

THE IMPRISONED NONVIOLENT DRUG OFFENDER: Specialized Martyr or Versatile Career Criminal?

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ABSTRACT: *Some observers oppose imprisoning nonviolent drug offenders because they view incarceration as costly and such persons as generally benign. The career-criminal literature has established that perpetrators, including drug violators, commit an array of offenses. The current study merges these debates using a sample of 500 arrested adults selected from an urban jail in the western United States. Drug offenders amassed a much more extensive arrest history than other suspects net the effects of age, race, sex, prison history, and arrest onset. Drug offenders are quite versatile and do not conform to the image of specialized violators who are nominally criminal.*

INTRODUCTION

Nonviolent drug offenders are prominent figures in policy-related criminological scholarship. Much of this work asserts that incarcerating drug violators is unnecessary because drug activity is usually a victimless crime and not dangerous to society at large. Furthermore, imprisoning drug offenders carries enormous fiscal and social costs, such as displacing violent and habitual offenders who are more deserving of harsh punishment. The purpose of the current study is to shift this focus on nonviolent drug offenders to a criminal career perspective. More specifically, this study empirically investigates whether drug offenders are specialized offenders, as implied in policy research, or versatile offenders, as established in criminal career research.

THE WAR ON DRUG OFFENDERS

The United States has been very willing to imprison persons for using, possessing, and selling illegal drugs. Drug offenders comprised 6% of state prisoners and 25% of federal prisoners in 1980. By 1996, these totals were 23% and 60%, respectively. Nearly 80% of these con-

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victions were for drug possession and 44% were for marijuana offenses (The Sentencing Project, 2000). This trend has been especially damaging to racial and ethnic minorities. For example, although blacks represent 13% of the total population and 15% of all drug users, they account for 35% of drug arrests, 55% of drug convictions, and 74% of prisoners serving time for a drug offense (Mauer & Huling, 1995). In 1999, 1% of white males in their late twenties were in prison compared to over 3% of Hispanic males and 9% of black males. During the 1990s, the percent of state inmates imprisoned for drug offenses increased 25% for blacks, 18% for Hispanics, and 12% for whites (U.S. Department of Justice, 2000). The news is even grimmer when considering data from federal prisons. Nearly 80% of federal prisoners currently serving time for involvement with powder cocaine are black or Hispanic. The disproportionate minority representation is 93% for crack cocaine, 85% for heroin, and 67% for marijuana (U.S. Department of Justice, 1999). More than 80% of the Hispanics in federal prisons were convicted of drug crimes. Among non-citizen federal prisoners, the majority of whom are Mexican nationals, 85% were convicted of drug crimes (U.S. Department of Justice, 1995).

The national drug policy has produced several direct and collateral costs. From 1981 to 2000, the domestic drug-control budget ballooned 773%, from \$2 billion to nearly \$15 billion. Moreover, 62% of these funds were used for interdiction, compared to 18% for treatment and 15% for prevention. These realities have beleaguered the American public to such an extent that support for U.S. drug policy has largely eroded (Lock, Timberlake, & Rasinski, 2002). At the state level, over \$81 billion is spent annually to combat substance abuse and addiction, a cost that equates to a \$277 tax per American. For every state dollar spent on the drug war, 96 cents are devoted to interdiction and four cents are appropriated for treatment and prevention (National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse, 2001). Additionally, contemporary drug policies have been implicated for a variety of social problems, including family dissolution and the disproportionate incarceration of women (Bush-Baskette, 2000), community dissolution and the disproportionate incarceration of racial minorities (Hagan & Coleman, 2001), and the Balkanization of society, often along racial lines (Agozino, 2000).

