

Carjacking and Copresence

Bruce A. Jacobs¹

Journal of Research in Crime and
Delinquency

49(4) 471-488

© The Author(s) 2012

Reprints and permission:

sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav

DOI: 10.1177/0022427811408434

<http://jrcd.sagepub.com>



Abstract

Drawing from in-depth qualitative interviews, this research note explores how carjacking offenders establish copresence with victims. Two tactics are explored: normalcy illusions and blitzes. The paper links these tactics conceptually to the delivery of coercive actions. Discussion focuses on the offenders' manipulation of celerity and publicity in the approach process and its implications for compliance generation in an alternative coercive climate.

Keywords

carjacking, compliance generation, copresence

Introduction

Carjacking requires copresent interaction with victims. Copresence is difficult to establish because victims are easily spooked and can spot trouble before it ensnares them. Both possibilities can produce resistance. The present research note explores how offenders manage these possibilities. Using a grounded theoretic approach, it links these tactics to the delivery of coercive actions. Conceptual attention is given to the speed, or celerity, of these tactics relative to their transition to coercion. The paper explores

¹ University of Texas, Dallas, TX, USA

Corresponding Author:

Bruce A. Jacobs, Program in Criminology, University of Texas, Dallas, Campbell Road, Richardson, TX 75083, USA

Email: bruce.jacobs@utdallas.edu

the data's conceptual implications for compliance generation in an alternative (i.e., predatory) climate of threat.

Coercive Actions

A coercive action is conduct undertaken by one party to impose harm or force compliance on another (Tedeschi and Felson 1994). Motives for coercive actions vary from social control and identity advancement to resource generation and vengeance. Coercive actions typically come in the form of threatened or actual violence, either to secure positive resources or to teach someone a lesson. Such goals are not mutually exclusive, however.

As a coercive action, carjacking is criminal and predatory. It attempts to enforce physical control over a target. It levies threats of deprivation to do so. It invokes displays of power, which can be explicit or assumed. Most importantly, it requires attention to copresence and more specifically, the speed with which copresence leads to actual coercion. Too little speed can forewarn targets; too much can scare them and create defiance. The present research note examines how carjackers navigate this difficult terrain. It is an area that has been overlooked in the field of coercion in general and within predatory crime in particular. Exploring it provides the opportunity to examine an offense that remains surprisingly understudied—carjacking.

Carjacking

Like other forms of robbery, carjacking is a violent crime. Its uniqueness lies in what is seized—a motor vehicle. As a percentage of all robberies, carjacking is rare. Approximately 34,000 carjackings occur per year (Klaus 2004). “Traditional” robberies occur at a pace 15-fold that. National data indicate that carjackings typically occur on parking lots or on streets. Carjackings typically involve more than one offender and offenders and victims who are strangers to one another. More often than not, carjackings involve a weapon of some sort (usually a firearm). Interestingly, two-thirds of carjacking victims resist, yet only 1 percent of all carjacking victims suffer injuries requiring hospitalization. Carjacking rarely involves death, but it engenders palpable fear because it is sudden and threat-laden (Fisher 1995; Klaus 2004).

Carjacking is energized by multiple forces, including money, revenge, thrills, and/or the desire to show off. Cars can also be jacked to facilitate escape from other crimes (Miethe and Sousa 2009; Young and Borzycki 2008). The

stereotyped carjacking involves a victim-as-driver sitting inside the vehicle with the engine on, whom the offender forcibly removes, but carjackings can also be part of larger robbery incidents in which offenders seize the victim's possessions (including his or her car keys) and take the car.

Some analysts have speculated that carjacking has become increasingly popular in recent years because of sophisticated antitheft technology that makes it harder to "hot-wire" a vehicle and drive it off (Clarke and Harris 1992; Miethe and Sousa 2009). An appreciable number of offenders reportedly prefer carjacking to auto theft because it is simpler: Threaten the victim, gain control of the vehicle, and drive it away (Jacobs, Topalli, and Wright 2003). Carjacking typically involves little in the way of advanced planning or casing of targets. The temporal gap between observing the target and seizing it is short (see, e.g., Topalli and Wright 2004). This is consistent with other forms of robbery, which also tend to be spur-of-the-moment affairs (Feeney 1986; Jacobs 2000).

As a form of robbery, carjacking is "transactional" because it requires victim participation (Luckenbill 1981). The transaction evolves through distinct phases: Offenders establish copresence; they announce the crime; they make a contingent threat; they seize the goods; and they escape (Luckenbill 1981). When offenders and victims are mutually oriented to the offending frame, each stage leads to the next. Mutual orientation requires communication from offender to victim and compliance by the latter.

