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# Understanding Women's Pathways to Jail: Analysing the Lives of Incarcerated Women

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Some researchers suggest that crime pathways are gendered and that different paths may be revealed depending on the point of contact with

the criminal justice system. Drawing from the feminist and age-of-onset literatures, we examine the life experiences of a sample of 'high-risk' women to assess whether their offending pathways into jail are consistent with those predicted by earlier research. We find substantial overlaps with feminist pathways, but notable differences as well — differences that may lie with which populations are under study (jailed and awaiting trial/disposition versus convicted felons; by racial composition). Sorting the women by onset age (early, adolescent, and adult), we discover a sizeable group of adult onset offenders (54%). Compared with those who begin offending earlier, these late onset women appear to have distinct risk factors.

Empirical questions raised by the age–crime curve, feminist and criminal career/developmental research have challenged the notion that a single causal mechanism or general theory of crime can explain involvement in criminal activity (see, e.g., Blumstein, Cohen, Roth, & Visser, 1986; Blumstein, Cohen, & Farrington, 1988; Daly, 1994; Heimer, 1995; Moffitt, 1993; Patterson & Yoerger, 1993). Feminist scholars, in particular, question whether theories developed by males about males and based on males can account for female experiences (i.e., the generalisability problem, Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988). But, even scholars who reject arguments that crime aetiology is gendered assert that there are multiple pathways to crime. Developmental and criminal career approaches suggest that there are different kinds of offenders whose paths into crime and subsequent offending patterns follow different routes and trajectories (Nagin, Farrington, & Moffitt, 1995). Considering that there is still considerable debate around these issues, we believe there is merit in further exploration of women's pathways to crime and the justice system.<sup>1</sup>

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In this investigation, we use data from a group of 351 jailed women (primarily African–American). Interviews with these women were conducted over a 2-year span (2001 and 2002) using a computerised life event calendar. Our research goals were fairly modest. First, we assessed whether our study can reproduce distinct pathways identified from examinations of similar populations (incarcerated women). Second, taking full advantage of the rich descriptive data we have collected (including retrospective accounts of criminal activity), we examined claims by developmental theorists that pathways into crime are age-graded.

## Literature Review

### FEMINIST FRAMEWORKS

Over 30 years of feminist research has produced a substantial body of empirical research on female offenders and their experiences in juvenile and adult justice systems (Reisig, Holtfreter, & Morash, 2006). This literature is far too extensive to summarise here (for detailed reviews, see Belknap, 2006; Britton, 2000; Kruttschnitt, 1996; and Simpson & Herz, 1999). It is clear, however, that studying the ways in which different life experiences and circumstances of females and males, including 'gender differences in type, frequency, and context of criminal behaviour', can lead to important theoretical insights (Steffensmeier & Allen, 1996). Feminist scholars have contributed greatly to this literature by characterising common pathways to crime for girls/women and the ways in which these pathways are linked to criminal justice contacts (Holsinger & Holsinger, 2005). By far the most common pathway of female law-breaking is the so-called *Street Woman* scenario (Daly, 1992; Miller, 1986).

Whether they were pushed out or ran away from abusive homes, or became part of a deviant milieu, young women begin to engage in petty hustles or prostitution. Life on the street leads to drug use and addiction, which in turn leads to more frequent law-breaking to support a drug habit. Meanwhile, young women drop out of high school because of pregnancy, boredom, or disinterest in school, or both. Their paid employment record is negligible because they lack interest to work in low-paid or unskilled jobs. Having a child may facilitate entry to adult women's networks and allow a woman to support herself, in part, by state aid. A woman may continue lawbreaking as a result of relationships with men who may also be involved in crime. Women are on a revolving criminal justice door, moving between incarceration and time on the streets (Daly, 1992, pp.13–14).

Although this scenario has dominated most feminist discussions of offending onset and persistence for female juveniles, researchers began to clarify other pathways to crime among juveniles and adults. Using case biographies described in presentencing investigative reports, Daly (1994) assessed the extent to which the street women scenario accurately depicted a 'deep sample' of 40 women whose criminal cases were disposed of by conviction in a New Haven felony court between 1981 and 1986. While one fourth (10) of the women in her sample fit this characterisation, the majority did not. Based on her qualitative study of the remaining women's biographies, she identified four additional 'pathways' to felony court (Daly, 1994, pp. 46–58):

- *Harmed and harming women* (15 women). These were women who had suffered neglect, physical and/or sexual abuse as children, and who were labelled violent or troublesome as youths and acted in ways consistent with those appraisals. Harmed and harming women experienced a chaotic home life and began using and abusing drugs and alcohol as a teen. Generally, these women showed symptoms of emotional and psychological damage as adults and demonstrated an inability to cope with difficult situations.
- *Drug-connected women* (5 women). This pathway identified women who used or sold drugs through relations with family members or partners (male). The women were not addicted to drugs and appeared to be more experimental and recent users. These women did not have an extensive criminal history.
- *Battered women* (5 women). These women were in a violent relationship with a partner in which battering occurred. Criminal activity on their part was a direct result of their relationship with violent men.
- *Other women* (4 women). None of these women had drug or alcohol problems, nor had they experienced noxious home environments. They also had no previous arrest or conviction history. Criminality for this group was related less to drug addiction or street life and more to a desire for a secure, comfortable, and conventional lifestyle.