Fueled by the drugs, the imprisonment binge in the United States has motivated scores of researchers to criticize drug prohibition vociferously (e.g., Chambliss, 1995; Cole, 1999; Currie, 1993; Duster, 1995; Gordon, 1994; Harrison, 2001; Irwin & Austin, 1994; MacCoun & Reuter, 1998; Mauer, 2001; Miller, 1996; Spohn & Holleran, 2002; Tonry, 1995; Zimring & Hawkins, 1992). The crux of this criticism is that the

criminal justice system focuses disproportionate attention toward non-violent drug offenders. Incarcerating such violators is construed as wasteful and unrighteous because of the assumption that such offenders displace violent and predatory recidivists. Cross-sectional data on prisoners currently incarcerated for a drug offense generally make this point (e.g., Harvard Law Review Association, 2000; Human Rights Watch, 1997; Irwin & Austin, 1994, pp. 55-61; Miller, 1996, pp. 80-86; Zimring & Hawkins, 1992). For example, Gordon (1994, pp. 33-34) proffered that "prisons are filling up with the plankton of the drug business, nonviolent adolescents who finance their purchases of athletic shoes (and sometimes their families' rents) with occasional employment selling drug on the street." Currie (1993, p. 204) has suggested that the police function is primarily to funnel drug users and dealers into the criminal justice system for punishment. From this policy stance, zeroing in on drug offenders has been, and continues to be, an expensive and abysmal campaign.

The criminal justice system, in turn, has singularly targeted nonviolent drug offenders as if their criminality was entirely constituted by drugs (Harrison, 2001). In doing so, current drug policies have placed enormous burdens on already stressed local, state, and federal criminal justice systems (e.g., Anderson, 2001; Belenko, 1990, 1998; Belenko, Fagan, & Chin, 1991; Benda, Toombs, & Whiteside, 1996; Beyer, Crofts, & Reid, 2002; Inciardi, 1993; U.S. Department of Justice, 1998). For instance, the Drug Enforcement Administration and local police enforce various municipal, state, and federal drug statutes. Persons arrested for nonviolent drug violations may be processed in specialized drug courts. If convicted, these violators may be sentenced to boot camps or therapeutic communities, alternative sanctions which presumably address the separate criminality of the drug offender. All these processes symbolically fall under the oversight of the executive overseer of drug prohibition known as the "drug czar." By comparison, other types of criminal behavior do not receive such individualized attention. For example, there are no "auto theft courts," "armed robbery boot camps," nor "arson czars" to oversee the social control of other specific criminal offenses.

Finally, some writers have suggested that the criminal justice system is dependent on the specific attention it devotes toward drug offenders. Blumenson and Nilsen (1998) have argued that drug forfeiture laws place economic interests ahead of fairness and crime control, creating a very disconcerting conflict of interest. Worrall (2001) found that 40% of the large police agencies in his survey reported that assets seized via drug forfeiture were a necessary budgetary source. He concluded that "law enforcement has a vested interest in there being a drug

problem because of the money and resources that stand to be gained” (Worrall, 2001, p. 183). How much of this generalized negativity would be reduced if the United States stopped its current drug policies? The answer is complex and unclear. However, policy researchers would suggest that a reprieve on the incarceration of nonviolent drug offenders would be a promising first step.

SPECIALIZATION VERSUS VERSATILITY

A perennial debate in the criminal career literature surrounds the offending patterns or types of offenses that criminals choose to commit. Are criminals specialized or versatile in their behavior? While researchers have defined and operationalized the concept of specialization differently (Brennan, Mednick, & John, 1989; Schwaner, 2000a; Weiner, 1989), it generally means that an offender repeatedly commits similar offenses over the course of his or her criminal career. These offense patterns can be “strict,” whereby an offender recurrently commits a specific offense, or “clustered,” whereby an offender commits analogous types of offenses, such as violent crime (Weiner, 1989). Using diverse methods and samples, researchers have found modest evidence of probabilistic, sequential, and distributional specialization in criminal offending. Examples include offenders who repeatedly commit armed robbery (Schwaner, 2000a; Wright & Decker, 1997), auto theft (Blumstein, Cohen, Das, & Moitra, 1988), burglary (Schwaner, 2000b), drug violations (Farabee, Joshi, & Anglin, 2001), fraud (Blumstein et al., 1988), status offenses (Farrington, Snyder, & Finnegan, 1988), and narrow clusters of property crime or interpersonal violence (Brennan et al., 1989; Britt, 1996; Bursik, 1980; Kempf, 1986; Rojek & Erickson, 1982).