Researchers have explored the robbery transaction in a variety of forms and contexts, including street muggings, drug robberies, and commercial robberies (Lejeune and Alex 1973; Feeney 1986; Shover 1996; Wright and Decker 1997; Jacobs 2000). Carjacking has received considerably less attention. Carjacking is different from traditional robbery. Although robbery and carjacking have a good deal in common, the fact that a vehicle is at the center of carjacking makes it somewhat unique (Copes, Hochstetler, and Cherbonneau in press). Vehicles can be used as weapons and shields, and the mobility of vehicles creates distinct challenges for offenders. Prior research either has ignored these challenges (but see Topalli and Wright 2004) or has focused on the causal forces of the crime rather than the intermediate area between these causal forces and how the offense unfolds (Jacobs et al. 2003; Miethe and Sousa 2009; but see Copes et al. in press). This intermediate area is anchored by copresence. Exploring it provides a window into compliance generation and its broader conceptual significance for coercion in an alternative climate of threat.

Method

Data for this research note come from in-depth interviews with 24 unincarcerated carjackers who operated out of a large midwestern U.S. municipality. Respondents were contacted through a specially trained field worker, who was a gang member, long-time offender, and experienced participant in the street criminal underworld.

Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim and took place in a private room. Interviews followed a semistructured format that permitted substantial probing. All respondents were granted anonymity. No information was recorded that could reasonably link respondents to specific crimes. Although the external validity of a small purposive sample of active offenders will inevitably come into question, such populations are essential for providing sensitive information about hidden behavior in volatile settings.

The choice to interview active offenders was fueled at least in part by the desire to avoid the potential bias that can attend to interviews in correctional settings. Criminologists have long “suspected that offenders do not behave naturally” in such settings (Wright and Decker 1994:5). On the street, active offenders are less likely to associate researchers with criminal justice personnel, particularly when an indigenous fieldworker is involved. This can translate into freer and/or more articulate expression of key decision-making processes. Active offenders also represent those who are less removed, both temporally and spatially, from the instability of street life, which can afford researchers better access to real-time insights. This is not to suggest that data from jailed offenders are not useful. Indeed, a number of excellent studies using incarcerated offender samples have been conducted and produced valuable results (see, e.g., Hochstetler 2001; Shover 1996). The utility of both traditions cannot be discounted. Together, they triangulate the sometimes-enigmatic phenomenon of offender decision-making.

In terms of the sample, all but three of the respondents were male. On average, respondents were in their 20s. The majority had no high school degree. Most were unmarried. All were African American, owing to the fact that the fieldworker had no contacts with offenders outside of his own race (he was also African American). Although respondents typically committed a medley of different crimes, they were recruited specifically because of their prior experience with carjacking. The field worker prescreened all respondents for inclusion in the study. Both the fieldworker and the respondents were remunerated modestly for their participation, a tactic found necessary to encourage participation among populations who rarely do anything for nothing.

Copresence

Copresence in carjacking requires that offenders ensnare targets without betraying their predatory intentions. The ensnarement process is mediated in no small part by the manner in which offenders approach their victims (Copes et al. in press). For carjacking to work, offenders must become proximate to victims without alerting them first and providing them a chance to skirt the encounter. To this end, offenders must manipulate the publicity and/or celerity of their approach. Offenders do this in one of two ways: by manufacturing the illusion of normalcy or by blitzing the victim. Normalcy illusions permit a stepwise introduction of the coercive action by enticing the target to believe that the offender's appearance represents nothing ominous. Blitzing the victim, by contrast, mingles surprise with force by combining the coercive action's announcement and contingent threat. In the language of coercion, normalcy illusions sacrifice celerity for more certain entrapment, while blitzes embrace celerity to enhance the certainty of entrapment through shock and force.¹

Normalcy Illusions

In establishing the illusion of normalcy, offenders approached and engaged targets in ways that revealed no imminence of harm. Social scientists have long recognized that the most effective way for persons with nefarious intentions to exploit predatory crime targets is to lull them into a false sense of security. By "wrongfooting" the target, the offender creates a momentary lapse in the target's awareness space (Deakin et al. 2007:61). So lulled, targets lose their defensibility when the coercive action starts to unfold. The tactic is rooted in the offenders' taken-for-granted knowledge that would-be victims are reluctant to define ambiguous encounters in predatory terms.

A variety of methods are available to do this, but each one manipulates space and time to justify the offender's proximity to the target without alerting the target of the offenders' intentions. The modal technique was to approach the target in an inquisitive mode—requesting help, service, or an item in need. One respondent approached his victim in the parking lot of a local mall as the woman placed her purchases inside her vehicle. He asked for the time and made the woman think that he was trying to catch the bus. Then, he grabbed her keys, pushed her down, and took her vehicle:

Walked up behind her and say, 'Excuse me. Can you give me the time?' ...