Importantly, the women's pathways identified by Daly were not a good fit for a deep sample of males convicted in the same court. Although she found some gender overlap in categories (e.g., harmed and harming men, drug-connected men, and street men), an additional pathway (which she called 'the costs and excesses of masculinity') was needed to account for the remaining males in her sample. Men who followed this pathway to court were subclassified as: (1) explosively violent men (men who generally use violence to control and dominate others), (2) bad luck men (at the wrong place at the wrong time — often harassed by other men), and (3) masculine gaming (acts that bring social rewards, crime as a means to demonstrate masculine prowess).

Distributions by gender into the 'common paths' revealed that more men fit into the 'disreputable' street category (40%) than did women (25%). Far fewer men than women were classified as harmed and harming (20% versus 37.5%) or drug-connected (5% versus 12.5%), leaving a large percentage of male offending falling into uniquely male paths (35%). Daly suggests that these results are not surprising given that her classifications were created from empirical research on women — an unusual and telling circumstance for a field that generally tries to fit females into categories created from male experiences (Reisig, Holtfreter, & Morash offer a recent example and critique of this practice, 2006).

Daly's study is important because it suggests: (1) multiple pathways into criminal behaviour and that some, but not all, women offenders have extensive contacts with the justice system and (2) substantial but far from complete overlap between male and female pathways (see also, Heimer, 1995). Daly's research, however, is not unique in its approach. Richie (1994, 1996), for instance, uses biographical information to compare a group of sentenced African-American and White women at Rikers Island, New York. Coining the term 'gender entrapment' to illustrate how battered

African–American women are compelled to crime (1996, p. 4), she highlights how a young girl's childhood experiences reflect race and gender intersections which, consequently, affect her construction of identity and interpretation of structural/institutional events (e.g., employment and education).

Like Daly, Richie describes distinct offending pathways for three groups of incarcerated women: (1) battered African–American women, (2) African–American women who were not battered, and (3) abused White women. Richie found that many in the first group of women were protected, privileged and insulated as children — conditions which shaped a positive self-concept and optimism for the future. Later, however, racial discrimination in the public realm and violence in their intimate relationships challenged this optimistic worldview and sense of self.

Violence from their intimate partners effectively destroyed their sense of themselves as 'successful' women and eroded their hopes for an ideologically 'normal' private life. The women felt betrayed, abandoned, disoriented, and yet ironically loyal to the African–American men who were abusing them. (Richie, 1994, p. 226)

As domestic abuse escalated over time, these women became fearful that they would lose their lives. This fear was the proximal force which 'compelled' them into a variety of illegal behaviours.

In contrast, the nonbattered African–American women in Richie's sample were less privileged as children, with a more realistic sense of the social world around them (both public and private). These women blamed 'the system' for their socio-economic plight and did not define themselves as criminals. Their pathways to jail were generally through drug-related offenses, robbery or burglary. These women share similarities with those observed by Maher, Dunlap and Johnson (2002), whose pathways into illicit drug distribution and sales were tied to structural and cultural disinvestment. The battered white women in Richie's study, on the other hand, grew up in traditional patriarchal homes — a circumstance that provided them with a more realistic conception of home life than that originally held by the battered African–American women. Because the Whites were more accepting of hegemonic conceptions of femininity, they expected worse treatment from their partners and were less apt to challenge gender traditionalism in their marriages. However, because of their race and perceived inferiority to men, Richie suggests that these battered women were also less protective of their partners once domestic violence began and more likely than the African–American women to seek help. These life circumstances produced pathways to jail and offending patterns (e.g., sex crimes, drugs and crime during assaults) that differed from either group of African–American women.

Richie's work is important because it suggests that women's racial/ethnic and social class background can affect perceptions of and responses to life circumstances. Yet, there are few quantitative studies that explore how race and class intersect to influence female pathways into crime (Siegel & Williams, 2003). Work by other scholars (see, e.g., Baskin & Sommers, 1998; Holsinger & Holsinger, 2005; Makarios, 2007; Simpson & Elis, 1995) suggests whether and how a woman engages in criminal behaviour (i.e., her pathways) should reflect these intragender differences, but empirical findings are mixed.<sup>2</sup> Because Daly ( $N = 40$ ) and Richie ( $N = 37$ ) study a small sample of convicted or jailed women, generalisability is at issue (Richie, 1996,

pp. 29–30). In our research, we explore similar research questions using a substantially larger database of women. Unlike Daly, we do not rely on Pre-Sentence Investigation (PSI) Reports for our biographical and criminal career information nor, like Richie, do we use open-ended life history interviews. Information for this study is collected from respondents using a computerised life event calendar. This approach (as we highlight later) incorporates both closed-ended questions and qualitative descriptions of violent incidents in which the women participated (as offenders and victims). Importantly, this data collection technique allows researchers to temporally organise life events and thus clearly differentiate whether common or distinct factors are related to early or later offending onset. This larger sample of women who are detained in jail — many of whom are awaiting trial, is apt to yield a larger number of street women (with greater variety) than Daly found in her deep sample of convicted felons. Similarly, because our sampling strategy is not purposive, it is more representative of jailed women than is Richie's. On the other hand, because the large majority of our research population is African-American, our findings should not be generalised to other races and ethnicities. We will return to this point later in our summary and conclusions section.

#### AGE OF ONSET

Feminist research implicitly suggests that pathways to crime are age graded. The street woman scenario, for instance, highlights the movement of *young girls* into deviant street networks. Conversely, battered women become involved in crime after marriage — a pathway that is linked to adult status. Yet, the apparent age-graded nature of these pathways is not well developed in the feminist literature. In the broader criminological literature, onset age is one variable (among many) used to distinguish high frequency offenders from one-time and/or low frequency offenders. The focus on onset age often is atheoretical, driven less by aetiological concerns than by empirical questions (i.e., how many offences distinguishes a high frequency offender?). However, when individuals begin offending is often related to criminogenic situational or biological factors such as type of victimisation experiences (childhood sexual abuse as opposed to spouse abuse), early physical maturation and peer influences (gang involvement). Some of these experiences may produce unique age-graded pathways into illegal activity and a long history of juvenile/criminal justice contact for young girls continuing into adulthood, while others are linked to adolescent or adult onset offending. Our goal is to explore how feminist pathways to crime can be further refined by examining age of onset in our sample of high-risk women.

