.

Motor Vehicle Theft (MVT). Motor vehicle theft, also called car theft or grand theft auto, is a type of crime involving an offender stealing or attempting to steal a motor vehicle (U.S. Department of Justice, 2021). The United States Department of Justice defines motor vehicles as automobiles, SUVs, trucks, motorcycles, buses, motor scooters, all-terrain vehicles, and snowmobiles. It does not include thefts of farm equipment, bulldozers, airplanes, construction

equipment, or watercraft such as motorboats, sailboats, houseboats, or jet skis.[1] Vehicles can be stolen while they are unoccupied, with or without the keys, or they can be carjacked, which is when an offender steals a vehicle from an individual by force. More than half (56.1%) of stolen vehicles were returned to the owner (U.S. Department of Justice, 2020). The UCR did not provide a breakdown of the returned vehicles, but the author was able to find a breakdown of recent MVT recoveries in certain states. California Highway Patrol (2021) reported 96% of automobiles and 93.6% of personal trucks and SUVs stolen in California were recovered in 2020. Of all recovered vehicles statewide (including automobiles, personal trucks and SUVs, commercial trucks, and motorcycles), 63.6% were recovered intact and in drivable condition, 3.1% were missing major components, and 8.6% were stripped of minor parts. The remaining 24.6% were intentionally burned and/or wrecked. There is also a chance that vehicles stolen with keys will have the keys returned as well. The Maryland Vehicle Theft Prevention Council (2003) estimated that 25-32% of recovered stolen vehicles still had the keys in them (as cited by Copes & Cherbonneau, 2006).

Auto Theft and Carjacking. There are several methods offenders use to steal motor vehicles, however, this paper will focus on two of the most common methods: theft of an unoccupied vehicle and carjacking. The term, "motor vehicle thieves," includes all offenders who steal motor vehicles, no matter their method. For this study, offenders who steal unoccupied vehicles will be referred to as "auto thieves," and those who steal occupied vehicles will be referred to as "carjackers." Both auto thieves and carjackers are involved in the act of illegally taking a vehicle, but by different means.

[1] Individual states vary in their statutory definitions of "motor vehicle" and may include some of those listed DOJ exclusions.

Auto thieves steal vehicles while they are parked somewhere without the owner present. This can occur on a street, in a parking lot or garage, from a driveway, or at a business. Auto thieves gain entrance to the vehicle with tools, by breaking windows, opening unlocked doors, or with stolen keys. Offenders who steal vehicles with the keys get them from a previous crime, such as a home burglary or robbery, or by finding vehicles left with the keys in or near it. Other auto thieves use tools to break down the steering columns and start the vehicles without their keys.

Carjackers steal vehicles by confronting the victim directly, usually while the victim is in their vehicle. The crime is typically a violent offense, like robbery, but with the target object being a vehicle. The crime occurs when the offender approaches the target victim and demands they exit the vehicle while leaving the keys or hand over the keys to the vehicle if they are outside of it. This is done using coercion, actual or threatened violence, or a weapon (usually a firearm). Successful carjackings allow the offender to escape in the vehicle with the keys.

Understanding the Problem and the Need for Further Research

MVT has been studied by criminologists looking at statistical crime data and through ethnographic interviews with both inactive and active offenders, as well as law enforcement. Scholars have focused on the causal forces of the crime, offender's methods, culture, victims, prevention, etc., but they are typically investigating one type of offender. A few studies on carjackings provided comparisons to robbery, but there have been little-to-no studies published comparing them to the crime of auto theft.

This study focuses on the motivation of motor vehicle thieves (auto thieves and carjackers) using active offenders as opposed to traditional research methods or statistical crime data to gain further understanding of the offender's perspective. Active offender research

investigates the topic at hand directly from noninstitutionalized criminals (i.e., not incarcerated or under formal supervision such as probation or parole) who are currently engaged in offending (Topalli et al., 2020). This type of research allows investigators to better understand the offender's decision-making process, the knowledge the offender has and uses to commit the crime successfully, and how the crime occurs from both cognitive and emotional standpoints without excluding unreported crimes. Active offender research is typically accomplished by recruiting participants and speaking directly with them using semi-structured interviews. The interviews between researchers and active offenders often take place outside of correctional settings because the researchers believe offenders do not behave naturally in those settings (Jacobs, 2012). Active offenders are assumed to be less removed from the instability of street life and expected to provide better access to real-time insights. By using active offenders for this study, the author hopes to better understand the motivation of the two offender groups and explain the similarities and differences between them.

Current Study

This study encompasses a comparative analysis of active offenders who commit auto theft and carjacking. There have been several studies done on these types of crimes, some utilizing active offender research, yet none comparing the motivation of the two groups. The goal of this study is to analyze the motivations of these offenders and to look at the similarities and differences between their responses. More specifically, it aims to investigate why the offender chose to commit crimes, why they chose vehicle-related crimes, and why they chose their method of taking the vehicle from the perspective of the offender. Within each section, consistencies between auto thieves and carjackers are reviewed. It also briefly discusses offenders who have admitted to both types of MVT, but more so why most auto thieves avoid

carjacking and vice versa. Additionally, since carjacking is typically a violent interpersonal crime, the study examines the offender's commitment to the crime, their willingness to hurt or kill for a vehicle, and any history that led them to violent crimes.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

History of Motor Vehicle Theft

Motor vehicles were invented in Germany and France in the late 1800s (History.com editors, 2010). It was not long before they were introduced to the rest of the world. Americans began manufacturing and selling vehicles in the United States in the early 1900s. By the 1920s, Ford, General Motors, and Chrysler emerged as the "Big Three" auto companies. The new automobile gained popularity and led to the beginning of MVT as a crime. On October 29, 1919, the Dyer Act, also known as the National Motor Vehicle Act, made interstate transportation of stolen vehicles a federal crime (U.S. Department of Justice, n.d.; National Auto Auction Association, 2017). The law allowed for punishments of fines and up to 10 years of imprisonment and focused on offenders transporting stolen vehicles across state lines.

The next intervention regarding MVT did not come until decades later when the Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) became a mandatory requirement (National Archives and Records Administration, 2008; National Auto Auction Association, 2017). The first VIN was used in 1954 to describe and identify motor vehicles made by American manufacturers. On January 1, 1969, the Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard (FMVSS) No. 115 was enacted and required all passenger cars, multipurpose passenger vehicles, trucks, buses, trailers (including trailer kits), incomplete vehicles, and motorcycles manufactured in the United States, or manufactured overseas and imported into the United States, on or after the enactment date to have a VIN. However, the uniform 17-character format of the VIN was not required until the early 1980s. All over-the-road vehicles beginning with the 1981 model year were required by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) to have a VIN in the current fixed format and no two vehicles manufactured within a 30-year period could be identical.

The original purpose of the VIN was to enhance public safety by deterring MVT based on the assumption that drivers of stolen vehicles would be more likely to operate the vehicle unsafely and be involved in a crash (National Archives and Records Administration, 2008). Today's 17-character VIN also serves as a tool to increase the accuracy and efficiency of vehicle recall campaigns, become a key identifier in data systems used to track compliance with federal importation regulations, vehicle registrations, insurance coverage, and crashes. They also help law enforcement trace and recover stolen vehicles and parts since each VIN is associated with a single vehicle (Allstate, 2019).

Another change came in the mid- to late-1960s when the FMVSS 114 was passed (Cherbonneau & Copes, 2006; Webb, 1994). The law was passed in 1966, but did not become effective until 1970. This required manufacturers to equip new passenger vehicles with a key-locking system that prevented the vehicle from being steered or driven forward without the ignition key. The rates of MVT decreased, at least temporarily (Webb, 1994). In the years leading up to this change, Ford was one of the manufacturers known to be easier for auto thieves and the company was deemed partly responsible for the high rates of MVT. Ford models manufactured between 1969 and 1974 were said to have weak ignition locks that led to a disproportionate rate of theft in the United States. Ford replaced those with a more secure version in 1975 and the rate of theft decreased by 25% (Karmen, 1981).

Two MVT laws were enacted in 1984. The first was the Motor Vehicle Theft Law Enforcement Act, which was passed on October 1, 1984 (National Auto Auction Association, 2017; United States Congress, n.d.). This law was created to reduce the incidence of MVT and facilitate tracing and recovery of stolen vehicles and parts. This also brought on the Federal Motor Vehicle Prevention Standard, which required manufacturers of designated high-theft

passenger vehicles to put the VIN on the engine, transmission, hood, fenders, sides and rear doors (including sliding and cargo doors and decklids, tailgates, or hatchbacks, whichever is present), bumpers, quarter panels, and pickup boxes and/or cargo boxes (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 2004). The VIN markings were aimed at chop shops who sold stolen parts. VIN markings are made so they cannot be removed without becoming torn or rendering the number on the label illegible. If the VIN is removed, the label must leave a residue behind showing that a label was originally present. This provides investigators with another piece of evidence to prove the part was illegally acquired. The Motor Vehicle Theft Law Enforcement Act also authorized exemptions from the parts marking requirements for vehicles that came standard with antitheft devices (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 2004). Manufacturers were only allowed two new exemptions per year through the 1996 model and one per year beginning with 1997 models. These exemptions are granted by the NHTSA if the anti-theft devices are likely to be as effective in reducing and deterring MVT as compliance with the parts marking requirements. Lastly, the act required exporters of used vehicles to submit proof of ownership containing the VIN to the Customs Service before exporting the vehicle and imposed heavy fines and prison terms for exporting violations (National Auto Auction Association, 2017). The second act regarding MVT was the Comprehensive Crime Control Act of 1984 (National Auto Auction Association, 2017). This act made counterfeiting or forging motor vehicle title certificates a federal offense. It aimed to prevent professional criminals from using counterfeit documents to dispose of stolen vehicles.

The next changes were made in the early 1990s. The first to be enacted was the Anti-Car Theft Act in October 1992 (National Auto Auction Association, 2017; National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 2004; 102d Congress, 1992). This act expanded on the requirement of

parts marking to include multipurpose passenger vehicles such as light duty trucks. It also made armed carjacking, and owning, operating, maintaining, or controlling a chop shop a federal crime. The Motor Vehicle Theft Prevention Act of 1994 (part of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994) added to that by stating carjacking resulting in death is punishable by death (National Auto Auction Association, 2017). The 1994 act also required the Attorney General, in cooperation with the state, to develop a national voluntary vehicle theft prevention program (U.S. Department of Justice, n.d.; National Auto Auction Association, 2017). The program allowed vehicle owners to sign a consent form which authorized law enforcement to stop the vehicle if it was being operated under specific conditions. Participants placed a program decal on their vehicle where it would be visible to law enforcement. Additionally, in 1996, the Anti-Theft Improvements Act upgraded state motor vehicle databases containing title information to enable federal and state law enforcement officials to quickly determine if a vehicle is stolen.

Since then, several states have made changes to their systems making MVT and associated crimes, such as title forgery, more difficult. Each state also has its own punishment for the crime and the charges often vary depending on the value of the vehicle. For example, in California, if the value of the vehicle exceeds $950, the charge is grand theft and is a felony. If the value is less than $950, it is considered petty theft and is typically charged as a misdemeanor. In nearly all cases, MVT in California results in a felony charge and is punishable by fines and/or incarceration in jail or prison (California Legislative Information, n.d.). Grand theft involving the threat of a firearm can lead to imprisonment from 16 months to three years. Other grand theft charges can be punished with up to a year imprisonment in a county jail and/or a fine up to

$5,000. Petty theft is punishable by a fine up to $1,000 and/or six months imprisonment in a county jail.

Most Targeted Vehicles. Although offenders may choose to steal any vehicle available, statistics have shown some vehicles to be targeted more than others. Some, like the late 1990s models of the Honda Civic, have remained as targets for decades (National Insurance Crime Bureau, 2021b). This is likely due to the limited anti-theft features used during those years of production. Theft of full-size pick-up trucks has increased, surpassing the Civic as the most stolen vehicle the past two years. This can be seen on the latest report from the National Insurance Crime Bureau (2021b). They reported the top ten stolen vehicles in 2020 as the (1) Ford Full-Size Pick-Up (44,014 thefts); (2) Chevrolet Full-Size Pick-Up (40,968 thefts); (3) Honda Civic (34,144 thefts); (4) Honda Accord (30,814 thefts); (5) Toyota Camry (16,915 thefts); (6) Nissan Altima (14,668 thefts); (7) GMC Full-Size Pick-Up (13,016 thefts); (8) Toyota Corolla (12,515 thefts); (9) Honda CR-V (12,309 thefts); and (10) Dodge Full-Size Pick-Up (11,991 thefts). When looking at 2020 models only, Honda vehicles were not on the list, but there were three full-size pick-ups. The report listed the top ten stolen 2020 model vehicles as the (1) Nissan Altima (1,732 thefts); (2) Chevrolet Full-Size Pick-Up (1,447 thefts); (3) Toyota Corolla (1,295 thefts); (4) Chevrolet Malibu (1,175 thefts); (5) Ram Full-Size Pick-Up (1,118 thefts); (6) Toyota Camry (1,041 thefts); (7) Hyundai Elantra (989 thefts); (8) Jeep Cherokee/Grand Cherokee (876 thefts); (9) Ford Full-Size Pick-Up (875 thefts); and (10) Dodge Charger (738 thefts) (Insurance Information Institute, 2021). However, neither report specified the method these vehicles were stolen.