I made her thought I was catching a bus ... And she looked up to look at the

time . . . And she turned around to look at her watch. I snatched the keys [out of her hand] and opened the door and I push her down, let's go. [Sleazy-E]

Requests for “the time,” directions, or cigarettes have long been associated with robbery initiations. Such requests “share the two advantages of holding the victim stationary and permitting a scan of his possible weaknesses and strengths without warranting overtly defensive maneuvers. The victim may be seriously worried, but, without more, it would be ‘crazy’ simply to run away” (Katz 1988:174). For the carjackers interviewed here, requesting cigarettes appeared to be the most popular engagement tactic. Such requests are commonplace in street culture and are part of the social exchange that lubricates daily street life. It behooves citizens to be open to such requests, lest they be perceived as arrogant or condescending—which can trigger predatory violence in its own right.

Corleone recounts the cigarette ploy, which he administered with a partner:

[The victim] parked as he was going to a barbershop or something like that . . . [When he came out,] I ask him for a cigarette . . . Most of the time it's the same trick. Go to the passenger side. Take his attention to the passenger side. ‘Hey, let me get a cigarette,’ something like that. While he is looking [the victim says,] ‘I ain't got no cigarette on me.’ Next thing you know, [with my gun, I say] ‘get out the car. Get out the car.’ He looking to this side. Then he [my partner] screaming ‘get out the car, get out the car!’ from the passenger side. He [the victim] don't know what to do. He just see two people so he getting out the car regardless and once he get out the car my cousin already in the passenger side. I get in and take off.

Low's use of the cigarette ploy coincided with an argument between the target and his girlfriend that distracted the target. As the argument concluded and the target walked toward his vehicle, Low approached and engaged him:

I was just walking around. I had already peeped [him] . . . The third time I walked past, I hadn't got to the car cause for some reason the argument had, well I guess he got mad at whatever she was talking about and he said ‘fuck it’ and just walked on away and I was walking the same, I was walking toward the car, he was walking this way and when I get in the front of the car he turned off the sidewalk and walked to the car door and I just made a quick left turn towards him, ‘can I get a cigarette?’ . . . When I come toward him, when he put his hands in his front pockets, I didn't know if he smoked or not, it was just something that just came to my mind. You can say a lot of things

with people ... He raising his head up toward me and he reached to his pocket. 'Can you spare a cigarette man?' [I said]. And he said 'yeah' but my hand was already in my jacket pocket on my gun and I just showed him the butt of the gun and just told him 'you just give me the keys and go on about your business'

Tactics used to justify proximity to targets without spooking them were limited only by the offender's imagination. Mo, for example, approached his target by dressing up as a bum and asking whether the target wanted his car cleaned. The ploy permitted Mo to engage the target in conversation without raising undue alert:

So I hit him with the bum kit, you know what I'm sayin', I'm a bum ... I was just in bummy clothes, trashy clothes, funky clothes, you know what I'm saying ... bombed out tennis shoes and smell like a bum, a smell like a shit bum basically, you know what I'm saying? ... [He] hit his brake light. Come up [to him] ... 'Can you help me out and I'll wash [your car]? ... Now [initiating the offense with a gun] you gotta give it all up. No more talking, you know what I'm saying, you gotta give it all up!'

Although the majority of normalcy illusions were geared to permit target engagement under the guise of some other social activity, some offenders seemed to create the illusion more to manage potential audiences than the actual target. Thus, an offender might approach a targeted vehicle and enter it prior to making verbal contact with the target. To an outsider, the action might appear to be nothing more than a citizen opening a car door and hopping in—something all of us do on a daily basis. To the victim, the action was something entirely different. Trapped in an enclosed vehicle, the target had no reasonable opportunity to escape or to make others aware that a carjacking was in progress:

How did I get him? Walk up to the window [late at night], open the door, passenger side ... Just mosey on around, stoop down low and mosey around to see if the door unlocked and if you touch it and it open, just hop in ... You know, people don't have they door locked. Hop in with 'em, you know what I'm saying ... 'you know what time it is.' ... He didn't have no choice unless you gonna take a couple of [bullets] ... Keep your mouth closed and do what I tell you, you know what I'm saying? Don't make no robbery turn into no murder ... I'm like 'shit, just get out. Go get your dash on, run.'
[Kow]

Applying the same general approach, Low was even bolder. His boldness was an artifact of the context in which he decided to enact the offense: the

drive-thru lane of a local fast food restaurant. Spotting the target, Low waited until the driver had ordered his food and driven up to pay at the window. After the driver provided payment but before he obtained his food, Low nonchalantly approached the passenger door, opened it, hopped inside, and announced the carjacking:

I wait until they get up to the line and stop the car. When the lady asks them for the money, pay for they food, they don't hand them the food, they close the [cashier] window right there. That's basically when I ... [go] to the passenger side and [hop in the car with them] ...