Affirmative evidence of criminal specialization has relied on analyses that were heavy in analytical technique and statistical significance, but light on substantive meaning. As Bursik (1980, p. 860) stated, “stochastic models, as enlightening as they may be, are still not completely satisfying.” Researchers commonly use transition matrices to determine the probability that an offender’s next arrest would be akin to the most recent arrest. Consecutive arrests for the same offense are interpreted as evidence of specialization. However, interruptions pose a problem. Is an offender considered a specialist if arrests eight and nine are for theft, but arrests one through seven are not? If 15% of an offender’s arrests are for property crimes, does this indicate a property-crime specialization? Reciprocally, do consecutive arrests for DUI indicate specialization for an offender with 30 additional non-DUI arrests? Does 15% specialization imply 85% versatility? As others have

mentioned (e.g., Schwaner, 1998; Weiner, 1989; Wolfgang, Figlio, & Sellin, 1972), there has been a tendency for researchers who find any empirical support for specialization to cast doubt on the idea of versatility. Britt (1994, p. 177) suggests that "a double standard is used; specialization is imputed when offenders are not shown to be completely versatile in their offending, yet the reverse is not held to be true." To demonstrate this point, he concluded from Brennan and her colleagues' (1989) data that only 20 violent specialists existed in a sample of nearly 29,000 Danish men.

On balance, the empirical literature suggests that most criminal offenders are versatile and their offense history covers an array of crimes. Wolfgang and his colleagues (1972, p. 206), in a seminal piece of research, concluded that knowledge of the number and type of past offenses has no bearing on the prediction of future offenses. Using the 1958 Philadelphia birth cohort data, Mazerolle and his collaborators (2000) introduced an alternative measure, the diversity index, to evaluate the specialization-versatility debate. The diversity index equals the probability that any randomly drawn offenses from an individual's criminal record belong to separate offense categories, such as "property crime" or "violent crime." When the diversity index equals zero, the offending mix is specialized. As the diversity index approaches its maximum value of 0.667, the offense mix is considered versatile. Mazerolle et al. (2000) found that offending patterns for both males and females tend to include a variety of different offenses. Moreover, persistent criminals had the most versatile criminal repertoire. DeLisi (2001, 2002) compared the offending careers of 500 adults who had been arrested a minimum of 30 times. The sample consisted of many extreme offenders, including 42 convicted murderers, 80 convicted rapists, and 38 defendants convicted of kidnapping. Overall, their offense histories contained a multitude of arrests for violent, property, public-order, and drug violations, suggesting that even killers and rapists are not specialized offenders. Other scholars also have found that versatility is the norm in offending behavior (Britt, 1994; Hindelang, 1971; Hirschi & Gottfredson, 1994; Piquero, 2000; Rojek & Erickson, 1982; Simon, 2000; Svensson, 2002; Wilson, 1983). Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990, p. 91) provided forceful support when they concluded that "in spite of years of tireless research motivated by the belief in specialization, no credible evidence of specialization has been reported."

To summarize, policy-driven criminology has posited a singular conception of the nonviolent drug offender. Drug offending is discussed as if it occurred independently of other types of criminal behavior. "Drug offender" and "drug offending" have become master statuses. This approach is tantamount to suggesting that drug offenders

are specialized offenders who narrowly engage in (and are narrowly punished for) drug offending. The intent of the current study is to empirically examine whether nonviolent drug offenders are specialized or versatile offenders.