Motor Vehicle Theft

The crime of MVT involves an offender stealing or attempting to steal a motor vehicle, most often an automobile (74%) (U.S. Department of Justice, 2021). The motivation behind auto theft has been classified in three groups: recreational, transportation, and money-making (Challinger, 1987). The auto thieves steal for pleasure, fun, or to challenge themselves. The transportation group steals for temporary travel needs or to use for the commission of another crime. The money-making group steals to sell the parts or the vehicle for profit. Although this breakdown did not explicitly include carjackers, it is likely, based on other research (Jacobs et al., 2003; Topalli & Wright, 2013), that they would also fit into these groups.

In the simplest terms, the difference between the groups is that auto thieves steal unoccupied vehicles and carjackers steal occupied vehicles. Otherwise, their processes are nearly identical. Both groups start by selecting a target. The offender may choose their target vehicles depending on availability and ease of access of a make and model, the value, if it has any upgrades, whether they feel confident they can successfully steal it, or what is being asked for if they are stealing it for someone else. Next, the motor vehicle thief maneuvers any obstacles to get into the driver's seat and commandeer the vehicle, whether by the auto theft method or carjacking (discussed in further detail in the following sections). Then the offender uses it for a given amount of time and disposes of the vehicle by simply leaving it somewhere, destroying it, or selling it as a whole or for parts.

Auto Theft. Auto thieves steal unoccupied vehicles using a variety of methods. Some offenders illegally enter the vehicle while it is parked, manually start it, and escape without using the key. Others prefer to steal vehicles with its key, allowing them to bypass security features and the need for tools, and escape in it that way. This group of auto thieves can obtain keys by

stealing them from the driver, their home, dealerships, rental agencies, etc. However, it is common for auto thieves to find keys left in or near the vehicle, often in the ignition with the vehicle running. Auto theft with keys has become a popular method with newer vehicles due to technological advances in anti-theft features. Auto theft is classified as a property crime because it is committed without the owner of the vehicle present, eliminating the need for confrontation, force, and/or violence.

Offenders who steal vehicles without keys have an unlimited selection but may prefer certain vehicles over others because they are confident that they will be able to enter and start the vehicle without the key. No matter their choice, they typically choose something they can break in or otherwise enter the vehicle and drive away within a few minutes (O'Connor, 2006). Offenders enter the unoccupied vehicle by opening an unlocked door, using a tool (such as a slim jim) to illegally open the vehicle, or breaking a window (Brill, 1982; Cherbonneau & Copes, 2006). It is in their best interest to minimize visual damage to remain conspicuous (Cherbonneau & Copes, 2006), so breaking a window is a far less favorable entry method. Offenders who do choose to break windows for entry usually smash the smallest one to avoid unwanted attention, leave less evidence behind, and make less noise. One offender noted breaking windows to be "a giveaway," (Cherbonneau & Copes, 2006, p. 199). Large-scale damages to the vehicle are undeniable and more likely to lead to a traffic stop (Powis 1977; Rap 1989, as cited in Cherbonneau & Copes, 2006).

Once inside the vehicle, the auto thief works quickly to "break down" or "crack" the steering column, or tamper with the ignition so they can start it (Cherbonneau & Copes, 2006). Several offenders mentioned it being "easy" to start certain vehicles with a screwdriver (but this may not work on the newer vehicles with improved technology and anti-theft features). The

techniques used to tamper with or open a steering column result in physical damage to the interior, no matter how well the auto thieves try to minimize it. Some insert a fake key in the ignition switch or replace the switch to make it appear normal, while others conceal the damage by covering it with a small towel or bandana (Copes & Cherbonneau, 2006; O'Connor, 2006).

The method of stealing a vehicle with keys does not come with the same challenges of starting the vehicle without them. However, the challenge comes with getting a hold of or finding the key. This makes auto theft with keys a much more opportunistic method since it would be assumed that most, if not all, parked vehicles would not have their keys readily available. Keys are acquired by stealing them from a person or their belongings (during a robbery or burglary), but surprisingly, thefts with keys occur most often after people leave the keys in the ignition or otherwise hidden in the vehicle (Copes & Cherbonneau, 2006). Participants in the Fleming et al. (1994) study discussed taking vehicles left running in driveways on cold mornings. One participant in Copes and Cherbonneau's (2006) study described walking up to a convertible car with its top down with the keys in it parked in a parking garage. The offender simply got in and drove away. Offenders see opportunities like this a low effort, minimal risk, and high reward. This is especially true with newer vehicles. Having keys allows auto thieves to bypass newer built-in anti-theft measures from the manufacturer and to appear more normal entering and driving the vehicle than without a key.

Once the auto thief has entered the vehicle and started driving, they continue their tactics to avoid getting caught. One way they do this is by trying to change their physical appearance and style to match the person they would expect to be driving the vehicle legally since they believe it may influence the risk of being stopped (Cherbonneau & Copes, 2006). One offender in Cherbonneau and Cope's (2006) study said he dresses like "the average Joe," while another

said he dresses nice when stealing a fancy or flashy vehicle. Auto thieves also consider how old they look with what vehicle they drive. Cherbonneau and Copes (2006) interviewed a young man who started stealing cars at 11 years old. He mentioned young drivers of a newer vehicles are more likely to attract attention than if the driver appeared to be an older teenager or adult.

The way the auto thief drives also changes when driving a stolen vehicle. Many participate in restrained driving behaviors to help create an illusion of normalcy and minimize legal justification for non-theft-related traffic stops (Cherbonneau & Copes, 2006; Jacobs & Cherbonneau, 2014). Numerous offenders believe the way they drive is more important than their personal appearance when driving a stolen vehicle. Apart from a few reckless, thrill-seeking auto thieves, offenders drive what they consider to be normal driving behavior. They wear their seatbelts, use their blinkers, stop at stop signs, refrain from speeding, and do not run red lights. They are aware that blatant disregard for traffic laws will attract attention and increase their chances of being stopped by law enforcement. Conversely, there are auto thieves who choose not to adhere as closely to traffic laws because they believe it is best to drive like other drivers (Cherbonneau & Copes, 2006). They acknowledge the average driver speeds, does not always use their blinker, and does not drive with perfect posture. This group of auto thieves may show off the stolen vehicle in their neighborhoods, listen to the stereo at high volumes, lean back, and cruise.

Another form of restrictive deterrence involves where the offender chooses to drive the stolen vehicle (Jacobs & Cherbonneau, 2014). Auto thieves may change the license plates to avoid automated detection from scanning equipment. If a scanner reads the fake or stolen license plate, it may show a different vehicle linked to it, but will not register as stolen. Offenders assume the officers are more likely to overlook the make and model over it being flagged as a

stolen vehicle. Auto thieves also noted driving the stolen vehicle outside of the area where they took it from to another jurisdiction because they believe it takes time for other departments to be looking for it.

No matter how well the offender appears or drives, there is still a chance they will encounter law enforcement. It is not uncommon for an officer to drive near or stop next to drivers at a stoplight. When this happens with auto thieves, they do their best to continue the illusion that they own the vehicle they are driving. Offenders have mentioned they believe displays of apprehensive emotions (for example, fear, stress, anxiety, uncertainty, and tension) are a cause for concern (Cherbonneau & Copes, 2006). More successful offenders are skilled at keeping their composure or "holding themselves back," when in the presence of an officer. If they fail to maintain control, they believe their threat of being stopped increases. Another way some offenders try to maintain the illusion of normalcy is by interacting with law enforcement. For example, informal interactions like making brief eye contact, head nodding, hand gestures such as waving, and other acts of friendliness. There are also offenders who avoid all interaction with officers because they hope to be ignored and not invite or lead themselves into a negative outcome. If they see an officer driving near them, they turn down different streets to distance themselves.

Carjacking. Carjacking combines the property crime of auto theft with the violent crime of robbery, but it centers around a vehicle (Jacobs, 2012). This section of the literature review aims to explain the nature of carjacking as it differs from auto theft. There have been fewer studies on carjacking than auto theft, possibly because it is a newer crime. The term, "carjacking," was coined in 1992 at the time of the Anti-Car Theft Act (Wing, 1994). A senator called it "a twisted innovation in car theft." As carjacking became more widely known, people

began to feel less safe in their own vehicles. Now, carjacking occurs much more often. A recent victimization survey by the Bureau of Justice Statistics revealed approximately 34,000 carjackings occur per year (Klaus, 2004). Some analysts argue that carjacking rates have increased due to the improvements in anti-theft technology making it harder to hotwire the vehicle (Clarke & Harris, 1992). More than half (68%) of these occur between the hours of 6:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m. (Klaus, 2004). They typically involve more than one offender and victimize strangers (Jacobs, 2012; Klaus, 2004).

One thing a potential victim may be intimidated by is the level of violence or potential violence associated with this crime. In 74% of carjackings, the offender was armed (Klaus, 2004). The most common weapons used were firearms (74% of carjackings), knives (11%) and other weapons (18%). Thankfully, the threat of violence is not always acted upon, and many victims are not physically hurt. The survey on carjackings that occurred between 1993 and 2002 reported 24% of carjacking victims to be injured, but only 1% required hospitalization (Jacobs, 2012; Klaus, 2004). About 9% of victims suffered serious injuries such as gunshots or knife wounds, broken bones, or internal injuries. More minor injuries, such as bruises and chipped teeth, occurred in about 15% of victims. There were no deaths listed.

Researchers have found carjacking to involve little planning in advance (Jacobs, 2012). Instead, the offender simply spots a target, threatens the victim, gains control of the vehicle, and escapes in it. The process begins like auto theft, where the offender selects a vehicle to target, but they also need to assess their risk with the driver (Topalli et al., 2015). This has an opportunistic aspect to it because they need to find a vehicle paired with a driver and believe they have the power and control to commandeer the scene. More than half (67%) of carjacking victims put up some level of resistance (Klaus, 2004). Resistance can be manifested in several ways such as

freezing up, screaming, speeding off, or shooting at the carjacker (Topalli et al., 2015). Carjackers in Topalli et al.'s (2015) study reported targeting victims based on their physical appearance, some preferring female victims over males to avoid scuffles. However, some offenders preferred male victims because females are more apt to scream. Carjackers also consider the age of their target, stating younger victims are more likely to put up a fight than older victims. Experienced carjackers view the target as not only a car, but as a vehicle and driver.

Once the target, both vehicle and driver, have been selected, the carjacker needs to approach. The two common methods of approaching targets are using normalcy illusions or blitzes (Jacobs, 2012; Topalli et al., 2015). Normalcy illusions are seen when the offender engages with the victim in a seemingly harmless manner. Social scientists have recognized this as the most effective way for a person with nefarious intentions to ease their target into a false sense of security. Some examples offenders provided for this were asking for the time or directions, but most often, asking for cigarettes. This tactic is often used in robberies as well. Once the victim responds and is in proximity, the mood suddenly changes, and the offender demands them to surrender their vehicle. Carjackers may do this with the threat of a weapon, such as showing a firearm or pointing it at the victim, to encourage compliance. The second method is blitzes. This is typically done by the offender suddenly confronting the target victim outside of their vehicle and showing a weapon. The idea is to catch the victim unaware and not to give them a chance to consider any actions besides compliance. An example of this method would be a carjacker running up to a victim at a stoplight, putting a gun to their head, and telling them to get out of the vehicle.

Both normalcy illusions and blitzes are forms of coercive action. Coercive action is defined as conduct undertaken by one party to impose harm or force compliance on another (Tedeschi & Felson, 1994, as cited by Jacobs, 2012). It typically comes in the form of threatened or actual violence, either to secure resources or to teach someone a lesson (Jacobs, 2012). Carjackers invoke displays of power, whether explicit or assumed, to coerce the victim to comply and prevent resistance. If the victim does not take the threat seriously, the offender may escalate the threat or use physical force or punishment to gain control and steal the vehicle. After the offender successfully gets into the driver's seat, they speed off, leaving the victim wherever they may be.

After the carjackings, vehicles were often stripped and disposed of. Topalli and Wright (2013) discussed the aftermath of crime. They found some carjackers would drive the vehicle around the neighborhood, despite the risk of being noticed by law enforcement, but most disposed of the vehicle shortly after stealing it. One of their participants informed researchers that quickly disposing of the vehicle was the key to getting away with the crime.

In addition to getting rid of the stolen vehicle, Topalli and Wright's (2003) study looked at what carjackers did with the proceeds from their crimes. A few respondents reported using the money from theft to pay for necessities or bills. The more common response was to spend the money on drugs, women, and gambling. One carjacker said he spent $1,500 in less than two days on "Whatever, it don't matter." Another offender said he spent the money he got from carjacking on holiday shopping, alcohol, and marijuana.

Motivation and Vehicle Disposal

In both carjacking and auto theft, the offender will steal the vehicle and keep it for a given amount of time before disposing of it. The method of disposal is usually tied to the

motivation for stealing the vehicle. MVT is usually motivated by pleasure (recreation, joyriding, thrill, etc.), transportation, or profit, but there may be overlap in those categories (Anderson & Linden, 2014; Challinger, 1987). For instance, if an offender gets a thrill out of stealing a vehicle, but also makes a profit in its disposal, the primary motivation may be money-making but secondary would be considered pleasure.

Pleasure. Wing (1994) argued the typical motor vehicle thief is motivated by joyriding or commanding an enterprise. They described the offender as a "professional criminal, or a would-be professional criminal, bend on committing crime," (Wing, 1994, p. 397). Wing (1994) said juvenile MVT offenders steal vehicles to take wild drives at night and wreak havoc with other drivers and pedestrians. Most research agrees with joyriding being a common motivator in younger offenders and low-skilled offenders. Anderson and Linden's (2014) study, which involved interviewing 43 youth offenders, noted their most common reason for MVT was joyriding (93%). Some noted it gave them excitement or an "adrenaline rush." Joyriding was also the most common reason given in auto thefts with keys (Copes & Cherbonneau, 2006).