Low explained that if the passenger door was locked when he approached, he would meld into the background and slink away, believing that no one, especially the driver waiting for his food, would conclude that his actions represented an attempted carjacking:

If the door is locked then I just go on about my business ... I just turn around, walk on about my business ... He [the intended victim] ain't gonna ride off when he just spend \$20 at Rally's or Mickey D's or White Castle, he ain't gonna ride off and leave his [food]. He probably be [saying], 'who the fuck is that here, who is that son of a bitch pulling on my door.' He ain't too much thinking about following me. He probably be cussing me out while I walk away ...

One normalcy illusion was used exclusively by the female offenders in the sample. In this modality, the females would seduce male victims at nightclubs and accompany them out of the club under the pretext of a sexual encounter. The females would then direct the victim to a designated spot, at which time male accomplices would unleash the offense. The females established copresence in such a way that the victim had no indication that a predatory carjacking was in the offing or even that they (the females) had set it up. Female offenders in studies of drug robbery, armed robbery, and retaliatory violence have been known to engage in similar schemes (see, e.g., Miller 1998).

In only one reported instance where offenders used normalcy illusions to establish copresence did victims engage in determined resistance. In this incident, the offender (named Goldie) approached the victim as a vagrant. After tapping on the window and asking for spare change, Goldie brandished a firearm and announced the crime. Upon seeing the weapon, the driver tried to accelerate away. Leaning into the open car window, Goldie fought with the driver and shot him. Goldie then forced the victim out of the car and ran over his ankle with the carjacked vehicle. "I hear bones break,"

he recalled, “like all this down here [indicating] was just crushed . . . I didn’t give a fuck though.” The fact that the victim was a prominent street criminal perhaps explains his resistance despite the gun being in his face. Negative cases and their significance for copresence are explored a bit later in the “Discussion” section.

Blitzes

Blitzes were the second modality used by the offenders to establish copresence. Whereas normalcy illusions hinged on veiling one’s predatory intent until the offense was announced, blitzes merged announcement and approach into one motion. Celerity was the overriding objective, and discretion was sacrificed for celerity’s sake. Although entrapping the target remained paramount to compliance, entrapment came through shock and force, not sneakiness.

In the typical approach, the offenders would suddenly confront the target outside his or her vehicle and brandish a weapon. The idea was to catch victims unaware and afford them no chance to consider any actions beside compliance (see also Copes et al. in press). Because carjacking occurs in the public realm and because the offenders had access to the same realm, it became a simple matter of pouncing when the moment was right. Because the approach hinged on a combination of shock and force, the offenders had to manipulate the trajectory and speed of that approach to avoid tipping their hand. This tactic was riskier than the normalcy illusion because it was visible and menacing, not nonchalant or inquisitive. Timing was critical: Once copresent, the offender’s motives were essentially transparent.

C-Ball, for example, was riding around with two associates late at night after visiting a nightclub. The would-be victim stopped in front of them at a traffic light in a red Camaro with 20 inch rims. C-Ball describes what he did:

He [the victim] was just riding through and he stopped at a stoplight . . . He probably ain’t paying attention to the road. We looking at him you know . . . We had ran up to him and put the gun to his head, ‘get out of the car’ . . . I put a gun to his face and I took it from him . . . He seen the big old gun I had. It was a 9MM, no, I ain’t messing with no 9MM . . . [T]hrew the white boy out of the car, you know, punched him in the face and I drove the car. We drove it back to our hood and broke it down [stripped it].

Nicole described a broadly similar offense, although her role appeared to be one of accomplice more than anything else. She and a male friend followed the targeted vehicle as it left a drive-in theater and trekked across town.

When the vehicle arrived at the parking lot of another business and pulled into a parking space, Nicole navigated into a nearby space and stopped. Nicole's accomplice jumped out of the car with his gun and initiated the carjacking:

My partner just jumped out of the car . . . and right then when I seen him with the gun I already knew what was happening . . . He jumps out of the car and runs over there to the door, the door's already open, he grabbed him [the driver] out, threw him on the ground and he put his knee in his back and he said [to me] 'come get the car.' . . . So we got in the car. The girl [passenger] was already out of the car screaming 'please don't kill me, please don't kill me.' So he made her run and the same time he made the guy get up and run . . . 'Get your motherfucking ass up and run towards that way' and he ran.