METHODS

Sample

A simple random sample of 500 adults was selected from a sampling frame of approximately 5,000 defendants booked at an urban jail in the western United States. The sample was assembled when this author was employed as a judicial officer in this jurisdiction. The study group was selected as part of a larger project that compared the criminal careers of 500 randomly selected offenders to a population of 500 extreme career offenders (see DeLisi, 2001, 2002). Pretrial-services officers interviewed all detainees in the year 2000. These officials gathered information on the defendant's employment, residency, and criminal history for setting bond and determining eligibility for personal recognizance bonds. This program was the county's primary mechanism to relieve jail crowding. The group is 73% male ($n = 365$) and 61% white ($n = 306$). The average offender age is 33 years (range 18 to 72 years) and the average age of arrest onset is 26-years-old (range 10 to 70 years). Nine percent ($n = 43$) of the offenders had previously been sentenced to state or federal prison ($M = .28$, $SD = 1.26$, Range = 0 to 17). Only 5% of the offenders ($n = 24$) had a prior commitment for drug violations involving use and/or possession of cocaine, hallucinogens, heroin, marijuana, methamphetamine, or prescription drugs.

Data

Defendants self-reported their criminal history during bond interviews. However, a variety of factors jeopardized the validity of these self-reports, including the intoxication of the defendant, poor memory recall, confusion with overlapping cases (e.g., simultaneously being on bond, deferred sentence, or probation), and blatant duplicity. To temper these sources of measurement error, all self-reports were validated by the defendant's official record produced by the National Crime Information Center (NCIC). The NCIC, containing over 24 million criminal records, is the most comprehensive national computerized database of criminal offenders. Automated criminal records are based on the fingerprint classification of officially contacted offenders, and the NCIC offers instant access to criminal justice agencies making inquiries about the criminal history and other information of individual offenders. To date, the NCIC has handled more than 700 million transactions. While

some observers rightfully criticize official records for their susceptibility to the biases of criminal justice system personnel (Geerken, 1994; Maxfield, Weiler, & Widom, 2000), the data chronicle offending careers accurately and comprehensively. Therefore, the combinatory use of self-report and official records bolsters the concurrent validity of these data (DeLisi, 2001; Farrington, 1992; Hindelang, Hirschi, & Weis, 1979; Maxfield et al., 2000; Svensson, 2002).

Measures

Five independent variables were used as demographic and criminal career controls. They include sex (male = 0, female = 1), race (white = 0, nonwhite = 1), age (continuously coded from 18 to 72) prison history (continuously coded from 0 to 17), and arrest onset (continuously coded from 10 to 70). Drug offenders were defined as persons with previous convictions and imprisonment for drug use/possession (no = 0, yes = 1). Offenders who had been incarcerated for drug trafficking or sales were not considered because prior research indicates they engage in numerous forms of criminal behavior, often at high rates (Anglin & Speckart, 1986; Blumstein et al., p. 322; Petersilia, Greenwood, & Lavin, 1978; Topalli, Wright, & Fornango, 2002; but see Chaiken & Chaiken, 1990; Maxwell & Maxwell, 2000; Sommers, Baskin, & Fagan, 1996). This limited operationalization of drug offenders permits a more conservative examination of the versatility hypothesis. Similarly, prison history was introduced to control for criminal history and temper the operationalization of "drug offender," which contains imprisonment information.

Four dependent variables were selected to examine whether offenders engage in conceptually different types of criminal behavior. The dependent variables contained the total number of self-reported and officially recorded arrests in the defendant's entire juvenile and adult criminal career. Violent crime was operationalized with the four violent Index offenses murder, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault ($M = .28$, $SD = .86$, Range = 0 to 7). Property crime was operationalized with the four Index offenses burglary, larceny or theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson ($M = .95$, $SD = 2.70$, Range = 0 to 31). White-collar crimes included arrests for embezzlement, forgery, and fraud ($M = .29$, $SD = .89$, Range = 0 to 6). White-collar crimes generally are considered to be distinct from conventional street crimes (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990, pp. 180-201) and were included to further explore offense versatility among drug and non-drug offenders. Nuisance offenses included vandalism, prostitution, disorderly conduct, and vagrancy ($M = .82$, $SD = 2.01$, Range = 0 to 19).