As already noted, much of the age of onset literature is atheoretical. However, developmental and life-course explanations for offending initiation are built around the idea that *age* matters (Moffitt, 1993; Laub & Sampson, 2003; Sampson & Laub, 1993). Some of these perspectives emphasise that delinquents who offend early in life are exposed to a distinct set of aetiological factors compared with later onset offenders (i.e., their paths into crime differ). However, researchers typically distinguish childhood from adolescent onset. Offending onset during adulthood is ignored by theorists and researchers alike (Eggleston & Laub, 2002). This may be due to the fact that many datasets truncate during early adulthood and researchers can only hint at patterns that have yet to emerge. For instance, Moffitt and colleagues (2001, p. 85) found only 3% of males and 5% of females to first offend as adults. Yet their

research followed participants only through age 21.<sup>3</sup> In their review of the cohort literature, Eggleston and Laub (2002, p. 264 [emphasis added]) conclude that adult onset offending (officially defined) constitutes a substantial portion of the adult offender population (on average, 50%) and that 'there is an even higher percentage of adult onset offenders among the *female adult population*'. Eggleston and Laub's observation is consistent with the work of some developmental theorists who expect gender-related differences in developmental processes over the life course (such as, say, mortality rates) to differentially affect behaviour patterns, including antisocial behaviour (Cairns & Kroll, 1994). Thus, excluding adult onset offenders when studying female offenders may produce incomplete or, worse yet, highly misleading empirical (and subsequently theoretical) conclusions. Through assessing whether there are distinct pathways to crime/contact with the justice system and distinguishing offenders who begin offending in childhood, adolescence and adulthood, we hope to provide a more comprehensive and detailed accounting of criminal causation for women.

## Research Design

The life history data for this study came from 351 women held, at the time of the research, in the Baltimore City Detention Center.<sup>4</sup> Extensive in-person interviews were undertaken using a computerised life event calendar (Horney et al., 1995) between January 2001 and April 2002. The calendar organised and structured a wealth of information about the women's lives and experiences prior to their current incarceration.<sup>5</sup>

### LIFE EVENT CALENDAR

The life event calendar collects four basic types of information—monthly, static, partner-specific and violence-related. Monthly information was collected for the three years prior to each woman's current incarceration (the 'calendar period'). This information consisted of month-by-month details of life circumstances and events, including a variety of legal and illegal activities in which the respondent or her partner(s) engaged and the frequency of violent and avoided violent incidents she experienced. Static information consisted of the respondent's demographic characteristics, offence history, family background and early sexual experiences. Partner-specific information consisted of questions regarding the nature and quality of a respondent's relationships with up to three of her most recent partners during the calendar period. A 'partner' meant someone with whom the respondent shared an intimate (sexual and/or emotional) and committed relationship. Finally, violence-related information consisted of comprehensive accounts of violent and avoided violent incidents in which the women were involved during the calendar period. For our research purposes, we selected the subset of variables listed in Table 1.

The life event calendar was a computerised program that led the interviewer and the respondent (sitting side by side) through a lengthy series of questions. A paper calendar assisted respondents in visually associating specific circumstances and events with the months in which they occurred. Although the average interview took more than 2.5 hours to complete, interviewers estimated that respondents reported events accurately.<sup>6</sup>

TABLE 1

Variables Used in All Analyses

Variable	Possible Description values	Mean (SD <sup>a</sup> )
Demographics and life contingencies		
Age at current arrest	[18, ∞] Respondent's age at time of current arrest	34.57 (7.55)
Minority	0, 1 Respondent is a racial/ethnic minority (e.g., Black or African-American)	.94 (.24)
High school graduate/GED	0, 1 Respondent graduated high school or obtained her GED	.46 (.50)
Married	0, 1 Respondent was married at time of current arrest	.15 (.35)
Employed	[0, 36] Number of months the respondent had a job	10.74 (12.58)
Raised by both parents	0, 1 Respondent was raised by both biological parents	.32 (.47)
Childhood physical abuse	[0, 4] Scale measuring respondent's experiences of childhood physical abuse by primary caretaker (e.g., twisted arm or hair, slammed against wall, punched or hit, choked, beat up, burned or scalded on purpose, kicked, used knife or gun, caused sprain/bruise/cut, caused to pass out, caused to go to doctor). Possible responses were <i>never, once or twice, sometimes, frequently, or most of the time.</i>	.21 (.45)
Childhood sexual abuse	0, 1 Respondent was sexually abused before sixth grade (e.g., showed or was shown sex organs, fondled/touched sex organs or was fondled/touched, attempted intercourse, intercourse). Only includes incidents the respondent defined as sexual abuse at the time the acts occurred.	.17 (.38)
Age at first sex	[0, ∞] Respondent's age at time of first consensual sexual intercourse	15.26 (2.65)
Friends in prison	[0, 4] Scale measuring the number of respondent's friends who served time in prison (possible responses were <i>none, a few, half, most, or all</i> )	1.63 (1.28)
Friends with felony convictions	[0, 4] Scale measuring the number of respondent's friends with felony convictions (possible responses were <i>none, a few, half, most, or all</i> )	1.43 (1.22)
Offence history		
Age at first crime	[0, ∞] Respondent's age at time of first involvement in crime	20.23 (7.27)
Age at first arrest	[0, ∞] Respondent's age at time of first arrest	23.21 (7.72)
Lifetime arrests	[1, 7] Scale measuring the number of times the respondent was arrested (possible responses were <i>1 time, 2-3 times, 4-6, 7-10, 11-15, 16-25, or more than 25 times</i> )	3.51 (1.43)
Lifetime jail terms	[0, 7] Scale measuring the number of terms the respondent served in jail (possible responses were <i>no times, 1 time, 2-3 times, 4-6, 7-10, 11-15, 16-25, or more than 25 times</i> )	1.45 (1.20)
Lifetime prison terms	[0, 7] Scale measuring the number of terms the respondent served in prison (possible responses were <i>no times, 1 time, 2-3 times, 4-6, 7-10, 11-15, 16-25, or more than 25 times</i> )	1.03 (1.30)