Snake and his partner blitzed their victim as the victim and his associate sat at a gas station. Loitering in a public park adjacent to the gas station prior to the offense, Snake and his co-offender saw the victim pull up and begin pumping gas. Realizing that their prey was distracted by a car radio, Snake and his accomplice approached rapidly with two firearms:

Yeah, me and my partner, we saw him pull up to the lot. . . . His partner was listening to the news. He couldn't hear, they got the music turned up loud. I went on ahead, my partner went around . . . I ran up, pulling it [the gun] out real fast, 'give [it] up,' my partner ran around cause the other dude he didn't even look up cause he was listening to the news . . . My partner went 'give it up' like this. The guy don't wanna get hurt, he gotta give it up . . . We jump in the car and drive off, drove off the lot.

On occasion, the blitz might involve an intervening technique to distract the target's attention and occupy him or her so the offense could be initiated with reduced risk of forewarning. Although the normalcy illusion relied on a similar strategy, tactically, that modality was distinct. With the normalcy illusion, the objective was to get victims to believe that the offender had no nefarious intentions. In the "distracted" blitz, the objective was to divert the victim's attention such that no physical copresence was required until the moment the carjacking began. Recall that in normalcy illusions, copresence preceded the offense's announcement.

Playboy, for example, describes how a co-offender faked a seizure in the middle of the street to divert the target's attention. Consumed by the spectacle, the target was easy prey for Playboy's second co-offender, while Playboy served as a lookout:

So one person walked in the front of the car and was like, you know, coughing, and you know ... [was] faking a seizure ... Your friend laying on the ground laying there shaking, you know, of course somebody else is gonna see you and he gonna say 'what's a guy just fell out in the street. Let's call an ambulance, oh, emergency people' ... that's a interference. Put it like that ... While that person [the driver] looking, the other person [my second associate] come up on the side [of the car with a fake gun] ... [You see, o]ne person is a fakeout. One person actually does the jacking—pull the person out of the car. The other one [me] is a watchout ... You [the victim] caught sleeping, you get got. So he [the victim] was caught sleeping and he got got, real simple like that ... [My co-offender] opened the door [with a fake gun] and [the driver] got out the car.

Pacman's diversionary approach was less subtle but similarly minded. He and his co-offenders followed the target vehicle and rammed it with the car they were driving. The targeted driver stopped and exited, intensely angry that someone had smashed into his vehicle. Shooting erupted shortly after Pacman's accomplice exited the striking vehicle. During the melee, the offenders managed to get the victim on the ground, at which point Pacman seized the vehicle and "burnt out:"

[The target] turned off kind of going up there by [fast food restaurant] or whatever to get something to eat ... So we dropped down on his ass, you know what I'm saying ... When he turned up the side street, he got to go down the strip and over a lot of railroad tracks to get to the [fast food restaurant]. We hit his shit [car]. This is his shit night ... We gotta hit his shit ... He stopped the car and like I said there was two motherfuckers got out. One of them was big or whatever ... old boy, he pissed. He like, 'what the fuck, what you all hit my car or whatever?' He started saying some more words ... [Then all of a sudden,] Pow, pow, pow. I could hear the fucking gunfire ... shit just happened and ... shit going down. You know what I'm saying? ... [Got the victim on the ground.] I just jumped in the motherfucker truck. That was the ultimate goal was to get this motherfucker truck. Got the motherfucker truck [, and] we burnt out.

Discussion

Robbery enactment has been a frequent topic of empirical research. Carjacking has not, so its theoretical import remains underexamined. Nesting the enactment of carjacking in the realm of coercive actions permits attention to its grounded-theoretic relevance. Coercion scholars have spent

the better part of four decades examining how changes in the certainty, severity, and celerity of threats influence rates of compliance (see, e.g., Gibbs 1975). The focus of that research has been almost exclusively in the realm of official coercion, such as when punishment is threatened for noncompliance to the law. Insights into compliance generation in an alternative coercive climate, where offenders are agents rather than targets of coercion, remain nascent at best.

Prior research on carjacking enactment (Copes et al. in press) suggests that compliance is mediated by the use of decision-making scripts. These scripts are applied throughout the enactment process and relate to how offenders select victims, approach them, establish copresence, seize vehicles, and escape. Each phase brings unique challenges, and offenders must navigate them to enhance the likelihood of compliance (Copes et al. in press). The present research note takes a more narrow view of compliance—focusing only on copresence. It argues that copresence is the point at which compliance is most demonstrably made or broken and that this is true irrespective of victim-type, context of occurrence, or the other phases detailed by Copes et al. (in press).