TABLE 1
Zero-Inflated Negative Binomial Regression
Summaries by Type of Arrests ($n = 500$)

Predictor	Violent		Property		White-Collar		Nuisance	
	<i>b</i>	<i>z</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>z</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>z</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>z</i>
Drugs	1.614*	3.17	1.148*	2.58	0.803	1.04	1.187*	1.97
Age	0.092*	3.39	0.030	1.75	-0.056	-1.78	0.063*	2.91
Race	0.481*	3.52	0.144	1.49	0.153	0.77	-0.031	-0.22
Sex	-1.321*	-2.71	0.107	0.50	-0.208	-0.58	-0.949*	-3.13
Arrest Onset	-0.094*	-3.07	-0.099*	-4.88	-0.041	-1.14	-0.107*	-4.34
Prison History	-0.038	0.51	0.154	1.82	0.177	1.32	-0.094	-0.84
Constant	-2.865*	4.92	0.540	1.44	1.068	1.49	0.157	0.37
χ^2	67.78*		130.57*		31.69*		55.90*	
Pseudo- R^2	.166		.142		.066		.069	

* $p < .05$

Analytical Procedure

The dependent variables are count data. For a variety of reasons, count data are not properly estimated using ordinary least-squares (OLS) regression. Count events contain integer values, are bound by zero, are highly skewed, and have heteroskedastic error terms. Moreover, criminal careers do not occur linearly; arrests occur with irregularity and offending can be truncated by periods of incarceration. Poisson regression is a useful alternative because its distribution accounts for the heterogeneity among offenders, allows for periods of intermittence (e.g., incarceration), and treats arrests as random, independent events (see Dean & Lawless, 1989; Zorn, 1998). However, goodness-of-fit tests of preliminary Poisson models indicated a poor fit of the data due to overdispersion in the dependent variables (the variances exceeded the means). Therefore, zero-inflated negative binomial regression models are used because they can accommodate overdispersion and count data where most responses have values equal to zero.

FINDINGS

Table 1 presents the zero-inflated negative binomial regression coefficients for all four types of arrests. The results reveal that drug offenders are significantly more likely than non-drug offenders to have arrests for a variety of crimes, including violent Index offenses ($b = 1.61$, $z = 3.17$, $p = .002$), property Index offenses ($b = 1.15$, $z = 2.58$, $p = .010$), and nuisance offenses ($b = 1.19$, $z = 1.97$, $p = .049$). The z -scores

indicate that drug offenders are arrested for these offenses two to six standard deviation units more than their criminal peers without a prior drug-related conviction and incarceration. Among this sample, drug violators could just as easily and accurately be referred to as “violent offenders,” “property offenders,” and “nuisance offenders.” The exception is white-collar offending ($b = .803$, $z = 1.04$, $p = .299$), where no significant arrest differences exist between drug and non-drug offenders.

The significant involvement of drug offenders in all types of criminal conduct withstands the competing effects of demographic and criminal career correlates of crime. The effect of offender age on arrest activity is variable. Older offenders total significantly more arrests than younger defendants for violent ($b = .092$, $z = 3.39$, $p = .001$), property ($b = .030$, $z = 1.75$, $p = .080$), and nuisance crimes ($b = .063$, $z = 2.91$, $p = .004$), whereas younger offenders exhibit more arrests for white-collar crimes ($b = -.056$, $z = 1.78$, $p = .075$). Minority arrestees accrue more violent Index arrests than white offenders ($b = .481$, $z = 3.52$, $p = .000$). However, no racial or ethnic differences exist for property, white-collar, or nuisance offending. Males accumulate significantly more arrests for murder, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault ($b = -1.32$, $z = 2.71$, $p = .007$) and the assorted nuisance crimes ($b = -.949$, $z = 3.13$, $p = .002$) than females. Men and women are equally likely to be arrested for property and white-collar offenses. Arrest onset is inversely related to amassing arrests for violent Index crimes ($b = -.094$, $z = 3.07$, $p = .002$), property Index crimes ($b = -.099$, $z = 4.88$, $p = .000$), and nuisance crimes ($b = -.107$, $z = 4.34$, $p = .000$), but not white-collar crimes. Offenders who had previous prison commitments harbor more arrests for property crimes ($b = .154$, $z = 1.82$, $p = .069$), but display no statistical relationship to violent, nuisance, or white-collar offending.