Jacobs et al. (2012) discussed various motivations stemming from pleasure in carjackers; few committed the crime for profit. Several participants in their study claimed to have sufficient money at the time yet chose to participate in carjackings to steal things they wanted. One offender explained how he and his partner carjacked a victim because they wanted rims, a radio, and speakers for their vehicles. He said, "We'd rather go take it than spend the money in our pockets," (Jacobs, 2012, p. 678). Other offenders mentioned stealing from specific victims as a way of depriving them. One carjacker said, "I was tired of seeing them just coming through, always trying to floss as they went past… always showing off, talking a lot… You floss too

much you get [carjacked]," (Jacobs, 2012, p. 681). To floss means to show off material possessions. The offender believed the individual deserved to be the victim. Similarly, some carjackers will act in retaliation when they feel another person has been wronged by the victim-to-be. This could be in response to refusing to pay a young boy pumping their gas for them or something as serious as the victim sexually assaulting another person. Jacobs (2012) did not state how carjackers disposed of these vehicles.

Retaliation can also be a motivating factor in auto theft (Cherbonneau & Jacobs, 2015). Auto thieves use their crimes as a method of direct or indirect payback. Direct payback is described as an efficient, quick method of revenge without hesitation. Like carjackers, several auto thefts steal vehicles of victims who they feel are flossing or showing off. To dispose of the vehicle, one offender described parking it "way off somewhere," (Cherbonneau & Jacobs, 2015, p. 478) and being satisfied knowing the victim would need to pay to get the vehicle back after it was found. Another auto thief disposed of a stolen vehicle in a similar manner after taking it from someone they felt wronged them. The auto thief said, "We just stole it, and left it somewhere just so we could see her mad," (Cherbonneau & Jacobs, 2015, p. 479). Indirect payback is described as retaliation in response to affronts committed by someone other than the person targeted for payback. One offender described his motivation stemming from when someone stole his vehicle in the past. "My car got stolen… I was mad, and I wanted revenge and I've just been stealing cars ever since," (Cherbonneau & Jacobs, 2015, p. 481). Another auto thief described stealing from people who "hate on," hurt, or harm themselves or their family or friends. They described stealing a vehicle in retaliation for a drug robbery. This offender also abandoned the vehicle shortly after the theft.

Transportation. Tremblay et at. (1994) also noted juveniles used joyrides as a means of transportation. They found this crime to be committed in the suburbs most often.

Several adult offenders used stolen vehicles as a way to get from point A to point B when they did not have a ride and were uninterested in taking public transportation (Topalli & Cherbonneau, n.d). Most young auto thieves, presumably those using the vehicles under this motivation group, leave the vehicle on the side of the road when they are finished with it, but a few said they take them to chop shops or give them to "a friend who doesn't know how to steal," (O'Connor, 2006, p. 973).

Money-Making. Money-making is one of the biggest motivators of auto thieves and carjackers since their crimes do not have capital overlays, unions, taxes on profits, nor employee benefits to be paid (Wing, 1994). Motor vehicle thieves earn profit by selling parts to chop shops, selling vehicles to unsuspecting buyers with "washed" or forged titles. Chop shops, often fronted as auto body shops, illicitly dismantle vehicles, and sell the parts illegally for more money than the vehicle would often be worth whole. This can be an extremely lucrative market. Used auto parts have been valued four times higher than the value of the vehicle. One common method for these types of thefts is for motor vehicle thieves to solicit orders for parts, then to steal cars to fill the orders. Chop shops can use stolen parts in junked or salvaged vehicles, then sell rebuilt vehicles with washed titles to unsuspecting buyers for prices four or five times the actual value. Stolen vehicles are also used as an export business where the vehicle is driven into a storage container, sealed, and hauled to the docks without being noticed by customs officials.

Some offenders dismantle the vehicle themselves, then leave the remaining body on the side of the road somewhere else or find a way to destroy it. Offenders who worry about the vehicle being found and tied back to them may set it ablaze or push it into a body of water. One

offender mentioned setting a stolen car on fire after taking what they needed from it because they did not wear gloves and needed to destroy the fingerprints (Topalli & Wright, 2013).

Theoretical Perspectives

One of the questions criminologists strive to answer is why an offender commits crime. There have been numerous theories to explain possible reasonings, but none fit the overarching topic of crime, specific crimes, or offender types. Similarly, several theories can be used to explain MVT. This paper relies on three theoretical perspectives to better inform how the offender began and why they continue to pursue MVT.

Social Learning Theory. Social learning theory was developed by Ronald L. Akers and Robert Burgess in 1965 (Cullen et al., 2018). They reformulated Edwin Sutherland's differential association theory. Sutherland's theory argued that criminal behavior is a learned in interactions with others, but it does not specify the mechanisms by which the behaviors are learned. The theory was built upon nine principles of differential association: (1) criminal behavior is learned; (2) criminal behavior is learned in interaction with other persons in a process of communication; (3) the principal part of the learning of criminal behavior occurs within intimate personal groups; (4) when criminal behavior is learned, the learning includes (a) techniques of committing the crime, which are sometimes complicated, sometimes simple and (b) the specific direction of motives, drives, rationalizations, and attitudes; (5) the specific direction of motives and drives is learned from definitions of the legal codes as favorable or unfavorable; (6) a person becomes delinquent because of an excess of definitions favorable to violation of law over definitions unfavorable to violation of law; (7) differential association may vary in frequency, duration, priority, and intensity; (8) the process of learning criminal behavior by association with criminal and anti-criminal patterns involves all mechanisms that are involved in any other learning; and

(9) while criminal behavior is an expression of general needs and values, it is not explained by those general needs and values since non-criminal behavior is an expression of the same needs and values.

In one article, Sutherland said he worked with a professional thief and was impressed with the thief's statement: "a person cannot become a professional thief merely by wanting to be one; he must be trained in personal association with those who are already professional thieves" (Sutherland 1956, p. 17, as cited by Topalli et al., 2020). Social learning theory agrees with Sutherland and expands on his theory in explaining how the offender is trained. It integrated the nine principals with other principals of behavioral acquisition, continuation, and cessation. Akers and Burgess added concepts of behavioral learning theory such as operant behavior and classical or respondent conditioning. Operant behavior refers to the voluntary actions of an individual being conditioned or shaped by rewards or punishment. Respondent conditioning is similar but refers to conditioning of involuntary reflex behavior. Social learning theory also included symbolic interactionism, which states social interaction is the exchange of meaning and symbols.

Social learning theory argues that the same learning process takes place in conforming and non-conforming behavior, but the difference lies in the balance of influences on behavior (Cullen et al., 2018). The probability that an individual will engage in illicit behavior increases and the probability that they will engage in pro-social behavior decreases when they differentially associate with others who are involved in criminal behavior in a favorable light, are exposed to criminal models, define it as justified or desirable, and have received or anticipate greater reward than punishment for the behavior.

There are four major principals within social learning theory (Akers & Jennings, 2016; Cullen et al., 2018). The first principal, differential association, is borrowed from Sutherland's

theory. This refers to the process in which an individual is exposed to normative definitions favorable or unfavorable to illegal or law-abiding behavior. Differential association can occur with one's primary groups, their family and friends, or more distant groups such as neighbors, churches, teachers, or other community members. The associations that begin earlier, last longer, occur frequently, and involve those with closer relationships have greater effects on an individual's behavior. The second principal is definition. This refers to one's own attitudes or meaning that they attach to a given behavior. This includes a person's evaluation of a behavior to say if the act is right or wrong, good or bad, desirable or undesirable, etc. They can be general definitions, such as all thefts are wrong, or specific, such as it is okay to steal something small if it is only one time and not hurting anybody. The stronger the definitions are believed by a person, the more likely they will follow them. Criminal behavior is more likely to be viewed as approved if they have positive or neutralizing beliefs attached. The third principal is differential reinforcement. This refers to the balance of anticipated or actual rewards and punishments that follow the behavior. Some examples of rewards are money, obtaining approval, and pleasant feelings. Some examples of punishments are painful or unpleasant consequences such as arrest, disapproval or shame, or the removal of a reward or pleasant consequence. These are also reinforced by their amount, frequency, and probability. The greater the value of the reward, the more frequently it is provided, and the higher probability it will be attained, the greater likelihood the behavior will occur and be repeated. The fourth and final principal is imitation. This refers to engaging in behavior after observing a similar behavior in others. After an individual observes an offender commit a crime and the reward and absence of punishment that follows, the individual may engage in the same behavior because of imitation.

Social learning theory aligns well with the way many auto thieves get involved with MVT. Many offenders learn how to steal vehicles from people around them, as described in the principal of differential association. They view the stolen items as rewards or a means to a greater reward if stealing for profit, and later choose to imitate or learn from the other person. O'Connor (2006) described how most young people in his study were introduced to MVT by a friend or family member. Most participants were shown the process by older males and then practiced on vehicles until they were successful. The juvenile auto thieves cited their first involvement from ages 5 to 17 with a mean of 12.8 years. In 53% (n=9) of their first auto thefts, they were merely passengers. A study by Fleming et al. (1994) had similar findings. Participants reported riding along in stolen vehicles 2.5 times before committing the theft themselves around the age of 13. In both studies, this behavior was learned at a young age and reinforced as they grew up. These studies did not discuss how carjackers became involved in MVT.

Routine Activities Theory. Routine activities theory provides a macro-level approach to why motor vehicle thieves commit their crimes. This theory was developed by Lawrence E. Cohen and Marcus Felson in 1979 (Cohen & Felson, 1979; Cullen et al., 2018). It argues most criminal acts require the convergence in time and space of a motivated or likely offender, suitable target, and the absence of capable guardians. A motivated offender refers to someone with criminal inclinations and the ability to carry them out, however, the theory does not discuss what motivates them to commit crime. A suitable target can be a person or object, such as a house or a vehicle. The absence of capable guardians refers to something or someone preventing the crime such as a security guard or alarm system that will alert authorities. This is something that makes a target less desirable. If any of these three variables are removed, it is assumed that no crime will occur.

Cohen and Felson's theory also discussed the probability of this triad being influenced by an individual's "routine activities," such as work, family, and leisure activities (Cohen & Felson, 1979; Cullen et al., 2018). They came up with this theory after crime rates increased post-World War II in the United States. During this time, there was a major shift of routine activities being away from home, leaving the house (suitable target) empty and vulnerable (absence of capable guardian) to burglary from a motivated offender. A motivated offender may select their target and observe the behavior of the guardian to find when the best time to commit the crime will be. For example, if the offender plans to burglarize a home in which the occupants are away at work during the week, the offender may observe this by watching when they drive away and how long they are gone to establish a pattern. Then, when they believe there will be an absence of capable guardians, the motivated offender will commit the crime.

In the case of MVT, the theory expects a motivated offender to steal a vehicle if it presents itself as a suitable target and there are not capable guardians around. For an auto thief, this may be the vehicle they are looking for, whether for profit or otherwise, being parked in a parking lot with nobody around, and the offender has the knowledge and tools to start the vehicle without its key. Another common scenario for auto theft would be the offender finding a vehicle running in the driveway on a cold morning and the owner was inside the home waiting for the vehicle to warm up (Fleming et al., 1994). In other words, this gives what the offender sees as the perfect opportunity to steal a vehicle. Carjacking can also fit into this theory. For example, the motivated offender sees the vehicle they are looking to steal at a stoplight and believes the person in the vehicle is not capable of defending themselves. Most of these crimes involve weapons which diminish the threat of the victim fighting back. The offender could approach the vehicle and threaten the life of the driver before commandeering the vehicle and driving away.

One carjacker said, “You have to have the right car and the right driver, but if you ain’t in the right place, you ain’t doing no carjacking,” (Topalli et al., 2015). This offender explained how they would not commit the crime without each component of the routine activity theory triad.

Rational Choice Theory. Rational choice theory provides a micro-level approach to explain why an individual commits crime, looking closely at the offender’s decision-making process. This theory was developed by Ronald V. Clarke and Derek B. Cornish in the mid-1980s (Clarke & Cornish, 1985; Cornish & Clarke, 1986; Cullen et al., 2018). It argues offenders are rational individuals seeking to maximize their pleasure and minimize their pain, like Cesare Beccaria’s classical theory.

This theory argues offenders calculate where their self-interests lie and pursue those. This is done in two major stages (Clarke & Cornish, 1985; Cullen et al., 2018). The first stage involves the initial “involvement model,” in which the individual decides whether they are willing to become involved in crime to satisfy their needs. These considerations, criminal or not, are heavily influenced by the individual’s previous learning and experiences. Choosing to move forward from this stage implies that the individual has contemplated the potential crime as a solution to their needs and has decided they would commit the offense. The second stage involves the “criminal event model,” in which the individual decides if they are ready to commit the offense. The individual’s decision is heavily influenced by their immediate situation, such as a need for money or peer pressure.

One important acknowledgement of Clarke and Cornish’s theory is that it does not assume people are perfectly rational (Clarke & Cornish, 1985; Cornish & Clarke, 1986; Cullen et al., 2018). Offenders seek to benefit themselves by their behaviors using “limited” or “bounded” rationality. This involves some considerations of costs and benefits but acknowledges

these may be made in haste, with limited time and effort, under the influence of drugs or alcohol, or based on incomplete or inaccurate information. This can be seen when looking at the involvement model and the criminal event stages. Sometimes they are distinctly separated in time, varying in length, and in others, they occur almost simultaneously, giving the offender little time to make a well-informed decision. It is also important to note that Clarke and Cornish define costs and benefits broadly and recognize people may weigh them differently from one another. Costs can include both formal and informal sanctions. Formal sanctions include punishments like incarceration, community corrections, and fines. Informal sanctions, or "moral costs," include disapproval of family and friends, shame, and guilt. Some people are easily deterred by things like the possibility of incarceration or the unpleasant feelings they may have after a crime, while others are willing to take the risk and are less affected by those outcomes.