Importantly, even Copes et al. (in press) recognize that “offenders must establish co-presence with victims in a way that did not allow their prey foresight into what was coming” and that “failure to achieve and maintain control of the scene could give victims an opening to escape or mount an effective defense . . .” (Copes et al. in press:11, 8). Indeed, the authors imply that the most important aspect of the coercive process is the extent to which offenders catch victims by surprise. Ensnaring victims at the copresence phase may well preclude consideration of alternatives to non-compliance and that is the parsimonious focus this research note has taken.²

The present paper has argued that control is mediated first and foremost by the speed with which copresence transitions into coercion. In traditional research on compliance to threats, speed refers to the “celerity” by which some coercive response follows some act of noncompliance. But the issue of celerity more broadly comes down to how fast coercion arrives relative to the action that initiates it. From the target’s perspective, celerity—like all aspects of threatened coercion—is perceived (Decker, Wright, and Logie 1993) and is frequently tied to the publicity of the coercive action’s announcement. Whereas formal coercive actions seek to maximize the action’s publicity and disseminate its threat as widely as possible to give that threat imminence (i.e., immediacy), coercion of the kind explored in this research note tightly focuses the message and veils its publicity until the moment it is delivered. To do otherwise threatens to undermine the

action's compliance-generating power and may even promote defiance. Although the step-wise approach invoked by normalcy illusions seems to lengthen the temporal gap between copresence with the target and coercing him or her, the announcement itself is no less concealed at the point that the coercer delivers it. This temporal gap is what permits ensnarement among those who apply the tactic—a rare example where compliance generation may be enhanced by a small but strategic reduction in celerity.

In establishing copresence with the object of coercion, celerity and publicity are important because of the manner in which the coercer must manipulate these dimensions to enhance the certainty of compliance. Traditionally, coercion scholarship assumes that the publicity and celerity of coercion are distinct from its certainty and possibly disconnected to it (but see Nagin and Pogarsky 2001). In the realm of “official coercion,” compliance generation certainly would be more efficient if coercers could convince targets that the certainty of coercion was an artifact of its publicity and celerity. Official coercers try to do as much through heavily advertised campaigns about “cracking down” on various forms of nonconformity, but the perceived certainty of coercion is a separate and far more important dimension (Pogarsky 2002). In delivering coercive actions, offenders recognize that celerity and publicity can be harnessed to engineer changes in certainty.

The link between these dimensions has been overlooked primarily because celerity has been all but ignored in studies of coercion (but see Nagin and Pogarsky 2001). Prominent researchers (Andenaes 1974; Gibbs 1975; Tittle 1980) have argued that celerity is a residual category because humans, unlike animals, can make connections between a stimulus and a response even when the response is delayed. But celerity and certainty can “blend” together in predatory contexts because of the manner in which compliance flows from fear. In traditional coercive climates, fear does not necessarily lead to compliance but is an essential intervening variable in the explanation of compliance or noncompliance (Pestello 1984). In coercive actions of the kind explored here, fear and compliance are directly correlated because the threat to the coerced is proximate and real, not distal and theoretical. This linkage could not obtain but for the merging of celerity, publicity, and certainty in time and space. It is this merging that generates intense vulnerability for the target and, in the eyes of the coercer, little recourse for alternative action.

Although an anonymous reviewer noted that testing the robustness of this hypothesis would require input from the person being coerced, this objective is beyond the scope of the present study (which focused on the offender's perspective). That being said, the data revealed only two “negative cases” of determined resistance by targets (Goldie and Pacman).

Negative cases would refute the notion that celerity and certainty “blend” in predatory coercion. The apparent rarity of negative cases would seem to support the connection the offenders were trying to make between the celerity and publicity of copresence and the certainty of compliance. In the case of carjacking-as-coercion, compliance can be assessed directly through the target’s conduct rather than intuited through some perceptual measure (the modal technique for measuring compliance to “official” coercion), and compliance was reportedly quite forthcoming.

If the certainty of coercion flows from its celerity, so also may its severity. In his path-breaking treatise on the topic of compliance generation in robbery, Luckenbill (1981) observed that the level of force used to generate compliance depends on two conditions: The quantity of coercive power available to the offender and the value of the target to the offender in completing the transaction. Luckenbill (1981:43) afforded primacy to the latter: “When the target is deemed necessary to the [offender’s] goal achievement, the [offender] is confined to using limited force, independent of the strength of his/her resources; when the target is not considered necessary, the [offender] will use limited or massive [coercive power], depending on the strength of his/her resources.” But Luckenbill also implied that the target’s perception of the offender’s level of coercive power and ability to use it was critical, which is why offender positioning in the copresence-establishing process is preeminent: “[W]hen the victim believe[s] the offender . . . [is] positioned within striking range, he/she complie[s] . . . [W]hen the victim believe[s] the offender . . . [is] not in the position to use [punitive resources], he/she resist[s]” (Luckenbill 1981:44). Thus, Luckenbill implies that levels of coercive power (i.e., severity) mean little if the offender “telegraphs” his or her intent prior to establishing copresence with the target. This means that celerity and publicity mediate the coercive action’s severity by conditioning prior notice to the victim. When mismanagement of either celerity or publicity leads to target forewarning, severity becomes the “fallback strategy” to shore up the certainty of compliance. This strategy is not preferred nor does it appear to be effective. Severity has long been the least useful compliance-generating dimension among formally coercive actions (Nagin 1998; Pogarsky 2002). Informal coercive actions like carjacking seem to reflect the same problem. The fact that 67 percent of all carjacking victims resist, 74 percent of offenders are armed (nearly half with a firearm), yet only 1 percent of victims are injured to the point of hospitalization (Klaus 2004) may reveal the futility of applying coercive power (i.e., severity) to generate compliance when celerity-based measures fail. In other words, severity may be seductive for generating compliance, but its efficacy is questionable.