Supplemental regression models, not shown here but available upon request, examine the effects of the demographic and criminal career measures on various forms of offending without the drug offender variable. This strategy allows the researcher to know exactly how much variation in the dependent variables is predicted by the drug offender measure, as well as model fit. Adding the drug offender measure to the violent crime model increases the explained variance by 7.5% and improves the model χ^2 from 55.06 to 67.78. For property crime, there is a 3% increase in the variation explained and model χ^2 improves from 130.57 to 133.71. The R^2 changes by 2% and the model χ^2 improves from 28.43 to 31.69 for white-collar crime. With respect to violent arrests, the R^2 change is 1.5% and the model χ^2 moves from 55.90 to a 60.68 value.

DISCUSSION

According to the United States Sentencing Commission and the Bureau of Prisons, 28% of all nonviolent drug offenders in the federal system have no prior criminal record. Moreover, 42% of federal drug violators are either carriers or peripheral players in drug trafficking (U.S. Department of Justice, 1994a). They are viewed as the symbols of the war on drugs, non-criminal casualties wastefully filling the nations' prisons and, presumably, displacing more socially damaging offenders. Overall, however, scholars have been disingenuous regarding the criminality of the drug offenders. For example, while 28% of federal drug violators had no prior history, an equal percentage had five or more prior arrests. Persons with five or more arrests are classified as chronic or habitual offenders. Moreover, nearly 70% of federal drug offenders had previous arrests and more than half had prior felony convictions (Scalia, 2001; also see DeLisi & Regoli, 1999). In addition, among offenders with no prior criminal record, it is possible that the current offense was so severe that it warranted incarceration. According to the U.S. Department of Justice (1994b), the quantities of contraband among federal drug offenders are higher than the presumed "petty user amounts" generally described. On average, heroin traffickers possessed six pounds, cocaine traffickers 183 pounds, and marijuana traffickers 6,000 pounds.

Using a criminal career conceptual framework, the current study indicates that drug offenders do sustain records of violence and criminal versatility. The nonviolent drug offender, like nearly all offenders, "specializes in a little bit of everything." This profile is much different than the martyr or blameless innocent often described in the policy literature.

Before delving further into the discussion of these findings, an important limitation of the current study deserves mention. The sample is relatively small and geographically limited. Thus, it is unknown how the external validity of these findings would compare to persons arrested in other jurisdictions within the United States. Moreover, it is unknown whether the results would vary for different consumer subpopulations, such as methamphetamine users in rural Iowa, cocaine users in urban Milwaukee, or heroin users in suburban San Francisco. Only a large, nationally representative sample of offenders would allow one to examine the generalized offending patterns of drug violators authoritatively. Despite the limited nature of the sample, the current study employed data derived from official and self-report sources, controlled for demographic and criminal history factors, and applied a robust statistical technique.