When looking at motor vehicle thieves, offenders in previous studies have explained their thought processes and how they made conscious decisions to commit their crimes. Auto thieves appear to think about each step of MVT before it happens. Several offenders note that they try not to break large windows to gain entry or drive "normally" to avoid punishment. Many also go out with the intention of stealing a vehicle for profit, providing a greater benefit to themselves. Carjackers also think about their crimes with some level of rationality. Researchers noted carjackers described waiting for a specific vehicle and planning their attacks (Jacobs et al., 2003). Also, in both auto theft and carjackings, offenders typically have escape routes planned and are thinking steps ahead to minimize their risks of getting caught.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The current study uses secondary, de-identified data sets provided by other researchers. The data were semi-structured, ethnographic interviews that were used in studies focused on auto thieves and carjackers. At the times of each interview, the respondents were active offenders, participating in auto theft and/or carjacking, and had committed motor vehicle thefts in their respective methods within the past year. The original studies were related to a single type of offender, either auto thieves or carjackers. The interviews were used for several projects by the primary investigators.

The author of this study contacted the primary investigators directly and was given access to an assortment of transcribed interviews from those studies to complete a secondary data analysis. These were provided in the form of written transcriptions from the original interviews. Having secondary data allows researchers to compare and analyze the original data set to answer different questions (Johnston, 2014); in this case, to answer the following research question: what are the similarities and differences in motivation between auto thieves and carjackers?

The research design (Study # IRB-FY2022-175) was submitted to and determined to be exempt from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Missouri State University November 15, 2021 (see Appendix A).

Sample

The study used a sample of interviews with 28 active offenders categorized as either an auto thief or carjacker (see Appendix B). The participants included 12 offenders labeled as carjackers (ages 16-45; mean = 24.58, median = 21) and 16 labeled as auto thieves (ages 17-42; mean = 26, median = 26). However, six of the auto thieves admitted they had participated in at

least one carjacking and at least six carjackers admitted they had participated in at least one auto theft as well[2]. The offenders who said they had been involved in both types of MVT were categorized by their predominant offense type. Having fewer participants labeled as carjackers relates to it being a rarer offense.

Original Auto Theft Data Set. Auto theft data used in this study came from a larger data set obtained for past studies. The original data were based on interviews from 35 active auto thieves operating out of a moderate-sized Midwestern U.S. city with notoriously high levels of serious crime, violence, and unemployment. The sample included 27 males and 8 females. All participants were Black and ranged in age from 17-49 years old (mean = 27).

The participants were recruited through a snowball sampling method. This is a non-probability convenience sampling method for studying hidden or hard to reach populations (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981, as cited by Cherbonneau & Jacobs, 2015). This begins with one or two key informants who refer other participants, who may refer another couple of participants, and so forth. This started with a local informant who had served as a field recruiter for multiple other studies in the past. He had extensive ties to the criminal population and maintained a strong reputation for integrity and trust within those networks. The recruiter used his connections to locate people who were currently involved in auto theft. Each participant was offered and paid $50 for their cooperation in the study and the fieldworker was paid $75 for each participant accepted into the study.

The interviews were semi-structured and conducted in a private room. The participants were asked open-ended questions to address a range of general and crime-specific topics including offenders' backgrounds, lifestyles, motivations to commit auto theft, target selection

[2] Carjackers were not directly asked if they had ever stolen a vehicle, but six clearly stated they had done it at some point in their career.

and crime commission procedures, driving stolen cars, methods used to dispose of stolen property, and risk management strategies. The interviews were digitally recorded with permission from each participant, then transcribed and proofread against the audio to limit error. The participants were promised complete anonymity and confidentiality, and they were only identified by an alias or "street" name.

Original Carjacker Data Set. Carjacker data used in this study came from a larger data set obtained for past studies. The original data were based on interviews from 28 active carjackers recruited from the streets of St. Louis, Missouri. Active carjackers were defined as individuals who had committed two or more carjackings in the previous year. There were 25 males and three females. All participants were Black and ranged in age from 16-45 years old (mean = 25.3).

The participants were located through the efforts of a street-based field recruiter who was also a member of the city's criminal underworld. The recruiter used his connections to networks of street offenders, speaking with family members, friends, and acquaintances, to locate people who were currently involved in carjacking. Each participant was informed of the research objectives and paid $50 for their participation.

The interviews were semi-structured and conducted informally. This allowed offenders to respond in their own words and discuss their involvement in carjacking freely. They were promised complete anonymity and confidentiality, and they were only identified by a self-assigned street moniker. Researchers noted this appeared to create a more relaxed atmosphere and raised the confidence and level of cooperation of the offenders.

Procedure

The author of this study was provided access to data collected by two criminology scholars from their prior MVT studies. The scholars electronically sent written transcriptions of interviews they had in person with auto thieves and carjackers. These Microsoft Word files were sent via Dropbox or direct email. The author of this study was not involved in choosing which archived interviews would be provided; instead, the scholars were asked to select a variety for a comparative study of auto thieves and carjackers. Participants who had committed both crimes in the past were also included but grouped by which offense was their primary means of stealing vehicles. The primary investigators did not provide copies of consent forms, nor were additional consent forms needed.

Analytic Strategy

The researcher approached the analysis by reading through the qualitative data multiple times and discerning different information during each reading. First, the researcher read and reviewed each interview for a basic understanding and familiarization. Then the researcher uploaded all interviews to a computer program called NVIVO for the analysis and data reduction. Each interview was electronically highlighted and coded, looking for themes and other pertinent quotes or information in relation to offender motivation. Then, the coded data was extracted to review recurring themes, descriptive quotes, and offender descriptive statistics (age, age of first theft, marital status, and if they have children or not). Lastly, the researcher analyzed the data to compare themes and motivations of auto thieves and carjackers using the themes as the variables.

Limitations

Working with secondary data has several limitations. The main disadvantage is the researcher of this study was unable to ask participants specific questions during the interviews. There were also no opportunities for follow-up questions with participants. Another disadvantage of using secondary data is the interviews were completed several years ago. It is possible the offenders prefer different methods or have new techniques and skills to steal motor vehicles that were not available or undiscovered at the time of the interviews. Any new manufacturer improvements to anti-theft and security features would not have been discussed at the time. Lastly, since the data is from several years ago, it will not account for the increase in auto thefts in the past year. The increase was in part due to the COVID-19 pandemic, an economic downturn, law enforcement realignment, depleted social and schooling programs, and owner complacency (National Insurance Crime Bureau, 2021a; National Insurance Crime Bureau, 2021b). However, the use of secondary data for this study does not allow for questions regarding those factors or changes.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

The results of this study are divided by five major themes like they were coded in NVIVO. Each section includes quotes from the offenders to illustrate the theme. The first theme discusses MVT method, which is broken down into two subthemes, auto theft and carjacking. The second theme is disposal. The third theme, motivation, has three subthemes. They are pleasure, transportation, and money-making. Fourth, demotivation is discussed with risk and desisting as the subthemes. The fifth theme looks at offenders comparing MVT methods. There are two subthemes are auto thieves on carjacking and carjackers on auto theft.

MVT Method

MVT takes place in one of two ways: auto thieves stealing unoccupied vehicles or carjackers stealing occupied vehicles. Both offender groups have various approaches within their preferred methods. These methods are affected by the individual's skill and confidence levels, and their motivation to steal.

Auto Theft. One of the most common MVT crimes is theft of vehicles without keys. This method forces offenders to find other ways to enter and/or start vehicles. Several auto thieves said they need to do this rather quickly and can do so with experience. Auto thieves in this study discussed three methods of entering a locked vehicle. These methods include: using a tool (e.g., a Slim Jim), breaking or popping off the lock on the door, or breaking a window. Tools leave little-to-no damage to the vehicle and breaking windows was described as the "sloppy" method. In any case, entry into a locked vehicle can be done in less than one minute by an experienced auto thief. Overall, the process to breaking in and starting an unoccupied vehicle without keys was described methodically, as capture in the following excerpt:

> I broke the lock, opened the door, popped the steering wheel out, popped the steering column, that exposed the side of the tip right there. Broke the, you know when you put your car in park your steering wheel lock. I twist it to the left, twist it to the right, twist, loosen up, grabbed my screwdriver, pulled that pin, put the screwdriver behind that pin, pulled it up. When I pulled it up, it starts the car. Then I drive off. Then I put just a key in there that'll fit in there, have to twist it. Put a towel over the steering column so you just won't actually look into the car and see the steering column broken down… Put the towel over the steering column, so you know, once you break it all down, you can look, somebody, and innocent bystander can look down in the seat, "This car broke; this car broken down." But we put a towel over it to hide that part that's all broken down. –E (auto thief)

Vehicles with active alarms systems take a minute or two longer to steal because the offenders need to find a way to disarm them without cutting all power to the vehicle. Some auto thieves described testing for alarms prior to the theft by throwing something at it or bumping it. Then, if there is an alarm, they decided if they feel capable of stealing it and watch for signs that someone will try to intervene. One subject explains:

> I done threw a rock at his car, the alarm went off and ain't nobody came outside. I can get his car. You know what I'm saying, walk by and bump it, you know what I'm saying, make the alarm go off and just keep walking. Awe, ain't nobody lookout the window, ain't nobody do nothing. I'll sit in the gangway and throw rocks at the car until somebody come out, the alarm keep going off, then I know later on I'm fixing to go get the car. –D-Cuz (auto thief)

Another common method auto thieves use to steal a vehicle is to take it with its keys. Offenders typically do this opportunistically, by finding unoccupied running vehicles or stealing keys with intent to take the vehicle. This method allows offenders to appear to be driving a legally owned vehicle because there is no need to damage the steering column, windows, nor door locks. The auto thieves simply get in the vehicle, start it, and drive away like an average person would drive their own vehicle, stating:

> I'd rather get the key, so the police see it and won't try to pull you over and take it from you. They can't say you stole it; you got the keys. Try to be smart about it. I ain't dumb... Keys in the car is the first thing I look for. Keys in the car and then see if the door unlocked. You know what I'm saying? I walk like I just went for a walk. You know what I'm saying and see which one I want to get. The door unlocked, I'm coming back for it, but there might be another one further down the way from the [hotel's front] door or something. You know what I'm saying? Hop in that motherfucker… –Lil Bunny (auto thief)

Auto thieves also noted this method is advantageous because they do not need to know how to break down the steering column or hotwire the vehicle to get it started. Lil Bunny said she does not know how to break the steering column down herself and was not interested in learning, so this was her go-to method. In addition to the time needed to learn, perform, and perfect the skill, she was not interested in the additional risks of breaking down a steering column. She elaborates:

> I don't want to [break it down]. Take too much time. You can get caught trying to break down – you know what I'm saying?... I want keys. I want to be able to get back in that motherfucker… The door can get locked or something. If you stuck, you have to bust a window out of some shit. What if it's cold or raining or some shit or too hot? You know what I'm saying? The air might be working but shit, it's going up out the hot ass window. I like to be on-point and shit. Be able to have shit on hand. Screwdriver and all, fuck that. –Lil Bunny (auto thief)

According to multiple auto thieves, it is not rare to come across vehicles with keys at gas stations or other quick stops. When auto thieves come across these opportunities, they act quickly and drive away with the victim's vehicle. As one thief noted:

> I see somebody leave their car running or something with the keys in it. You know what I'm saying? So, I might just hop in and just drive off. You know what I'm saying? Something like that. That's just how easy it is. Just wait until somebody park their car, they'll leave the A/C on or something, run in the store real quick or pay for their gas or something. Just hop in the car and leave. – Jewells Santana (auto thief)

MVT with keys may be more common on colder days because people leave their vehicles unattended to warm-up. One offender, Red Dog, mentioned he found "a lot" of cars he liked when people left them unattended. Like other offenders, he noted how he simply got in the vehicle and started driving:

> Those were the cars where I ain't have to bust the window or bust the steering column or nothing like that… You could just be riding in the wintertime, and you know in the wintertime you just be riding, people have they cars parked in their garage started-up and warming up. You know, you might luck up one day and run up on it, pull the door handle, because you know some people feel comfortable where they stay and ain't nothin' never happen around [there] like that so, you know. –Red Dog (auto thief)

Multiple offenders also mentioned taking vehicles from people they knew or had contact with. Jewells Santana said this was how she initially got involved in MVT, by stealing her mother's car at night. D-Cuz described taking a vehicle he and his friend were left in while the owner went inside a house. He said he waited about a half an hour, blowing the horn a few times, and finally driving away with the vehicle. Lavanda explained how she hustled men by setting them up and then stole their vehicles. In one of her recent thefts, she went with a man to a hotel after a night of drinking. Once he fell asleep, she took his keys and left in his vehicle. While those victims were not consciously handing over their keys, there are some cases where the victim does so without knowing:

> I had my little black pants on, little white button-up... At the valet, a little old man and his little kids, "Could you take my car and park it?" Fuck, they had the little ticket stubs. You know the little podiums they have? Hey, I don't know but I rip the motherfucker up. He took one. I didn't even know which one to give 'em and I was gone. –Lil Bunny (auto thief)

Similarly, Capone mentioned he has stolen vehicles from car lots by bringing someone with a license to acquire the vehicle for a test drive, but never returned it:

> We go in there like we're test driving, like damn, "We gonna test drive it." We need some licenses. We'll have a dope fiend or something with us with some license. He give them his license, they print it out, then we pull off with the car and don't come back. –Capone (auto thief)

Red Dog also stole vehicles from car lots:

> Those are easy, right there, rental car lots. You don't have to break them down or nothing… 'Cause the keys already be in them. Just have to have something to hold, to put over the spike so the spike won't bust the tires… Just put the cardboard over the spikes and drive the car slow. –Red Dog (auto thief)

Carjacking. Carjacking is another form of MVT, but it involves taking the vehicle from the victim with force. Previous research described two methods, using blitz attacks or normalcy illusions, both of which were described by offenders in this study. A blitz attack is when the carjacker surprises the victim with an immediate threat, often with a weapon, to get them to comply. Some carjackers described scoping the scene and waiting for the right moment to approach the victim:

> I went out when we seen his wife went in there. I was like, come on, let's go and then when I went up to the car I was like, "Get out of your car." He was like, "Why?" and then I said, "Get out of your car." Then I had pulled the gun out on him and then he said, "Alright, let me get my kids," and he unbuckled the kids, and his wife came outside running talking about what are they doing. He told her to shut up and she said, "Why." Then she tried to come at us, and my friend pulled out his knife and he said, "I'll slash your throat you come any closer," and we just burnt off. –Number One (carjacker)

Carjackers also used normalcy illusions to make their victim feel at ease before demanding their surrender. In most cases, offenders ask for spare change or a cigarette. This distracts the victim and often lowers their guard, so they may reach into their pockets or purse thinking the offender only wants a small token, but as soon as they do, the carjacker makes their move:

> I knocked on the window, asked the guy, "Hey, you got a cigarette for me man?" and, you know, he went going in his pockets for a cigarette. As he was doing that, I just pulled my gun and told him, "Get out the car, get out the car"… He said "Why?" and I said, "You gonna sit with it here if you don't get out"… He act like he wasn't scared but, you know, damn, when I stuck it into his shoulder he went on and got out and I told him, I say, "You got any money?" … He gave me his wallet. That's how I survived, you know, with gas that night. What he gave me you know. –Binge (carjacker)

As Binge described, carjackers often commit the crime to take more than the vehicle alone. Several recounted previous offenses where they stole the victim's wallet/money, drugs, and jewelry. In all but one case, the victim is left at the location of the crime, but one carjacker described kidnapping them as well:

> I grabbed her out the car, you know, I had a pistol to her, I made her get in the trunk. Now I don't know why I put her in the trunk, but I drove her around for a couple of hours … I walked up to her and asked her for her keys. But you know, I never been a raper or whatever, man… She was a healthy woman. It didn't matter how old or young. She was healthy… A well-built woman… I liked how she looked, and I liked her car. So, I took both of them. –Tall (carjacker)

After a couple hours of driving around with the woman in the trunk, Tall said he changed his mind about the crime he had begun, parked somewhere, and left her in the trunk of her vehicle on the side of the road. In this offense, Tall had a weapon, but he said it is not always necessary as he told researchers about another carjacking:

> I can do it with or without a gun. I mean, if I feel I can muscle anything, I mean, it's plenty of times that I haven't used one and WILL use a gun, but not that particular night… I overpowered him. I felt that I could overpower him, which I did… I guess when there's someone knocking at your window, it tends to scare someone you don't really know. –Tall (carjacker)

This was one of three accounts described by carjackers committing their offense without a weapon. However, when the offenders were armed, the weapons were rarely used as more than

a threat. As he described, most victims exited and surrendered their vehicles, but there were a couple in which the victim resisted, and the armed carjacker shot them:

> Well, they at this stoplight. I'm standing across the street like I'm waiting on a bus or something sitting at this stoplight. For me, I was just waiting for this specific car, you know, the car that I wanted, and I got the drop that he usually come through this certain place, Grand and Penrose around this time. I was standing at the bus stop waiting on him, you know. Just chilling and he pulled up, you know, and the light changed just in time. I ran up over there, put the gun to his head, asked him if he was going to get out or die, you know what I'm saying, either one, you going to get out this motherfucker or die? He was going to put up a fight trying to spin off with, I jumped in and threw it in park… He tried to spin off with it so now I'm hustling with him and tussling with him. I dropped my gun on his lap. I had to pick the gun up, right? So, we still tussling and everything, by this time motherfucker behind is blowing honking they horns and shit and so you know I'm thinking the police coming but still I want this car. I got to have this car… So, I grabbed the gun and put it to his throat. I asked him, you know, so what you gonna to do? Is you gonna die or give up this car? By this time, I'm on the passenger side. I done jumped in the car… I shot him in the leg… like in the thigh. You know what I'm saying? I opened the door and pushed him out. Drove off. Know what I'm saying? But before I drove off, I backed up, ran over him I think on the ankles. –Goldie (carjacker)

The interviews did not provide information regarding prior violent crimes that lead these offenders to carjacking.

Disposal

Motor vehicle thieves typically do not keep the stolen vehicle long-term. The length of time varies depending on how confident the offender is to get away with the vehicle and the reason for stealing it. Once they are satisfied or feel threatened enough to not want the vehicle any longer, they find a way to dispose of it. Carjackers recounted disposing of or stashing the vehicles almost immediately after stealing them to minimize their chance of getting caught:

> You don't be driving, you don't be driving nobody else car like that, know what I'm saying… You don't know if they made it to another phone and called the

> police or whatever, you don't even try to be joyriding… You ain't got no time to be playing. –Kow (carjacker)

Conversely, auto thieves varied in the length of time they kept the stolen vehicle. They noted keeping vehicles for specific time spans of a few hours to a few months, or simply until they run out of gas. Most adult offenders said they kept vehicles longer as juveniles, as Baldy explains:

> When I was young, when I couldn't get in trouble, I'd keep it for as long as fuck; a month, two months, three months. –Baldy (auto thief)

As adults, most auto thieves dispose of the vehicles after 2-3 days and only kept vehicles longer for specific reasons; Killa elaborates:

> We keep them for a longer period of time but when we need it for a certain purpose like to sell it to someone, we'll go steal it, sell it, and we through with it… Like, if you steal a car for someone else and they are going to pay you for it, why would you ride around with it and risk it getting taken from you by the police or someone else? Someone else could rob you for a car and it's stolen already. So now you're out of a job and some money. –Killa (auto thief)

Most often, when offenders are ready to dispose of the stolen vehicle, they strip it and sell the parts. Both auto thieves and carjackers said they sell the wheels (rims and/or tires), sound system (stereo/faceplate, equalizer, speakers, etc.), and sometimes interior or auto body parts by taking them to chop shops, flea markets, or to the streets to sell to anyone who will pay:

> Average people, average everyday people. I call them taxpayers. Average motherfucker who might, you know what I'm saying, people living paycheck to paycheck. Now they might need a part for they car. Here they is, they spent their hard earned money on this car, they living paycheck to paycheck so they can't put the car in the dealer shop in the dealership, so they saying, "I gotta make the next move. I gotta get to and from work. If I can get the parts off the street, I can get 'em. If I can get the parts and use 'em, I'm gonna use 'em." –Baldy (auto thief)

After selling parts, they abandon the vehicle by leaving it parked somewhere or by destroying the remainder to avoid detection. Destruction was a less discussed method of disposal. Only one auto thief mentioned destroying (burning) a vehicle, three carjackers said they had burned vehicles, and one said the vehicle was pushed into a body of water. Two carjackers who discussed destroying the vehicle mentioned doing so to get rid of possible evidence that could connect them with the crime:

> Stripped it, took the beats, the amps, the radio and I burned it up for prints... I had to burn it up for prints because I didn't have no gloves on then by me being the last one in the car my prints would be pulled up. –Loco (carjacker)

Some offenders sell the vehicle whole, whether to a chop shop or to another person, such as a partner. There are several reasons to sell whole rather than part it out. The offender may be hoping for a better payout, not know how to strip the vehicle themselves, or felt they did not have enough time to do so. Binge explains:

> I just wanted to get rid of it. I told him I didn't just want to leave it there and then somebody else strip it for nothing, you know what I'm saying. If I'd just left it parked there, gees, you know somebody would have probably got it and they'd have stripped it to nothing. –Binge (carjacker)

However, if waiting for someone to buy the vehicle whole takes too long, offenders may choose their backup plan of selling for parts or other methods of disposal. Occasionally, the vehicle is even given away free:

> They little motherfuckers from the hood. You know what I'm saying, little bad motherfuckers, they teenagers, bad fuckers. They'll know we in a stolo, they know we ain't got no damn car. They be like, "What's up with the stolo?" "Shit, it's right on such and such or on such and such in the back of the house," or whatever. And they fucks with them. You know what I mean? Who gives a fuck? When I'm through with a car, I don't give a fuck. I really don't. You know what I'm saying, they can drive, I don't give a fuck if they 9, if your mama ain't got

> you in check like she probably should be, that ain't my motherfucking fault. You can go jump your little bad ass in that car, you know right from wrong, I'm not, you know what I'm saying, your father. And don't say you following my footsteps though. I ain't shit, I ain't never been shit so if you following me you ain't going to be shit either [laughing]. So, shit, I don't give a fuck. I done gave up on that shit man, for real. But I ain't fixing to take the blame for them little motherfuckers jumping into them cars. They know them cars stolen man, shit. – Juice (auto thief)

Motivation

Previous research suggests three categories of motivation for MVT: pleasure, transportation, and money-making. This study used those categories to explore motivation further. Both offender groups discussed each category, but to different extents. Money-making was discussed most, and transportation was least.

Pleasure. The category of pleasure in MVT focuses mostly on recreation and joyriding, but the author also included revenge because it relates to something done for fun or thrill. Revenge or retaliatory auto theft stemmed from offenders having their vehicle stolen in the past and feeling the desire to do it to someone else or using MVT to deprive the victim for another reason.

One auto thief described having arguments with a lady he knew, so he used MVT as a form of revenge:

> We said we're going to get her back so she wouldn't curse us out every time she see us and stuff like that and be ignorant with us… We didn't trash it or nothing. We just stole it, and left it somewhere... So, she could be bitching at us, "I know you all stole my car" and all like that but, you know, she couldn't prove it. It's like payback. –Killa (auto thief)

A few carjackers also used MVT to retaliate against people they did not like:

> The nigger, I don't like him, you know what I'm saying. … 'Cause he fucked one of my little gals. Well, she was saying that he didn't really fuck her, you know, he

> took the puss, you know what I'm saying?... but she was scared so, you know … so I talked to him and shit and he talking all this shit and all he was going to do. – Goldie (carjacker)

More commonly, offenders stole for recreation or the pleasant feelings it gave them. One carjacker conveyed those feelings even when he could barely put them into words:

> The thrill, the rush, the, mmm, I mean it's a thrill that comes over you. Mmm… – Tall (carjacker)

A few motor vehicle thieves mentioned committing the crime because they wanted to try something new. After doing it once, several offenders found the risk to be too enticing to deny. Others did it for their perceived rewards:

> I do it for personal reasons, for me to have fun and enjoy myself. I got to get to the club, I got to do this, I got to mess with my women, you know, that's a lot of things, you know?... Just ride and bumping the music you hear me. Try and look fly you hear me. Go impress somebody, you know what I'm saying, just stunting, smoking, drinking, you know? –End Dog (auto thief)

As previous research described, MVT for pleasure was a motivating factor for younger thieves. Another offender told the story of his first MVT experience of learning to break down a steering column at a young age. He and a friend had gotten into a neighbor's vehicle who was away and started experimenting with it. They ended up successfully breaking it down and getting the vehicle to start, so they stole it. T-Raw recalls:

> I'm the type who used to take my father's old radios and break the motherfuckers down, you know what I'm saying? …When I was younger, I'd play like I'm fixing shit, you know what I'm saying? But I love tearing shit apart. I love fucking with it. I love seeing how shit work, you know what I'm saying? And that's fucking with that it just all came – I mean 'cause he was out of town so we just sit and playing with that motherfucker. You know what I'm saying? Playing like we driving the motherfucker and all type of shit, you know what I'm saying? And end up fucking with that motherfucker, you know, shit. –T-Raw (auto thief)

Quite a few adult auto thieves mentioned beginning their MVT careers for recreation, whether it be to learn to drive or to joyride. As these young offenders learned they could also make money from these crimes, recreation often became a secondary motivator. Tye noted:

> Basically, how I got involved is, you know what I'm saying, I wanted to joyride and kind of learn how to drive. So, you know what I'm saying, I used to take my brothers' car or my mothers' car. I used to take that and steal it in the middle of the night, go driving and learn to teach myself how to drive in 'em. I've been doing ever since then… Now, like I said, I'm an auto thief; I do it for money. – Tye (auto thief)

In addition to the money, numerous offenders stole vehicles to take parts for their own vehicles:

> We knew we were going to carjack. My partner wanted some rims, and I wanted some speakers, and a radio, so that led to some carjacking. We had nothing else to do either and we were getting high… Well, that's what we do, I mean that's all we're used to, we were brought up like that. We're not gonna go buying when we can get it another way without spending our money. Why are we gonna go buy it? –Little Ty (carjacker)

Transportation. Transportation was the least referenced motivator in both auto thieves and carjackers. In total, 15 (12 auto thieves and 3 carjackers) mentioned transportation as a factor in their crimes, but not necessarily as the primary reason for MVT. This category includes offenders who steal vehicles for the purpose of getting from one place to another or as part of another crime. Auto thieves who steal for transportation noted stealing because they or their partners were "stranded" and did not want to use public transportation nor walk to their destination. For example:

> If you are somewhere and you don't got no gas and you don't feel like walking or whatever, get a car and you don't have to walk. –Young G

Another offender explained how he believes transportation may be the initial motivator to MVT:

> That's kind of how most people get into stealing cars, where they get stranded and then they are forced to either walk or go get a car… Nobody wants to [take public transportation]. It's not fun. The only fun you get out of that is if you not paying for a ticket and they try to lock you up and then you got to run and get away from the police and all that type of stuff. –Killa (auto thief)

While two carjackers mentioned stealing unoccupied vehicles for transportation in conjunction with a secondary crime (such as to search for or get to a vehicle to carjack), only one mentioned carjacking solely to get around:

> I didn't have enough bus fare. I'm walking down the street, there's a guy sitting in his car. I go asked him for some change. He was going in his pocket. I just grabbed him outta his car. Literally, just dragged him outta his car and drove off … He was parked. I don't know if he was waiting on someone or whatever the case may have been at that particular time. It didn't matter. I mean, I needed a car, and I took a car. -Tall (carjacker)

MVT as a part of secondary crimes was discussed by six auto thieves. Capone explains:

> We don't do nothing out of no legit cars that's one of our cars or something. We always use stolen cars. –Capone (auto thief)

These auto thieves discussed stealing vehicles for the purpose of selling drugs, doing a drive-by, making a drop off, picking someone up, getting to other vehicles to steal, committing robberies, and changing their appearance. As noted by Jewells Santana:

> You know, when you're young, you want all your friends to see you driving a car and stuff. You think that what's cool so that's what you do. Then it escalated to, you know, "But wait. I can't keep stealing cars for no reason so I'm going make a reason for it." Then I start selling drugs so then I would steal cars so that the police wouldn't know, you know what I'm saying, what they were going to catch me in, what they was going to see me in. So, I would just switch up cars like every three days to make it not look as obvious. You know what I'm saying? ... I

> do it because I'm just a smart person and I don't want to get myself, you know what I'm saying, caught. I don't want to press my luck when I can just go get another car real easy just like I got this one. –Jewells Santana (auto thief)

Money-Making. MVT for the purposes of making money was the most talked about factor in offender motivation. Money-making was mentioned by all 28 participants in the study. This versatile category allowed offenders to sell the stolen vehicle or parts, and/or the victim's belongings for profit. For some, like Young G, this was the only reason to be involved in the crime:

> If you ain't gonna make no money off them, there ain't no point in stealing if there ain't no money involved. Whatcha you going to steal a car for if you ain't gonna make no money off of it? –Young G (auto theft)

Several auto thieves and carjackers said this was the way they learned how to make a profit. Only five of the 28 offenders were legally employed. The remaining participants earned money from MVT or other "hustles." As stated by Nicole:

> I'm all open to anything, I'm open for everything. If it was gonna make me some money, I was open for this here. I'll go down there and tell these, yeah, what life out here in St. Louis and it was rough. I wish I was brought up on the side that you all was brought up cause the shit I done seen, my mom smoke crack. She down in Memphis now. I had to leave her down there 'cause she was stealing from me. She smoke crack. My dad in jail, he killed his wife about I don't know how many years ago…. I mean this is all I know. –Nicole (carjacker)

One auto thief explained how this process or cycle works. Many offenders retold stories of their first MVT experiences, riding along with older friends or family members and starting as the lookout while others stole or carjacked the vehicle. They learned by seeing and experiencing the crime, and then found ways to be more involved over time. As they grew up, the roles reversed and the new offenders were now experienced, teaching a new generation how to make a profit from crime:

> They came to me. They say they needed some quick money… "You want some quick money then I'm going to teach you how to do something." You know, I taught one little guy the little game and he taught the next little guy the game, and we ride, and we scope the cars out, or the trucks and the vans out, and we get them. –Mr. Blackwell (auto thief)

Once the motor vehicle thieves have the stolen goods ready to sell, they can choose to sell the vehicle whole or in parts. As with anything in life, it does not always go according to plan. One auto thief told interviewers how he planned to sell whole but had to go to his backup plan of selling for parts:

> I wasn't able to sell it whole due to the fact I had it for a while. Too long to try to get that type of money so I end up selling parts—tires, seats, radios, speakers, stuff like that… As far as time in my possession. Like a week, two weeks, it was going on three weeks, and I still had it. So, I wasn't trying to be caught up in it. I was moving, I had it, had it for a week okay, and ain't nobody wanted to buy it. Another week passed, nah. Now I'm in a position where I don't want to drive it, I'm gonna keep it stashed away so I can get to it if push come to shove, I can sell it, or just strip the parts and things like that. So, I end up having to stash it and just getting the parts off of it…. You wanna sell the whole thing but you if you can't get the whole thing, you sell it. You sell it, so there, that's how it is. –Baldy (auto thief)

Parts are sold however or wherever the offender can do so, but offenders suggest there are buyers everywhere:

> Most people sell them in a flea market or something. Most people sell them on the street. Most people pawn them. So, either way it goes you get money from somewhere. It's always a person looking to put rims on their car, you know. –Playboy (carjacker)

When compared to other methods of crime, a few motor vehicle thieves mentioned MVT to be a faster way to make larger amounts of money. They also felt safer in their chosen method than doing another crime, as will be discussed in later sections. Goldie explains:

> It's just more quicker. It's quicker money. More lump sum than you go up to a motherfucker and rob them you don't know what is in they pocket. You get a few hundred dollars or whatever, you know what I'm saying, that guarantees some G's. –Goldie (carjacker)

Offenders reported getting less than $20 for stealing car stereos as a youth but getting hundreds or thousands of dollars for stolen vehicles and parts. For example, motor vehicle thieves said stereos and speakers could sell on the street for $40-450, rims for $500-3,000, and whole vehicles from $600-6,500, depending on the make and model. Offenders typically made $3,000-10,000 per month.

The desire for quick money was discussed for recreational things, like drugs and alcohol, spending it on gifts for their partners or families, or shopping sprees, but several also noted the money for everyday expenses like bills or to buy food for their family:

> It's a money game that you playing out there with carjackings, you know. Let's just say, okay, you got a baby. You don't have no job, but you need the money. Only way you know how is the way you was taught … So, you gonna go out and do what you gotta do to make you money. Carjacking, whatever. –Playboy (carjacker)

Demotivation

The topic of demotivation looks at why one's motivation would decrease for a given activity. In this study, demotivation was explored in terms of risks involved with the crime and why an offender has considered or would choose to desist from MVT in the future.

Risks. As with virtually all crime, auto theft and carjacking have numerous risks. According to rational choice theory, offenders consider these risks and weigh them against the potential benefits to decide if they should commit the crime or not. The responses in this study gave insight into which risks they considered and how much they thought about them.

The auto thieves and carjackers were all asked about getting caught. Auto thieves discussed being aware of a variety of risks:

> All type of risks. Locked up, getting taken away from the family. Anything could happen. Motherfucker will run out of gas and be caught up. Accident; I could be fucked up. You know what I'm saying? Anything could happen. I don't even think about that. I just think about where I need to go and what I need to do; and that's messed up… I think main risk is getting caught, caught by the police. I'm just not trying to head the direction my family went. I'm not trying to go to jail. I can get a couple of scrapes and bruises, I got that, you know what I'm saying? – Lil Bunny (auto thief)

A few offenders were confident in their ability to avoid law enforcement, but even so, some discussed having uncomfortable feelings when driving a stolen vehicle:

> It's scarier 'cause you always thinking about the police. You always watching the corners like when the police come it's like, "Damn, am I fixing to get into a high-speed? Damn, what's up, what's up man, what's up, what's up?" Even though you having fun, you listening to the radio, but it's still ticking in your head. When you in a legit car, you just relax, you don't even care if the police behind you. That's just me. I wouldn't care. I just keep driving. I got a license, but if I'm in a stolen car, I ain't gonna have my license on me, I ain't have no identification on me because I might want to lie about my name. You know what I mean? In a legit car, like if I get my momma's car when I get out, when I leave here, if I get my momma's car, I ain't got no warrants, I can pull my license out. If police get behind me, I'm gonna keep my radio up, you know what I mean? What? If they flag me, "What's you flagging me for?" I even let the window down and hand 'em my license and insurance card. I ain't gotta get outta this car. You see what I'm saying? I don't have to. –Capone (auto thief)

When it comes to law enforcement, auto thieves tended to avoid interaction by driving in different directions when they saw officers' vehicles and to try to appear inconspicuous if they were spotted. Killa recalls:

> I kind of dodge them all the time. I don't even want to be stopped by one or conversate with one or anything like that. I dodge them… If I see them like coming this way, I'll go the other way or anything to get me like away from them. I just dodge them all automatically. –Killa (auto thief)

Others said they find it best to have small, casual interactions if law enforcement looks in their direction. They offer an image of normalcy so officers will leave them alone. As explained by Baldy:

> I just get real nerdy, man. The ten and two, seatbelt action and just drive that motherfucker like it's mine. I'm minding my business, if he looking at me, I'll look at him. "How you doing? Okay, bye now." They be like, "Nah, that ain't even him. Nah this ain't what we looking for. He don't even fit the description, nah." –Baldy (auto thief)

Auto thieves also try to make the vehicle appear legal by changing license plates to one from a non-stolen vehicle, so their scanners do not detect it as quickly. This is done by stealing the plates from vehicles on the streets or in junkyards. One auto thief said it did not matter what vehicle the plates came from, as long as it had the current registration sticker on it.

Carjackers had a lot fewer responses regarding risks. They tended to avoid any chance of law enforcement with quick disposal or separation from the stolen vehicles:

> Basically, when I do get in a car, I don't really joy ride. I go park it in a safe place. I'll catch a bus where the fuck I'm going. I don't ride around in the car… Because I know it's stolen at the moment. If he call the police, they gonna look for that car at that moment but if they don't find it after they shift over, they just put it in the computer and it will pop up on the stolen sheet. –Low (carjacker)

As Low mentioned, this offender group encountered an additional risk when it came to being seen since their method of MVT is interpersonal. The victim is forced to interact with the offender and would likely contact law enforcement shortly after the crime took place. To avoid detection, a few carjackers used disguises such as wigs or glasses, or completely covered their faces with masks. One carjacker said this means the crime needs to be planned in some part to carry a face covering on hand. If the crime is done without covering their face, it could result in killing the victim or add future threats to avoid being identified later:

> If you want your face to be seen, a person who let's they face be seen they usually kill the person. You know, that's what happens so you cannot ID them and they can come look for you and use a mask. Or let's just say something like this- if you carjack somebody wit' your face showing, you take they ID and you – some people are threatened. Like if you say something, "I got your ID. I know where you live. I know where you stay." So, most people won't say nothing, you know they just go get a address changed, move or whatever. –Playboy (carjacker)

Carjackers recognized the risk of their victims possibly being armed as well, but with little deterrence from the crime:

> That's just the chance you take… Anyway you go, it's a risk you're taking. You got to get it, go and get it. You got to shoot them, they got to shoot you. –Kow (carjacker)

Auto thieves also acknowledged the risk of being injured or killed while stealing the vehicle. One mentioned having friends who had been shot while doing an auto theft. He and a few others made it clear they were aware of the chance someone could try to stop them while the crime was in progress:

> It ain't just easy. You know what I'm saying? You've got to wait. You've got to have patience with that type of stuff because you never know what can happen. You might be breaking a person's car down and they coming outside. You know what I'm saying? So, you've got to be very cautious with everything. There's a certain time, a certain place that you'll have to do it. And there's a certain, you know what I'm saying, way you have to do everything. So that's why you have to be logical about what you're trying to do, and you've got to have your mind set on what you're wanting to do before you go say, "This is what I'm doing." Because things can get dangerous. People could come up to you and, you know, anything. They might catch you breaking into their car and want to shoot you. They might want to fight you. You might have to end up hurting somebody. So, you have to think, you know what I'm saying, to how you would be able to get around hurting yourself and hurting other people. You know what I'm saying? So, there's a lot, for real, that you've got to do with car theft. –Jewells Santana (auto thief)

No matter the MVT method, it is possible for an offender to be spotted and stopped by law enforcement. Carjackers noted concerns of being caught with weapons, but most expressed

confidence in getting away and said they did not fear getting caught. Many had been incarcerated before and were not deterred to the extent of desisting from crime. Binge explains:

> I wasn't worried about the police. I'm just saying that if they'd have caught me with a pistol, they'd have a case and you know I already have two or three cases and I didn't want to get caught and get any more court violations and go back up the penitentiary… Sometimes I live a criminal life, you know, and I know it's bad but then sometimes. I just don't give a damn, you know I say be damned if I get caught, I just get caught, you know, and they send me away, man, and I be away for a little while you know, this and that, but you know most of the time if I do anything bad, I'm doing it in the winter time, you know. I don't do too much in the summertime 'cause I'm enjoying myself in the summertime. –Binge (carjacker)

While they acknowledged there was a risk, they downplayed their chances of it and used cognitive patterns or techniques, like cutoff, to keep focused on the crime, noting that:

> It's all a big risk you take. It's all a risk, anything is a fucking risk so fuck, you can't worry about that. You doing wrong anyway so fuck it. –Kow (carjacker)

Conversely, many auto thieves said if they were to get caught, they would likely end up in a chase. One said he has had it happen before and he always jumps out of the moving vehicle:

> I'm not just going to bail; I'mma bail and [leave] the car running man. I'm giving the motherfucker a choice. You know what I'm saying, I ain't gonna take away the police choice. Me or the car? Which one of these motherfuckers you want the worst? The car moving so you think of the public safety and shit man. I mean, you gotta keep that in mind—the property damage. I mean don't get me wrong, I ain't going to jump out the motherfucking car and I see a bunch a kids right there or some shit, you hear me? But as soon as I can dip to get out this motherfucker, I'm getting out this car. "Oh yeah, you gotta earn your check—foot racing." [laughs] –Juice (auto thief)

Juice was not the only auto thief to bring up public safety:

> Having an accident after you get the car… That's the biggest risk you going to have… Hurting yourself, hurting somebody else that ain't even got nothing to do

> with it you know. Because you know you going to be in a bad situation because once you have a wreck, you going to jail. –End Dog (auto thief)

Desisting. At the far spectrum of demotivation, offenders desisting choose to stop committing their crimes all together. While the reason for doing so varies, some offenders discussed reasons they might desist from MVT in the future. The most common response to questions regarding quitting MVT were about money and the difficulty of finding a job:

> I guess as the older I'm getting, man, life change situation. I'm getting sick and tired of doing the same stuff over and over again, but knowing that when push come to shove, I can't get no job. Nobody wanna hire me, so I gotta move how I move to maintain the lifestyle that I live. To maintain it for myself. But I've been trying to slow down. –Baldy (auto thief)

Several offenders saw crime as their only option to make money. They enjoyed the freedom of being their own employer, in a sense:

> That's the only thing I can do as long as I'm in this hood. Know what I'm saying? There ain't no jobs in the hood, no jobs…It's more relaxed. I got my own time. I ain't gotta wake up for no motherfucker. Wake up when I feel like it… I know damn well that I'm gonna have some cash every day. –Goldie (carjacker)

But even then, being employed with a paycheck that could support their family was a desired change for several offenders. Low explains:

> If I could find a job where it's not hard for me to live, I wouldn't mind working. I would work, any man would work. It ain't no 50-50 thing that I might do, it's something that I would do... I would give it 110%. It's just something I haven't ran into but if I would find a better job to do then I would cease. I don't want to go to jail or lose my life because I have a brand-new daughter and I don't want to be lost without her… I'm a daddy and that is something that I would really like to do… A good paying job to help support my family, yeah, I would stop then. –Low (carjacker)

Other reasons these offenders said would help them stop stealing vehicles included getting their own vehicle or possibly after receiving therapy. But in the end, this has still been a pleasurable activity for so many of them and they still, as described by Lil Bunny, enjoy stealing vehicles:

> If I get some counseling or something I'll think about it. It's just fun. Shit, riding out other people's gas. Gas is high. It went down but it's high. I remember when gas was $.97 shit like that… I might slow it down, but I gonna stop. I need their gas. I need to make my hookups, my sales. Motherfuckers don't need to know what I'm riding in. These crackheads crazy as a motherfucker. You know what I'm saying? Better believe it. –Lil Bunny (auto thief)

Similarly, another auto thief said there is a chance she could stop, but at the time, was not looking to do so because this was part of her lifestyle:

> I've got money. I could get rentals. I just don't want to spend my money on that. I think it's fun when you steal cars. It's just like more – because when you're in the drug game, when you sell drugs, you don't give a fuck about nothing because you sell drugs. You know what I'm saying? I sell a drug that kills. I don't sell that drug that just get people high. You know what I'm saying? So, when you're in the drug game, I mean, and everything that comes along it, you've got to do whatever you've got to do to maintain your business. You know what I'm saying? That's just how it is. I'm a gangster. I've been a gangster. I was brought up a gangster you know what I'm saying? –Jewells Santana (auto thief)

Offenders Compare MVT Methods

Auto Thieves on Carjacking. Auto thieves had different responses to carjackings and whether they have committed or would choose to be involved with the crime. One offender who said he has committed both types of MVT said his reasoning lied in the expected profit:

> Money. Only money. Only money and big money because if you ain't there and I'm stealing your car – if you there and I'm trying to take your car, there's a possibility I might have to lay you down right there, leave your ass right there. – Juice (auto thief)

As Juice mentioned, carjacking also adds human interaction that is not typically a part of an auto theft. The possibility of violence was discussed as the demotivator for several offenders:

> That's not what I do. I don't harm people. I don't scare people. What I do is not even involved with them on the scene. You know what I'm saying? I am slick about it. People wouldn't even know that I did it. You know what I'm saying? I'm not the type of person to say, "Hey, get the fuck out of here. Get the fuck out this car right now or I'm going to shoot you in your head." No. I don't do nothing like that because people have kids. They have their kids with them, anything. I wouldn't want nobody to run up on me with my kids like that. You know what I'm saying? Not that, you know, I won't knock the shit out their ass, but I just wouldn't do that. That's not the proper way to do it. I just feel like this is what I do I hustle. You know what I'm saying? I hustle and I steal cars and that's what I'm going to do. I'm not going to turn into no killer. I'm not going to turn into no murderer. I'm not going to turn into no person that's putting fear in people hearts. You know what I'm saying? I'm just going to do whatever I can to make it easier for me and easier for other motherfuckers to get the fuck out my way. You know what I'm saying? I ain't going to go scaring nobody, smack them with a pistol or nothing like that. I make it easier for myself by doing it when there ain't nobody around where I don't have to do all that shit. You know what I'm saying? It takes so much energy to do all that. It's already enough energy in me trying to steal the car. You know what I'm saying? I'm not going to do all that extra shit when I could just walk up on somebody else leaving their car running and just hop in that. You know what I'm saying? All it is patience. You know what I'm saying? You've got to have patience for this bullshit because you walk up and smack somebody, that's going to take you to jail. They're going to know who you is. They're going to know what you look like. And then the police really going to be looking for you because they're going to have a hit on you for attempted murder or whatever, or robbery. Then you're really going to be fucked. So that's why I just go ahead and do it the easy way. Just do it like I've been doing it. I ain't been caught yet. I ain't had to kill nobody. I ain't had to smack nobody up. –Jewells Santana (auto thief)

Carjackings can also involve passengers which not everyone is comfortable with. For example, some offenders said they were especially weary of those with children in the vehicle:

> I guess I hadn't got up there yet, you know what I'm saying? To need to pull somebody out their car and drive away with it. 'Cause I'm the kind of guy, I'm like this. I'm a thief, yeah, but sometimes you can see kids in the cars, I'm not even trying to get into all that. Now, you know what I'm saying, I won't get in somebody car and drive off with their kids in there. I ain't about that. You know what I'm saying. Though what I do is bad, I ain't trying to, you know what I'm

> saying, that's something that's in general, you know what I'm saying, just stepping into somebody's car, no telling what's in there, so… I'm a thief, but I ain't a violent person. I don't want to hurt nobody. –Tye (auto thief)

The repeated reason for auto thieves who chose to avoid carjacking was to avoid violence and harsher punishments:

> I'm not that type of guy. I'd rather do it when nobody around. That just don't pop me, you know what I'm saying, it don't interest me. I'd rather wait 'til it's sitting still – alleviate all of that, you know what I'm saying. If I'm going to get some time, it's gonna be some time that I can get out again rather than just throwing my whole life away you know what I'm saying… Or you go to "up" somebody and they beat you to the punch, shoot you dead right there… The repercussions from the consequences are a hell of a lot greater man. –Baldy (auto thief)

Carjackers on Auto Theft. Offenders who carjack do not have the task of starting the vehicle without its keys like many auto thieves, so for those who are not used to doing so, auto theft, as Goldie notes, is not worth the challenge:

> It's more harder. It's harder. You got to sit there trying to figure how to break it down and all this bullshit. It ain't for real. I don't steal a car. That's what my little brother do. He steal cars. I just take it from them. It's more easy. Car's running. Got the keys and everything –Goldie (carjacker)

In addition, Goldie explained how some places looking to buy stolen vehicles will not accept those that are broken down, making disposal more difficult.

This group of offenders discussed feeling safer in a carjacking rather than auto theft. They believe carjacking minimizes the risk of the victim surprising them to fight back because the victim is there at the time of the crime regardless of what time it occurs:

> [Auto theft is] easier but if it's just sitting there parked, they could be sitting in the window just looking at you, just waiting for you. That's just too easy. –Kow (carjacker)

Some, but not all, carjackers began with auto theft at a younger age. One who started at twelve years old only does carjackings now to take vehicles that are harder to steal without keys:

> But I don't steal cars no more. That's petty, you know what I'm saying? The cars I want you can't steal… The cars I get, really you can't steal them. Unless you hot wire them and doing all that shit, and I ain't into that. –Goldie (carjacker)

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

This study reviewed a group of 28 active offenders, both male and female, who have committed auto theft and carjacking crimes. The goal was to analyze the motivations of these offenders and to look at the similarities and differences between their responses and to investigate why the offender chose to commit crimes, why they chose vehicle-related crimes, and why they chose their method of taking the vehicle from the perspective of the offender. It also briefly reviewed offenders who have admitted to both types of MVT; notably, however, only a few were clearly overlapping in their timelines. The study also reviewed why auto thieves chose to avoid carjacking and vice versa.

Question 1: Why Did These Offenders Choose to Commit Crimes?

When looking at why the offenders in this study chose to commit crimes, the author focused on both why they started and why they continued. Most offenders got involved as juveniles. All but one auto thief said they were involved in their first MVT before the age of 18; the other participant said he started at 18 years old. Out of the five carjackers who discussed the age of their first theft, all were under the age of 18 as well. The other carjackers were not asked how old they were during their first MVT experience. Of those who talked about their first auto thefts, most did it to learn to drive or joyride. It is also possible these juveniles felt peer pressure because they did not know how to drive or wanted to look cool in front of their peers. Several offenders mentioned getting involved with older peers in their neighborhoods, being lookouts and learning the skill from them. This coincides with social learning theory because the younger offenders were surrounded by others who committed MVT (and/or other crimes) and taught them to do the same. This study did not have any respondents who only participated in one crime

and chose not to continue; future studies may explore this more and discover reasons why a person would choose not to continue after their first experience with crime.

After their first offense, the individuals in this study continued to commit crimes. Making a profit was brought up the most in interviews. Offenders often have difficulty obtaining legal employment due to their location ("in the hood") or their criminal history. This creates a need for money for survival and necessities. Several offenders said they used their money earned from crime to buy food and clothing for themselves and their families. More than half[3] (n=16) of the offenders said they have children and used the profits to provide for them. The money was also used to pay bills. Additionally, many offenders used their earnings for pleasure or recreation. Popular responses included drugs, alcohol, and women. Offenders with drug habits said they spent hundreds to thousands of dollars on heroin, crack, and marijuana, and enjoyed being high.

One other reason the respondents said they committed crimes was for retaliation or revenge. These motivation types were talked about more in the interviews with carjackers than auto thieves. However, upon discussing this finding with the original researcher for the carjacking studies, the author was informed one of the topics they were exploring was retaliatory offenses. While it may be true that carjackings are more often retaliatory than auto thefts, it cannot be confirmed due to the differences in interview questions and techniques.

Retaliatory crimes occurred when the offender acting when they felt they had been wronged by another person or if they felt like someone else was wronged and the offender acted on behalf of the victim. In one case, a carjacker discussed victimizing a woman who did not pay a young boy for pumping her gas. Instead of brushing it off, talking to her, or giving the boy a tip for her, he decided to carjack her as revenge. Another carjacking story was recounted about

[3] One offender was not asked if he had children; 16 of 27 said they have children and all but two said they were responsible for providing for the children.

victimizing a man who sexually assaulted a female friend. This meant the carjacker used crime in retaliation for another crime that was committed instead of reporting to law enforcement or by other legal means. In the end, offenders who commit crime for retaliation may do so for the feeling of instant gratification. Court cases can take several weeks or longer, but victimizing the individual is done in the moment and likely leaves the offender feeling satisfied afterward.

Committing crimes gave most offenders positive feelings either during or after the offense. Many mentioned loving the rush or the thrill of crime. They often described benefits such as getting luxury items or their drugs of choice without needing to pay. Every offender in this study had done crime with a partner or group at least once, and often shared the rewards or profits with them. This supports the observation that there is a social aspect of why someone would commit crimes. Furthermore, some auto thieves who did carjackings chose not to further pursue this crime, but still committed other crimes. Thus, there is a fluidity of crime and offenders often do whichever crime their peers are involved in, not necessarily what they had always done before. Being a part of that peer group probably added to their pleasurable feelings too. Lastly, for many offenders who grew up with others being involved in crimes, this was what they knew and what they saw most often. As suggested by social learning theory, the people in their immediate environment were all committing crimes often with no intention of stopping, and younger offenders were learning to do the same.

Question 2: Why Did These Offenders Choose to Commit Vehicle-Related Crimes?

The choice to commit crimes with vehicles as opposed to something like robbery or burglary seemed to stem from the target and its end goal, whether for profit, transportation, or pleasure. Vehicles are big ticket items and sell for hundreds to thousands of dollars on the streets, even if they are stolen. Offenders were aware of the needs or requests for specific vehicles or

parts that could be sold within minutes of acquiring them. In comparison to selling drugs or other stolen goods, a vehicle or parts can be sold to anyone anywhere. As one offender said, there is always a buyer. The buyers can be anyone, even law-abiding citizens who need parts for their vehicles. Selling to an average person crosses the line out of the criminal underworld to the everyday world. Vehicles and parts are sold quickly for large sums of money, providing money that may be needed for survival. Motor vehicle thieves get instant gratification from the fast turnover, allowing them to spend the profit on whatever they need or want.