TABLE 1 (continued)

Variables Used in All Analyses

Variable	Possible values	Description	Mean (SD) <sup>a</sup>
Offence history			
Lifetime felony convictions	[0, 6]	Scale measuring the number of times the respondent was convicted of a felony (possible responses were <i>no times, 1 time, 2-3 times, 4-6, 7-10, 11-15, 16-25, or more than 25 times</i> )	.98 (1.08)
Illegal/antisocial activity			
Dealt drugs	[0, 36]	Number of months the respondent dealt drugs	12.87 (12.92)
Partner dealt drugs <sup>†</sup>	[0, 36]	Number of months the respondent had a partner who dealt drugs	9.73 (14.08)
Dealt with partner	0, 1	Respondent dealt drugs with a partner	.05 (.21)
Dealt with family	0, 1	Respondent dealt drugs with a family member	.02 (.13)
Used drugs	[0, 36]	Number of months the respondent used drugs (e.g. marijuana, crack, cocaine, heroin, speed, acid, other drug)	24.62 (11.88)
Partner used drugs	[0, 36]	Number of months the respondent had a partner who used drugs	13.84 (14.08)
Drank every day	[0, 36]	Number of months the respondent drank alcohol every day	9.95 (14.01)
Partner drank every day	[0, 36]	Number of months the respondent had a partner who drank alcohol every day	7.84 (12.33)
Property crime	[0, 36]	Number of months the respondent committed property crime (e.g., theft, prostitution, burglary, auto theft, fraud, forgery)	5.28 (9.95)
Partner property crime <sup>†</sup>	[0, 36]	Number of months the respondent had a partner who committed property crime	4.30 (10.23)
Property crime with partner	0, 1	Respondent committed property crime with partner	.02 (.13)
Property crime with family	0, 1	Respondent committed property crime with other family member	.01 (.11)
Violent experiences			
Violent victimisations	[0, 16]	Number of unique incidents in which a nonviolent respondent experienced a partner or nonpartner violent victimisation (e.g., assault, rape, robbery)	.32 (1.10)
Defensive violence	[0, 16]	Number of unique incidents in which a nonoffensively violent respondent used defensive violence against a partner	.09 (.38)
Offensive violence by victims	[0, 16]	Number of unique incidents in which a victimised respondent used offensive violence against a partner or nonpartner	.79 (1.50)
Offensive violence by nonvictims	[0, 16]	Number of unique incidents in which a nonvictimised respondent used offensive violence against a partner or nonpartner	.40 (1.04)
Had partner violent series	0, 1	Respondent reported at least one partner violent series of incidents	.28 (.45)
Had nonpartner violent series	0, 1	Respondent reported at least one nonpartner violent series of incidents	.08 (.27)

Note: <sup>a</sup> Standard deviation<sup>†</sup> Variables were only known for respondent's three most recent partners. Only 12 respondents (3.4%) had more than three partners during the calendar period.



## SAMPLE

The interview sample drew from the general inmate population of the Baltimore City Detention Center (BCDC). We selected only women (over 18 years of age) who had a preliminary hearing before the court and were aware of the possible sentence for their current charge. Over the 14-month period during which the study ran, the BCDC staff recruited incarcerated women who met these criteria for participation in the study.<sup>7</sup> Potential participants were informed that the study would ask about their experiences with violence (regardless of whether they had any to report)<sup>8</sup> and that they would receive monetary compensation for their participation (US\$15 to be placed in their commissary account).

The BCDC staff recruited 361 women as potential participants in the study. Only six refused to be interviewed, yielding an overall response rate of 98%. Of the 355 women who agreed to the interview, four were transferred, released or stopped the interview before it was complete.<sup>9</sup> The final number of valid interviews completed was 351.

Generally, our respondents are similar to other inmates (female and male) incarcerated in the BCDC during the data collection period (Franklin, 2001).<sup>10</sup> Our sample consisted of primarily African-American (94%),<sup>11</sup> unmarried (86%) women with children (81%) whose current charge was drug-related (55%). Less than half of the women (46%) had graduated from high school or received their General Educational Development (GED). Nearly 40% had been unemployed for the entire 3 years prior to their current incarceration. Of those employed, 59% earned less than US\$15,000 per year. Most of the women self-defined as heterosexual (65%), and three fourths of the women were 30 years or older in age (75%). Over 60% of the women had been previously treated for drug and/or alcohol abuse.