Clearly, the criminal justice system has an image problem regarding nonviolent drug offenders. Many criminologists with policy interests lament the use of prison to control drug offenders, even though it is well known that drug offenders are active and versatile offenders (see Bennett, DiIulio, & Walters, 1996; Chaiken & Chaiken, 1990; Goldstein, 1985, 1990; Johnson, Golub, & Fagan, 1995; McCoy, Messiah, & Yu, 2001; Topalli et al., 2002). For example, McCoy and her colleagues (2001) interviewed 1,479 chronic and non-chronic drug users in the Miami area. They found that chronic drug users were significantly more likely than their non-chronic peers to perpetrate, witness, and fall victim to assorted criminal acts. Specifically, chronic drug users were nine times more likely to commit robbery, five times more likely to shoot someone, and twice as likely to commit any act of violence. These findings mesh with the fact that 60–85% of the correctional population in this country is, in some part, drug-involved (Office of National Drug Control Policy, 2001).

The current findings are reconcilable with several divergent theoretical perspectives, both within and outside the criminal career camp. Most noticeably, the discovery that nonviolent drug offenders also significantly engage in and are arrested for violent, property, and nuisance crimes is commensurate with Gottfredson and Hirschi's self-control theory (1990). They suggest that it is fruitless to devise separate theoretical explanations for various types of offenders since criminals will engage, by definition, in an assortment of deviant behaviors. Simply, the only variables that differentiate burglars, robbers, and thieves are the level of self-control within the individual and the opportunity to commit burglary, robbery, and theft. The versatility of nonviolent drug offenders is also consonant with the research advanced by Delbert Elliott and his associates (1989). Elliott et al. (1989) found that many criminal offenders are "multiple problem youth" characterized by overlapping substance abuse problems, mental health difficulties, and involvement in various forms of delinquency. These problem behaviors often interact synergistically and make it very difficult for delinquents to desist from antisocial activities. This idea is similar to the versatility of the nonviolent drug offenders in the current study.

The criminal versatility of drug violators is also supportive of two disparate, but conceptually similar, theoretical perspectives beyond the criminal career paradigm. The first is Goldstein's (1985, 1990) systemic model where crime and related violence are viewed as intrinsic to involvement in the distribution and consumption of illicit substances. From this perspective, drug offenders are by definition versatile criminals because of the interconnectedness of drugs, violence, vice, and crime in general. This idea has received empirical support (Blum-

stein, 1995; Brownstein, Crimmins, & Spunt, 2000; Spunt, Brownstein, Goldstein, Fendrich, & Liberty, 1995).

The second area is the moral poverty perspective advanced by Bennett, DiIulio, and Walters. Like the systemic model, Bennett and his colleagues (1996, p. 208) suggest that drugs, crime, and vice are highly interrelated and caused by moral poverty. Moral poverty is defined as "the poverty of being without loving, capable, responsible adults who teach children right from wrong [Society is characterized by] an unprecedented severing of the bonds of affection, devotion, and love between adults and children, between parents and child." From this perspective, one should not be alarmed at the extent of drug prohibition, but instead at the extent of the drug problem. For example, there are more than four million chronic cocaine and heroin users and another four million occasional cocaine and heroin users. According to the Office of National Drug Control Policy (2001), these individuals use more than 250 metric tons of cocaine and 13 metric tons of heroin per year, amounting to more than \$36 billion spent on cocaine and \$10 billion spent on heroin. Another \$5 billion is spent on methamphetamine and \$11 billion on marijuana annually. These costs have several collateral consequences, namely crime. Extrapolating from snapshot data of drug prisoners that their criminality is limited to drugs is misguided. As the current findings indicate, a more fruitful policy discussion of nonviolent drug offenders could be gleaned from a criminal career perspective rather than the benighted view that drug violators engage only in drug offending and not other forms of crime.

CONCLUSION

The criminal career approach is a dominant paradigm in criminology. One of its greatest contributions is the empirical finding that criminals tend to be versatile in their offending patterns and do not specialize in committing one particular type of crime. This is precisely the case here. While nonviolent drug offenders may currently be incarcerated for a drug offense, it is very likely that they have previous arrests for violent, property, and public-order crimes. This profile is in direct opposition to the popular view that drug violators are non-criminals who are unfairly embroiled in the criminal justice system.

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