Vehicles may also be the choice target due to their original intended use: transportation. Young offenders who do not have their own vehicles steal to learn to drive and get from one place to another. One auto thief said he drove a stolen car as a juvenile to get to school and back. Some adult auto thieves stole vehicles to get around also, but they did not keep the vehicles as long. Carjackers rarely stole for transportation alone. MVT was also more common for adult offenders to steal vehicles for secondary crimes. One offender said he had stolen a vehicle to be the transportation in a few bank robberies. Another offender stole a different vehicle every few days to sell drugs out of or do drop offs. For her, it was a way to conceal her identity so nobody ever knew what she would be driving. She and other offenders chose to do crimes out of stolen vehicles to avoid using their own vehicles. Several carjackers also stole unoccupied vehicles to go find or get to another vehicle to carjack. If they were working with partners, the stolen vehicle was usually driven so the others could leave and not everyone would need to get into the carjacked vehicle. Another possible explanation was so the carjacker could get to their target vehicle without walking or taking public transportation, or to have a quicker getaway in case things went awry.

Pleasure was another reason offenders chose to steal vehicles. A few mentioned having interests in vehicles at a young age and wanting to drive various models. It gave them a rush or thrill. Several auto thieves would showoff in the vehicles and pick friends up to spend time or get high together. Some offenders mentioned they wanted to get parts for their own vehicles, such as rims, so they would steal for those alone. Motor vehicle thieves also took pleasure in knowing their reward would be greater than with other crimes. Even if they did not enjoy the crime or felt guilt for it, they were getting what they wanted in the end (money, drugs, status), so MVT was simply the avenue.

In addition, the offenders felt their chosen MVT method was safer than other types of crime. Offenders in this study had been doing MVT for years or even decades. Many described their preferred method as easy and quick. Auto thieves knew which vehicles or even brands were best to target, and which would take longer to steal. They knew they could steal an unoccupied, locked vehicle within a couple of minutes. Similarly, carjackers completed their crimes rather quickly. If the victim fought back, the scuffle could last longer, but otherwise, they could get into a vehicle and drive away in minutes. The more these offenders committed the crimes, the more confidence they gained. If they were to attempt a different crime, they would need to start from the beginning to learn how to do it, build clientele, and improve their skills. Although that is doable, it would take time and it is therefore easier for them to continue what they already know. One offender compared this idea to a lyric from the TLC song, “Waterfalls.” One line of the song says, “Don’t go chasing waterfalls, please stick to the rivers and the lakes that you’re used to.” For this offender, MVT was what he knew and chose to stick to.

Question 3: Why Did Auto Thieves Choose Auto Theft and Why Did Carjackers Choose Carjacking?

Auto Thieves. Auto thieves in this study discussed several reasons for choosing to steal unoccupied vehicles as their crime of choice. In addition to their perceived rewards of pleasure and profit, as discussed earlier, many of them discussed the convenience of this MVT method. Offenders who chose to steal vehicles without keys had years of experience stealing vehicles and learning the best practices of breaking them down. Several said it was easy and fast, being able to get in and drive away within a minute or two, even if the vehicle had an active alarm. Doing something so often would make their skill second nature. Auto thieves could describe the process in steps to interviewers without hesitation or long pauses being noted in the transcriptions.

There were also auto thieves who stole vehicles with their keys. Like carjackers, this group found additional benefits in stealing the vehicle without needing to damage it. These vehicles were also easier and faster to steal since they did not require being broken down. Offenders could stop and start the vehicle as they pleased and appear as if it were their own since they could also get in and out with ease. The vehicle would stay on without the tools coming loose or shorting a hotwired circuit on turns. Moreover, if they chose to sell the vehicle afterward, it would likely appear to be a legitimate sale to an unsuspecting buyer.

Auto thieves also explained how they believed this crime to have a lower risk than others, such as carjacking. They were able to do the crime with nobody around, with or without partners, and avoid interacting with the victim. This also minimized the risk of violence. Nearly all conveyed they were not violent people. A few mentioned how they knew what they did was wrong but neutralized their crime because they did not physically harm anyone. Even though

they recognized the crime could cause stress to the owner or their family, they assumed the person who legally owned the vehicle would get it back or get a new one through insurance.

Additionally, auto thieves chose their MVT method because they felt the possible consequence would not be severe if they were caught. For example, one talked about if he were caught and sentenced to jail time, he would be able to get out after a few years whereas if he had hurt or killed a person intentionally, he would "throw his life away," and may never be released. Another thought he may also be able to get out even sooner if he had a good lawyer. These minimal consequences likely played a part in weighing the pros and cons of the crime and the chance of reward outweighing the punishment leading to crime in accordance with rational choice theory. The topic of deterrence by a harsher punishment seemed to be found more in auto thieves than carjackers, so another possible future research direction could explore the deterrability of these offender groups.

Carjackers. Carjackers in this study discussed several reasons for choosing to steal occupied vehicles as their crime of choice. One of the benefits of this crime over stealing most unoccupied vehicles was getting keys. Since profit was heavily talked about in MVT motivation, anything that would garner more money would be a draw. Offenders noted buyers not wanting vehicles that had been damaged, especially newer vehicles. Carjackers also have the chance of stealing additional items directly from the victim. Some mentioned taking their wallets, clothing, jewelry, and drugs. These items could be for themselves or people they know, or extra items to sell.

The crime of carjacking allowed offenders to surpass several steps an auto thief would need to take in stealing a vehicle. Some carjackers described the crime as easy because of it. Since the vehicle is typically running at the time of the theft, the offender does not need to worry

if the vehicle works or has any security features like alarms or kill switches to start it. It is nearly guaranteed that once the driver is out of the vehicle, they can get in and escape. They do not need to know how to hotwire or break down any specific type of vehicle. This allows carjackers to take whichever vehicle they feel they can overpower the driver for, no matter which security or technological advances it has. New technology may have made an impact since these interviews were done though; one offender said he backed out of a carjacking in progress because the OnStar person started speaking to him and telling him to pull over. As technology improves, carjackers may need to change techniques to counteract it. This is another possible topic for future research.

Offenders who prefer to carjack said they felt a thrill or rush when committing their crimes. Some said they committed the crime even when they did not need money or parts, but simply because the opportunity presented itself. This idea parallels the concepts articulated by routine activities theory. The offender, motivated and likely armed, would come across a suitable target with a guardian they felt could be overpowered. A few carjackers noted they did not always have a weapon, but still believed they could overpower the victim by surprising them. One said he felt any victim would expect him to be armed and would be scared if he opened a car door and got in unexpectedly.

Another notable reason for this crime of choice was carjackers felt safer confronting the victim face-to-face. With auto theft, they might be able to get the vehicle easier, but they do not know who may be watching and how they will react. With carjacking, the offender is there, ready to fight for the target vehicle, giving the victim the same chance whether they are prepared or not. The victims were not usually hurt in the process, but two offenders recounted times where they or their partner shot the victim. In one, the victim was resisting so the offender shot him in

the leg during a struggle. He explained this was not meant to be a shot to kill, but just a shot to hurt or disable the victim so he could commandeer the vehicle. In the other situation, the victims, a young man and woman, were told to run and not look back. The respondent said her partner shot the man and suggested the reason was being "trigger happy." She was not sure if the man lived or not. Their reasoning for hurting the victims was simply to successfully acquire the target vehicle, not because they wanted to hurt the victim.

Revenge was also noted a reason for a few of the carjackings discussed in this study. The offenders who felt someone deserved to be carjacked described how their victim irritated or upset them, so they did what they knew how to do to retaliate. Some also argued that a carjacking might be warranted to stop the victim from doing something such as showing off in their vehicle. As one offender put it, if "you floss too much, you get carjacked." This would stop the victim from the initial action that was unwanted by the carjacker. But there are also retaliatory carjackings that were for non-vehicle related actions, such as sexual assault. The offenders may see it as a serious crime for another serious offense, or it is also possible the carjacker is choosing to do the crime they know best to get back at the other person.

One other reason a person may choose to carjack is what they see as an evolution of their crimes. Several carjackers mentioned having also done auto thefts in their past, but one described auto theft as "petty" and something for younger offenders. He believed this was the next level of MVT, stealing from a person rather than stealing property alone. Although this may not be believed by all, there is a possibility others would agree since they stole unoccupied vehicles to get to a better vehicle (the carjacking target).

Concluding Thoughts

This study contributes to the existing MVT literature by highlighting the similarities and differences between auto thieves and carjackers, specifically regarding motivation. Although both auto thieves and carjacker target vehicles, there were some differences in motivation. Money-making was the most popular reason for MVT by both groups. Offenders stole vehicles to earn money for survival and necessities, as well as to spend on luxury items, drugs, alcohol, and women. Pleasure was the second most notable motivator in MVT. Both auto thieves and carjackers found the crimes to be exciting. Auto thieves also stole vehicles as a means of transportation, such as juveniles stealing to get around town and some adults doing the same. Transportation was a rarer motivating factor for carjackers, although several would steal unoccupied vehicles as a secondary part of carjacking. Revenge offenses were discussed more by carjackers than auto thieves. Most auto thieves avoided interpersonal crimes to reduce the need for violence or the chance of heavier consequences, but carjackers rarely used their weapons as anything more than a scare tactic. This matched with recent statistics showing zero deaths from carjackings and most victims only suffering minor injuries. After the crime occurred, carjackers disposed or separated from the stolen vehicles almost immediately, but auto thieves often kept them for several days or longer. Youth offenders usually kept vehicles the longest. The vehicles were most often disposed of by stripping them of parts and abandoning them on the side of the road by both offender groups. Carjackers were more likely to destroy the vehicle afterward than auto thieves.

There were several notes made during the study that could lead to future research, one of those being the need for updated research to account for the latest vehicle technology advances. It would be interesting to ask motor vehicle thieves how things like the push-to-start button (not

needing a key), newer security features, or dash cameras influenced or changed MVT. Along those same lines, the author is curious how many offenders nowadays know how to disable older anti-theft features such as the club since it is not as commonly used. Another thing that is less common and could cause an issue for newer drivers is the transmission. One offender mentioned not knowing how to drive a manual transmission vehicle, so the author wonders how much of a deterrent something like that would be for offenders since they are far less common today. Another topic that could be explored further from this study is demotivation and desisting. The author would also like to know if any of these offenders have stopped MVT due to those changes or other reasons. There are so many newer forms of crime that allow offenders to make money such as cybercrimes or using the dark web and cryptocurrency. These crimes pose less of a physical risk to offenders since they can be done anywhere, such as in the privacy of their own homes. The author wonders if the motor vehicle thieves have continued with what they knew or moved on to different crimes that could earn more money in quicker ways. One other topic for future research would be to look at where these offenders are now, such as if they are still active or have been caught, and how their children growing up with them being motor vehicle thieves has influenced them to continue or desist.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (IRB) Determination

To:
Aida Hass
Criminology
William Sandel, Michael Kyle

Date: Nov 15, 2021 1:38:58 PM CST

RE: Not Human Subjects Research Determination
Study #: IRB-FY2022-175
Study Title: Car thieves vs carjackers

This submission has been reviewed by the Missouri State University Institutional Review Board (IRB). It has been determined that the proposed activity is not research involving humans subjects as defined by federal regulations; therefore, IRB approval is not required.

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these activities are research involving human subjects, please submit a modification to this study to the IRB for determination or call the Office of Research Administration at 417-836-5972 or email irb@missouristate.edu.

This study was reviewed in accordance with federal regulations governing human subjects research, including those found at 45 CFR 46 (Common Rule), 45 CFR 164 (HIPAA), 21 CFR 50 & 56 (FDA), and 40 CFR 26 (EPA), where applicable.

Researchers Associated with this Project:
PI: Aida Hass
Co-PI: William Sandel, Michael Kyle
Primary Contact: Tara Abrahams
Other Investigators:

Appendix B: Respondent Demographics

Name	MVT Method	Age	Age of First Theft	Has Children?	Married?
Baldy	Auto Theft	31	17	Yes	Single
Binge	Carjacker	45	Unknown	Yes (non-dependent)	Single (in a relationship)
Capone	Auto Theft	25	15	Yes	Single
D-Cuz	Auto Theft	33	13	Yes	Single
E	Auto Theft	32	17	Yes	Single (in a relationship)
End Dog	Auto Theft	19	15	No	Single
Eric	Auto Theft	29	15	Yes	Single
Goldie	Carjacker	22	14	Yes (non-dependent)	Single
Jewells Santana	Auto Theft	21	16	Yes	Single
Juice	Auto Theft	29	11	Yes	Single
Killa	Auto Theft	18	15	No	Single
Kow	Carjacker	20	Unknown	No	Single
Lavanda	Auto Theft	26	15	No	Single
Lil Bunny	Auto Theft	21	14	No	Single

Name	MVT Method	Age	Age of First Theft	Has Children?	Married?
Little Rag	Carjacker	19	Unknown	No	Single
Little Ty	Carjacker	19	11	No	Single
Loco	Carjacker	20	16 or 17	No	Single
Low	Carjacker	33	Unknown	Yes	Married
Mo	Carjacker	23	Unknown	No	Single
Mr. Blackwell	Auto Theft	42	16	Yes	Married
Nicole	Carjacker	22	Unknown	Yes	Single
Number One	Carjacker	16	Under 18 (unknown)	No	Single
Playboy	Carjacker	19	Unknown	Yes	Single
Red Dog	Auto Theft	20	16	Unknown	Unknown
Tall	Carjacker	37	14	Yes	Single
T-Raw	Auto Theft	26	15	Yes	Single
Tye	Auto Theft	27	18	Yes	Single
Young G	Auto Theft	17	14	No	Single