## RESEARCH CONCERNS: RETROSPECTIVE METHODS

Although life event calendars are a commonly accepted data collection technique (see, e.g., Horney, Osgood, & Marshall, 1995), the retrospective design raises some reliability and validity concerns — particularly given its dependency on respondent memory along with accurate recall and dating of significant events and feelings (Janson, 1990). Research has found that while retrospective techniques have their strengths and weaknesses, the event calendar design can substantially enhance recall over more traditional retrospective techniques (e.g., self-reports) by collecting information in a bundled fashion (for different domains of inquiry) and through specifying meaningful units of recall (e.g., monthly). Consequently, some scholars have concluded that life history calendars improve on traditional survey techniques because they promote 'sequential and parallel retrieval within the autobiographical memory network' and facilitate more complete and accurate recall (Belli, 1998, p. 383). Test-retest studies have found consistent reliability and stability of responses using life event history calendars. Indeed, a recent study directly comparing responses from the Q-list interviewing technique with those from an event history calendar (EHC), concluded that 'the EHC condition led to better-quality retrospective reports on moves, income, weeks unemployed, and weeks missing work resulting from self illness, the illness of another, or missing work for these reasons in combination with other ones' (Belli, Shay, & Staffor, 2001, p. 45). However, this

same study found that the EHC was associated with overreporting household members entering the residence and employment (number of jobs). Finally, some differences in reliability appear to depend on the type of information collected. In a study by Henry, Moffitt, Caspi, Langley and Silva (1994) where retrospective and prospective measures of variables were compared, the authors found less correspondence for psychosocial measures than for other factors such as injuries, reading ability and anthropomorphic measurements (retrospective reports and criterion variables measured prospectively). The research also revealed that respondents had difficulty recalling event frequency.

Most of the test–retest studies use noncriminal samples (see Morris & Slocum, 2002 for a review of this literature). Thus, while the life event calendar technique is well established and may be preferred in some circumstances, the evidence is somewhat sketchy as to its relative strengths and weaknesses with offender populations. Luckily, this research question was explored recently by Slocum and Morris (2004) who used criminal records to assess the validity of the self-reported arrest data reported in this study while looking at specific factors related to memory and recall (e.g., saliency, race, substance use and timing). They found substantial accuracy between the self-reports of arrest and recorded arrest incidents, especially for arrest prevalence and frequency. They also discovered that substance use did not negatively affect recall (this is important given that drug use is common among offender populations). The calendar was somewhat less successful when respondents were asked to place events in the accurate arrest month (timing), but the specific timing of events is less important for our study if respondents can place events within a reasonably accurate time period. This seems to be the case with this sample. Slocum and Morris (2004), for instance, increased the match from 24% (exact month) to 40% accuracy when criteria were relaxed to a 2-month window. Thus, for our purposes then, the LEC appears to be a reasonable reporting technique for this sample of high-risk women.

## VARIABLES

The variables in our analyses were selected from our review of the relevant feminist and age of onset literature. Table 1 presents a list of all 35 variables, their means, and standard deviations. The variables are arranged into four general categories, including *Demographics and life contingencies* (e.g., age, education, marital status, childhood abuse), *Offence history, Illegal/antisocial activity* (e.g., drug dealing, drug/alcohol abuse, property crime), and *Violent experiences*. In addition to the general characteristics of our respondents described above, other variables show that most were not raised by both biological parents and nearly 40% had been physically abused by their primary caretaker. Some women (17%) also had been sexually abused (occurring before the 6th grade) and more than 75% had friends who had been imprisoned or convicted of a felony. Virtually all of the women (95%) and most of their partners (67%) used or dealt drugs at some time during the calendar period.

Perhaps most interesting, slightly more than half of our sample (54%) did not report any criminal activity until they had reached adulthood.<sup>12</sup> In fact, the average age of self-reported offending onset was 20 years. This statistic corresponds with Eggleston and Laub's (2002, p. 264) observation that adult onset offending constitutes a substantial portion of the adult offender population, especially among

females. Furthermore, if the mean age of the women we interviewed (35 years) had been just 5 years younger, we would have lost a striking 88% of the adulthood onset offenders in our sample. This observation is particularly important given the limited age to which cohort studies have followed individuals.

Nearly 87% of the women in our sample had experienced at least one violent incident during the calendar period. Our definition of 'violence' included robbery, rape and physical attacks such as punching, slapping, kicking, choking, throwing to the ground or wall, or throwing a rock or bottle that were done by or against the respondent. Violence did not include pushing, shoving or threats of physical harm. To better sort the relevant forms of violence associated with possible pathways to jail among women (Daly, 1992; Richie, 1996), we identified four mutually exclusive groups of women:

- 13% of the sample had been victimised by violence during the calendar period but had never used violence (or attacked back);
- 6% had used violence defensively (attacked second) against their partners but had never used violence offensively against anyone;
- 33% had used violence offensively (made the first attack) and had been victimised in other incident(s); and
- 20% had used violence offensively but had never been victimised.<sup>13</sup>

These classifications are created from respondent reports of unique violent incidents whose causes and circumstances could be specifically recalled and distinguished from others. Some women also experienced a series of partner or nonpartner violent incidents that they could not clearly separate in their minds. Because women could not (by definition) recall specific details of series incidents, and because the questions posed to women on the series form were too general to enable accurate classification, we chose instead to include dummy variables in our analyses representing whether women reported any partner or nonpartner violent series. In this way, we were able to account for women who potentially experienced greater amounts of violence during the calendar period, but who could not recall specific episodes with discriminatory clarity.