In the only other carjacking study to look explicitly at this issue, Copes et al. (in press) suggest that offenders do rely on coercive power to generate compliance, but because their study analyzed phases of the enactment process rather than copresence alone, the proportionate degree of this reliance is unclear, as is the degree to which offenders systematically altered their copresence tactics relative to varying degrees of coercive power available to them. Moreover, the amount of coercive power used by their offenders was not constant and occasionally varied by victim type. Criminal victims (such as drug dealers), for example, were treated more roughly than were regular citizens, and some of the offenders preferred noncriminal victims precisely because they required less force to generate compliance. Their study (like the present one) was based on a small qualitative sample, which makes inferences about noncompliance rates difficult relative to the threatened severity of coercion. The question is whether and to what extent different types of copresence mediate the degree of coercive power used and secondarily, how that coercive power translates into likelihoods of resistance. The present study has argued that there are two different ways to maximize the efficiency of compliance at the copresence stage and that resistance can be inhibited by either tactic. Unlike the Copes et al.'s study, the present study argues that the actual use of coercive power in later stages of the offense is secondary to the ability to entrap victims at the copresence stage. Thus, although Copes et al. found blitzes to be the modal approach technique (because it reportedly was otherwise difficult to approach victims without alarming them), the present study reveals that *how* offender's approach is less important than entrapment itself. At least some of the offenders in the present study imply that blitzes can promote more alarm and earlier flight among targets than tactics that veil one's coercive intent until it is "too late" for targets to respond meaningfully. Entrapment removes exit strategies and feasible alternatives to compliance.

Armed robbery provides a point of contrast and brings the present study's empirical contribution into relief. Research on armed robbery consistently demonstrates the rarity of resistance and also the direct correlation between resistance and victim injury (for an overview, see, e.g., Katz 1988). Although some questions remain about the time order of these events—that is, whether victims are injured because they resist or they are injured first and resist because of it—research among robbery offenders strongly supports the former account. Ethnographic studies consistently show that robbery offenders have little intention of hurting their victims and typically do so in response to noncompliance. This is especially true of armed robbers because of the efficiency with which their weaponry conveys a credible

contingent threat. And more often than not, weapons are used in robbery. In carjacking, the threat is more tenuous because the object of the offense—the victim's car—can serve as both a weapon and a shield. This can embolden resistance. Conventional armed robbery victims cannot stake the same claim, which puts the comparative rarity of their resistance into perspective.

The present study shows offenders who are keenly aware of the resistance potential and who actively try to mitigate it at the copresence stage. Although the tactics described here are broadly similar to those used in traditional robbery, their salience for carjacking is more far-reaching: Victims with resistance power of their own (i.e., a vehicle) must be “corralled” lest the offending frame be undermined before it is established. Offenders' use of coercive power may not be able to achieve this alone. The fact that meaningful resistance was rarely reported here implies that celerity and publicity can be effective in making carjacking more like a conventional robbery. The offenders' manipulation of celerity and publicity decreases the utility of the target's vehicle as a weapon and shield and reduces the offenders' reliance on coercive power alone to subdue victims. It may be better to prevent resistance than to respond to it, and the copresence tactics explored here accomplish this in ways that minimize reliance on punitive resources.

Acknowledgment

I would like to thank Richard Wright and Volkan Topalli for their assistance at various stages of the grant-writing and research process.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no conflicts of interest with respect to the authorship and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: The study was funded by the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation. Points of view or opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the funding agency.

Notes

1. Interestingly, Copes et al.'s (in press) offenders appeared to rely more on shock than normalcy. This may be an artifact of their incarcerated sample: Conceivably,

jailed (unsuccessful) offenders face a greater risk of detection by being brazen. Brazenness can result in detection for any discrete carjacking (even after the fact, because of incriminating actions taken by the offender that ultimately lead to his or her detection), or it can reflect a broader pattern of indiscreet behavior that, over the long term, makes one more likely to come to the attention of the authorities.

