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Minn. Stat. § 480A.08, subd. 3 (2018).*

**STATE OF MINNESOTA
IN COURT OF APPEALS
A18-0458**

State of Minnesota,
Respondent,

vs.

Jamael De-Shaun Coatie,
Appellant.

**Filed February 25, 2019
Affirmed
Ross, Judge**

Scott County District Court
File No. 70-CR-17-18657

Keith Ellison, Attorney General, St. Paul, Minnesota; and

Ronald Hovevar, Scott County Attorney, Todd P. Zettler, Assistant County Attorney,
Shakopee, Minnesota (for respondent)

Cathryn Middlebrook, Chief Appellate Public Defender, Amy Lawler, Assistant Public
Defender, St. Paul, Minnesota (for appellant)

Considered and decided by Johnson, Presiding Judge; Ross, Judge; and Smith,
Tracy M., Judge.

UNPUBLISHED OPINION

ROSS, Judge

The district court accepted Jamael Coatie's guilty plea to illegally possessing
cocaine and a gun. Coatie appeals his consequent convictions, arguing that his plea-hearing

statements admitting that he was “taking responsibility for” the cocaine and that he was “taking possession and ownership” of the gun provided an insufficient factual basis for his pleas. Because Coatie’s admissions, which included his attorney’s imprecisely worded inquiries, suggest no real ambiguity in the facts that establish his guilt, we affirm the convictions.

FACTS

According to an October 2017 Scott County criminal complaint, a Shakopee police officer stopped a car for expired registration. The officer asked the five occupants to identify themselves. One passenger, Jamael Coatie, falsely identified himself as “Shaundel Jordan.” The officer learned that a man matching Coatie’s description had recently been reported as carrying “a large amount of cocaine” and a .25 caliber handgun, and he also learned that Coatie was subject to an arrest warrant.

The officer searched the car, finding a loaded handgun and more than ten grams of cocaine. One of the passengers said that the gun and cocaine belonged to Coatie. The driver said that Coatie had brought the gun and the cocaine into the car. The officer arrested Coatie, and the state charged him with possessing a gun as a prohibited person, possessing cocaine, and giving a false name to a police officer.

Soon after the state indicated that it was forensically analyzing the DNA evidence, Coatie agreed to plead guilty to possessing the gun as an ineligible person and to the reduced charge of third-degree possession of a controlled substance. In his plea hearing, Coatie admitted to being in the car. His attorney asked if he understood that police discovered more than ten grams of cocaine in the car. Coatie answered, “Yes, ma’am.” The

attorney then asked, “And at this time are you taking responsibility for that?” Coatie answered, “Yes, ma’am.” The attorney asked Coatie if police also found a gun in the car, and Coatie answered affirmatively. Coatie’s attorney then asked him, “And at this time are you taking possession and ownership of that firearm?” Coatie answered, “Yes, ma’am.” Coatie also confirmed that he was ineligible to possess the gun because of a domestic-assault conviction.

The district court accepted Coatie’s guilty pleas, convicted him of both crimes, and sentenced him to concurrent prison terms—60 months on the gun-possession conviction and 54 months on the cocaine-possession conviction. Coatie appeals.

DECISION

Coatie argues that, because the record lacks a sufficient factual basis to establish that he actually committed the crimes, his plea is invalid and his convictions are illegal. Whether a guilty plea is valid is a question of law we review de novo. *State v. Raleigh*, 778 N.W.2d 90, 94 (Minn. 2010). To be valid, a guilty plea must be accurate, and to be accurate, it must rest on sufficient facts. *Id.* The district court usually establishes the factual basis by asking the defendant to describe in his own words what happened. *Id.* This is the best practice. But “a defendant may not withdraw his plea simply because the [district] court failed to elicit proper responses” if the record is sufficient to support the conviction. *Id.*

Coatie argues that his pleas are not accurate because his responses to questions at the plea hearing were ambiguous as to whether he possessed the gun and the cocaine. His attorney’s questions are not a model of clarity. But in context the questions and answers are sufficient. We reject Coatie’s argument that his answers to his attorney’s questions do

not demonstrate his guilt but rather, “could just as easily show” that Coatie was trying to protect his friends from criminal liability by taking responsibility himself. The argument disregards context. In the circumstance of being reminded during a guilty-plea hearing that police discovered cocaine in the car and then being asked if he was “taking responsibility for that,” Coatie was admitting that he was responsible for placing the cocaine in the car, not that he was accepting the criminal consequences for someone else’s conduct. And his admission that he was “taking possession and ownership” was likewise acknowledging that he possessed and owned the gun, not that he was taking ownership of anyone else’s guilt. Coatie’s attempt to lift his attorney’s words about “taking possession and ownership” and “taking responsibility” from the context of the fact-admission stage of his plea hearing fails. Context gives meaning. A vacationer who says, “I took the plane,” might use the same words as a confessing hijacker, but context prevents any real misunderstanding.

The district court should have asked Coatie to put the events in his own words, Coatie’s attorney should have inquired more precisely, and the prosecutor should have insisted on a clearer statement. But we hold that the factual record, in context, is clear enough to support the district court’s acceptance of Coatie’s guilty plea. His convictions stand.

Coatie’s supplemental brief repeats the same contention and otherwise rests inappropriately on assertions of fact outside the record. *See Thiele v. Stich*, 425 N.W.2d 580, 582–83 (Minn. 1988). We will not address the extraneous assertions.

Affirmed.