## ANALYTICAL APPROACHES

We employed two analytical approaches to test for the existence of distinct pathways within our sample. Our first strategy was an attempt to replicate Daly's (1992) classification of women. Toward this end, we used principal components factor analysis to test for factors corresponding with the female pathways identified by Daly — street women, harmed and harming women, drug-connected women, battered women and other women.<sup>14</sup> To interpret the results of our factor analysis, we used a commonly employed criterion that a factor loading of 0.4 or higher indicates component commonality on any given factor.

Our second strategy was to distinguish pathways based on age of onset. We defined age of onset as the age at which a woman reported first becoming involved in crime.<sup>15</sup> We then used logistic regression and comparisons of means to determine which variables predicted classification as a child (up to age 12), adolescent (age 13–17), or adult (age 18 or more) onset offender. To predict childhood and adolescent

onset, we estimated two separate logistic regressions and included only variables that theoretically preceded (or co-occurred) with each event. Our regression predicting childhood onset was estimated on all offenders, while our regression predicting adolescence onset excluded child onset offenders because the predictor variables logically preceded adolescence and adulthood onset. To test for differences in other, post-onset variables across onset groups, we used simple comparisons of means.

## RESULTS

### Replicating Daly's Pathways

We conducted a principal components factor analysis on all variables listed in Table 1. The analysis extracted six factors and all variables with loadings equal to or greater than 0.4. We then assigned the variable to the factor on which it loaded highest. We present the results from this reorganisation in Table 2.

Only five of the thirty-five variables analysed failed to load substantially on any of the six factors extracted. These included: (1) marital status (married), (2) drug dealing with a family member, (3) daily alcohol consumption, (4) previous property crime and (5) use of offensive violence but never victimised. Factor loadings for the remaining thirty variables generally are consistent with the pathways identified by Daly (see Table 2).

**Street women.** Factors 1 and 5 most closely approximate the street women scenario. Factor 1 categorises women with extensive offence histories, as is indicated by a high number of lifetime arrests, terms served in jail or prison, and felony convictions; while Factor 5 identifies women with criminal friends. However, neither factor accounts for the street woman's typical history of childhood physical and/or sexual abuse (in our sample, these factors load with later offensive use of violence and adult victimisation), and Factor 5 associates these women with partners who do not have substantial alcohol abuse problems—a characteristic not easily attributable to street women. Also, although each factor identifies some of the characteristics associated with street women, the factors themselves represent two distinct groups of women. According to Daly's classification scheme, we should have found only one street women factor in our analysis. However, because our sample consists of jailed female offenders and we have more cases to sort, it is plausible that we have found more complex variations on the street women pathway than did Daly in her more limited and nonrandom sample of convicted felons. Clearly, the street women in our sample have extensive law breaking histories (Factor 1), but our data also reveal a group of women who are embedded in criminogenic social networks (Factor 5). We know from other studies that friendship can play a critical role recruiting girls into street offending (Baskin & Sommers, 1998). These women are surrounded by friends who have committed felony offences and who have served time in prison, but they do not appear to have the same extensive criminal careers as the women identified above (perhaps because of a prosocial intimate partner?). However, it may be just a matter of time. Friends met on the street, in deviant peer networks, provide a critical mechanism through which girls and women can learn criminal behaviour (a pathway to offending) and gradually replace prosocial friends and acquaintances with deviant ones (Baskin & Sommers, 1998). When women become more

**TABLE 2**  
Results from Factor Analysis<sup>†</sup>

Variable	Effect on factor	Relevant Daly pathway
<b>Factor 1</b>		
Lifetime arrests	Positive	Street women
Lifetime jail terms	Positive	
Lifetime prison terms	Positive	
Lifetime felony convictions	Positive	
<b>Factor 2</b>		
Age at current arrest	Positive	Other women
Raised by both parents	Positive	
Age at first sex	Positive	
Age at first crime	Positive	
Age at first arrest	Positive	
<b>Factor 3</b>		
High school graduate/GED	Positive	Harmed and harming women
Childhood physical abuse	Positive	
Childhood sexual abuse	Positive	
Partner property crime	Positive	
Property crime with family	Positive	
Offensive violence by victims	Positive	
Had partner violent series	Positive	
Had nonpartner violent series	Positive	
<b>Factor 4</b>		
Employed	Negative	Drug-connected women
Dealt drugs	Positive	
Partner dealt drugs	Positive	
Dealt with partner	Positive	
Used drugs	Positive	
Partner used drugs	Positive	
Defensive violence	Positive	
<b>Factor 5</b>		
Friends in prison	Positive	Street Women
Friends with felony convictions	Positive	
Partner drank everyday	Negative	
<b>Factor 6</b>		
Minority	Negative	Battered Women
Property crime with partner	Positive	
Violent victimisations	Positive	

Note: <sup>†</sup> only variables with a factor loading of 0.4 or greater are presented.

embedded in deviant street networks, the greater the likelihood that they will develop extensive criminal histories themselves (a pathway to jail). As Miller (1986, p. 128) points out, such women accumulate so many arrests that it is difficult for them to keep ‘track of them all’. Our investigation of onset age may reveal other important differences between these two groups.

**Harmed and harming women.** Factor 3 replicates Daly's harmed and harming women typology. This factor groups together women who experienced serious childhood abuse (physical or sexual) and who have used violence offensively as adults, but who also experienced violent victimisations. These women also reported more partner and nonpartner violent series of incidents, suggesting extensive involvement in violence as adults. Although Daly's characterisation of harmed and harming women does not explicitly refer to partners or family members engaging in property crime, it is hardly a stretch to associate these variables with the chaotic family lives experienced by these women. Contrary to expectation, however, these women were also likely to have graduated high school/obtained their GED. We suspect that this educational difference (especially the GED) may be due to longer periods of incarceration for these offenders which yield more educational opportunities while in prison. Unfortunately, the existing data do not allow us to follow up this possibility.