2. This is not to suggest that the other phases of the enactment process are unimportant but rather, that these phases lose significance if offenders fail to get close enough to launch the offense in the first place.

References

- Andenaes, Johannes. 1974. *Punishment and Deterrence*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Clarke, Ronald V. and P. M. Harris 1992. "Auto Theft and its Prevention." Pp.1-54 in *Crime and Justice: A Review of Research*, edited by Michael Tonry, Vol. 16. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Copes, Heath, Andrew Hochstetler, and Michael Cherbonneau. 2011. "Getting the Upper Hand: Scripts for Managing Victim Resistance in Carjackings." *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* doi:10.1177/0022427810397949. Retrieved May 3, 2011.
- Deakin, Jo, Hannah Smithson, Jon Spencer, and Juanjo Medina-Ariza. 2007. "Taxing on the Streets: Understanding the Methods and Process of Street Robbery." *Crime Prevention and Community Safety* 9:52-67.
- Decker, Scott H., Richard Wright, and Robert Logie. 1993. "Perceptual deterrence Among Active Residential Burglars: A Research Note." *Criminology* 31:135-47.
- Feeney, Floyd. 1986. "Robbers as Decision-Makers." Pp. 53-71 in *The Reasoning Criminal: Rational Choice Perspectives on Offending*, edited by Derek Cornish and Ronald Clarke. New York: Springer-Verlag.
- Fisher, R. L. 1995. *Carjackers: A Study of Forcible Motor Vehicle Thieves Among New Commitments, 1985-1993*. Albany: New York Dept of Correctional Services.
- Gibbs, Jack P. 1975. *Crime, Punishment, and Deterrence*. New York: Elsevier.
- Hochstetler, Andy. 2001. Opportunities and decisions: Interactional dynamics in robbery and burglary groups. *Criminology* 39:737-764.
- Jacobs, Bruce A. 2000. *Robbing Drug Dealers: Violence Beyond the Law*. New York, NY: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Jacobs, Bruce A., Volkan Topalli, and Richard Wright. 2003. "Carjacking, street life, and offender motivation." *British Journal of Criminology* 43:673-88.
- Katz, Jack. 1988. *Seductions of Crime*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Klaus, Patsy. 2004. Carjacking, 1993-2002. Washington, DC: United States Bureau of Justice Statistics.

- Lejeune, Robert and Nicholas Alex. 1973. "On being mugged: The event and its aftermath." *Urban Life and Culture* 2:259-87.
- Luckenbill, David 1981. "Generating Compliance: The Case of Robbery." *Urban Life* 10:25-46.
- Miethe, Terrance and William H. Sousa. 2009. "Carjacking and its Consequences: A Situational Analysis of Risk Factors for Differential Outcomes." *Security Journal*. 23:241-258. doi:10.1057/sj.2008.19.
- Miller, Jody. 1998. "'Up it up': Gender and the Accomplishment of Street Robbery." *Criminology* 36:37-66.
- Nagin, Daniel S. 1998. "Criminal Deterrence Research at the Outset of the Twenty-First Century." Pp. 1-42 in *Crime and Justice: A Review of Research*, Vol. 23, edited by Michael Tonry. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago.
- Nagin, Daniel S. and Greg Pogarsky. 2001. "Integrating Celerity, Impulsivity, and Extralegal Sanction Threats into a Model of General Deterrence: Theory and Evidence." *Criminology* 39:865-89.
- Pestello, H. Frances. 1984. "Deterrence: A Reconceptualization." *Crime & Delinquency* 30:593-609.
- Pogarsky, Greg. 2002. Identifying 'Deterrable' Offenders: Implications for Research on Deterrence." *Justice Quarterly* 19:431-50.
- Shover, Neal. 1996. *Great Pretenders*. Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Tedeschi, James T. and Richard B. Felson. 1994. *Violence, Aggression, and Coercive Action*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Tittle, Charles R. 1980. *Sanctions and Social deviance: The Question of Deterrence*. New York, NY: Praeger.
- Topalli, Volkan and Richard Wright. 2004. "Dubs, Dees, Beats, and Rims: Carjacking and Urban Violence." Pp. 149-169 in *Criminal Behaviors: A Text Reader*, edited by D. Dabney. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing.
- Wright, Richard and Scott H. Decker. 1994. *Burglars on the Job*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.
- Wright, Richard and Scott H. Decker. 1997. *Armed Robbers in Action: Stickups and Street Culture*. Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press.
- Young, L. J. and M. Borzycki. 2008. "Carjacking in Australia: Recording Issues and Future Directions." *Trends & Issues in Crime and Justice*. No. 351. Australian Government.

Bio

Bruce A. Jacobs is a professor of criminology at the University of Texas, Dallas. He studies offender decision-making.