**Drug-connected women.** Factor 4 provides solid support for a drug connected pathway to jail. Unemployed, drug-using women who dealt drugs with their drug-using, drug-dealing partners group together on this factor. However, women who used defensive violence against their partners also load on this factor and Daly's description of drug-connected women fails to associate any form of violent behaviour with this specific pathway. Qualitative data, drawn from the women's descriptions of violent incidents, suggest that much 'defensive' partner violence in our sample was drug-related. Thus, drug use and dealing by both partners may make partners more aggressive and defensive responses by victims more common. It is also plausible that drug-related partner violence is a characteristic associated more with this sample of women — particularly when compared with Daly's (1994) sample. Neither is a random sample, so the differences that we observe may be a function of sample selection. Also, Daly collected her data 20 years before ours (before the crack-cocaine markets penetrated US cities). Thus, period effects also cannot be ruled out. Or, perhaps more likely, our larger sample size allowed us to identify a characteristic of drug-connected women that simply was not present in Daly's deep but small sample of female offenders.

**Battered women.** Factor 6 groups together nonminority (White) women, victimised by violence within their relationships, but who did not fight back against their partners. These women tended to engage in property crimes with their partners — crimes unrelated to drug or alcohol use. These characteristics are most concordant with Daly's battered women pathway; however, there are some inconsistencies with this classification. Daly describes battered women as being in court because they fought back or defended themselves against their partners. These women did not do that. Instead, our results correspond more closely with Richie's (1996) description of White battered women.<sup>16</sup> In her study, White battered women engaged in property crime while attempting to escape from their relationships. So far, our results are consistent. Yet, unlike the women in Richie's sample, our respondents did not commit property crimes alone but offended with their partners. Moreover, none of their previous offences was prostitution (the most frequent activity reported by Richie's women). Rather, the White battered women in our sample engaged primarily in thefts or forgeries with their violent partners. It is impossible

to determine whether the woman's violent partner coerced her into criminal activity (as Richie would predict); however, partner coercion cannot be excluded from the picture either. Our analysis seems to have identified a variation on the battered women pathway not fully described by Daly or developed by Richie. The paucity of Whites in our sample, however, gives us pause to draw any substantive conclusions about this particular pathway.

**Other women.** One factor (Factor 2) seems to correspond best with the 'Other Women' category in Daly's sample. This factor identified women who fit none of the other pathways. These were older women, raised by both biological parents, who report later ages of criminal onset and sexual activity. These women seem to have none of the 'risk' factors associated with a pathway into crime. A more complete method to determine whether these women fit Daly's other women classification would be to look at offender motivation for the crime — in particular, economic need and thrill-seeking. Unfortunately, we had insufficient information in our data set to examine this possibility.

In sum, our analysis of 351 high-risk (and mostly African-American) women reveals substantial overlaps with earlier, more qualitative, pathways research. The larger sample size, combined with quantitative techniques, also pinpointed some points of divergence and nuanced variation. Our next analytic step is to explore whether the points of divergence can be further refined by investigating when these women became involved in criminal activity.

### Predicting Onset Age

More than half (54%) of the women in our sample reported committing their first crime in adulthood, while another third (36%) began offending in adolescence (ages 13 to 17) and the remaining 10% began in childhood (before age 13). We used logistic regression and comparisons of means to detect any significant variation across classifications.

Our first step was to estimate two separate logistic regressions: one predicting childhood onset and one predicting adolescent onset. The variables included in our childhood onset model had preceded or co-occurred with early criminal onset. They measured whether the respondent was a racial minority, raised by both parents, sexually abused before sixth grade or engaged in consensual sex at or before age 12. We included these same variables in our adolescent onset model and added measures of whether the respondent had graduated high school or obtained her GED, had been physically abused by a primary caretaker before age 18 and engaged in consensual sex during adolescence. In both regressions, we also included respondent's current age to control for differences in memory recall.

The logistic odds ratios associated with each regression are presented in Table 3. Besides age, two predictor variables emerged as significant in the childhood onset model (reference group is all nonchildhood onset offenders), whereas there were no significant predictors in the adolescent onset model (reference group is adult onset). Respondents who were sexually abused before sixth grade and those who had consensual sex before age 13 were three and a half times more likely to be *childhood onset* offenders than women who lacked these characteristics. This finding was true

TABLE 3

Logistic Odds Ratios Predicting Childhood and Adolescent Onset Offending

Variable	Childhood onset <sup>††</sup> (n = 342)	Adolescent onset <sup>††</sup> (n = 307)
Age at current interview	0.916***	0.911***
Minority	3.206	0.735
High school graduate/GED	—	1.018
Raised by both parents	1.411	0.993
Childhood physical abuse (before 18)	—	1.395
Childhood sexual abuse (before 6th grade)	3.532**	1.000
First sex in childhood	3.490**	1.647
First sex in adolescence	—	1.354
Pseudo R-square	0.139	0.083

Note: All odds ratios greater than 1.0 are associated with an increased likelihood of early or adolescent onset classification, and all odds ratios less than 1.0 are associated with a decreased likelihood. Pseudo R-square was calculated as 1 minus L1/L0 where L1 equals the full model log likelihood and L0 equals the log likelihood of a model containing only the constant.

\*  $p \leq 0.05$ , \*\*  $p \leq 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p \leq 0.001$ , all tests one-tailed.

† Reference group is nonchildhood onset offenders (i.e., adolescent or adult onset).

†† Reference group is adult onset offenders.

even when respondents' age, race and type of parental rearing were controlled. There were no factors that distinguished adolescent onset offenders from adults.

Our second step in distinguishing onset age classifications was to compare means for the remaining (post-onset) variables to see whether the variables identified in the feminist pathways research would differentiate the groups further. Results from these comparisons are presented in Table 4. Three of the four *Demographics and life contingencies* we examined showed at least one significant difference between onset age groups—namely, respondent's marital status, number of friends in prison and number of friends with felony convictions. More adult onset offenders were married at the time of their current arrest than were adolescent or childhood onset offenders, although only the difference between adult and adolescent onset ratios reached significance. Adult onset offenders also had significantly fewer friends in prison than the other onset groups, and they had significantly fewer friends with felony convictions than did the early (child) onset offenders. There were no significant differences in the number of months respondents were employed across onset age classifications.

Of the four *offence history* characteristics, we found that offenders who began offending careers as adults had significantly fewer lifetime arrests than either childhood or adolescent onset offenders, and they had served fewer prison terms than adolescent onset offenders. However, there were no significant differences in the number of lifetime jail terms or felony convictions across onset age classifications. Only two of the 12 *Illegal/antisocial activity* variables showed significant variation by onset age. Early onset offenders spent significantly more months dealing drugs than adolescent onset offenders during the calendar period, and they spent significantly more months committing other property crime than did those who began offending in adulthood. There were no significant differences with regard to partner drug



**TABLE 4**  
Onset Age Comparisons of Means and Ratios

Variable	Childhood onset (n = 34)	Adolescent onset (n = 122)	Adult onset (n = 186)
<b>Demographics and life contingencies</b>			
Married	0.088	0.107* <sup>c</sup>	0.177
Employed	8.765	9.836	11.238
Friends in prison	2.000** <sup>b</sup>	1.860** <sup>c</sup>	1.462
Friends with felony convictions	1.781** <sup>b</sup>	1.517	1.363
<b>Offence history</b>			
Lifetime arrests	4.182*** <sup>b</sup>	3.810*** <sup>c</sup>	3.290
Lifetime jail terms	1.636	1.566	1.387
Lifetime prison terms	1.242	1.213** <sup>c</sup>	0.855
Lifetime felony convictions	1.364	0.967	0.968
<b>Illegal/Antisocial activity</b>			
Dealt drugs	16.794* <sup>a</sup>	11.623	13.586
Partner dealt drugs	11.382	10.557	9.081
Dealt with partner	0.029	0.041	0.054
Dealt with family	0.059	0.025	0.005
Used drugs	26.882	24.500	24.941
Partner used drugs	14.863	14.959	13.183
Drank every day	8.000	10.730	10.086
Partner drank every day	7.212	8.314	7.552
Property crime	8.382* <sup>b</sup>	5.541	4.478
Partner property crime	4.412	5.000	3.909
Property crime with partner	0.029	0.016	0.016
Property crime with family	0.029	0.016	0.005
<b>Violent experiences</b>			
Violent victimisations	0.118* <sup>b</sup>	0.197	0.430
Defensive violence	0.029* <sup>a</sup>	0.131	0.070
Offensive violence by victims	1.441* <sup>b</sup>	0.885* <sup>c</sup>	0.624
Offensive violence by nonvictims	0.794	0.541** <sup>c</sup>	0.253
Had partner violent series	0.382	0.303	0.237
Had nonpartner violent series	0.088	0.115* <sup>c</sup>	0.059

Note: \*  $p \leq 0.05$ , \*\*  $p \leq 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p \leq 0.001$ , all tests one-tailed.  
<sup>a</sup> Significant difference between *Childhood* and *Adolescent onset* means.  
<sup>b</sup> Significant difference between *Childhood* and *Adult onset* means.  
<sup>c</sup> Significant difference between *Adolescent* and *Adult onset* means.

dealing, drug use, drinking, and property crime, respondent co-dealing drugs or committing property crime with partners or family members and respondent drug use or heavy drinking.

Lastly and perhaps most interestingly, we found that five of six types of *Violent experiences* varied significantly across onset age classifications. Childhood onset offenders experienced significantly fewer incidents of unmixed victimisation (i.e.,

victimisations of women who never used violence) and fewer incidents of defensive violence against a partner than did adult or adolescent onset offenders, respectively. Also, adult onset offenders reported substantially fewer incidents of offensive violence (by victims and nonvictims alike) than did either of the other groups,<sup>17</sup> and they were less likely to have experienced a series of violent incidents against nonpartner opponents than were adolescence onset offenders. All three onset age categories were equally likely to have experienced a partner violence series during the previous 3 years.

**Childhood onset.** Based on our two analyses, we can now paint a picture of the typical childhood onset female offender in our sample. She was relatively young and unmarried at the time we interviewed her, and she first consented to sexual intercourse at a young age (early sexual debut is a risk factor for delinquency, see Armour & Haynie, 2007). She was also apt to have been sexually abused before sixth grade. She had a fair number of criminally involved friends and she had accumulated more lifetime arrests than had other onset age offenders. For nearly half of the previous three years she had been dealing drugs and, although she also participated in property crime, her involvement in this type of offending was less common than drug dealing during the calendar period (about a quarter of the time). The fact that her involvement in drug-dealing and property crime exceeded that of adolescence and adulthood onset offenders may be due to her life circumstances — for example, a need to survival on the streets (Hagen & McCarthy, 1997; Miller, 1986) and/or affiliation with antisocial peers (Baskin & Sommers, 1998; Patterson & Yoerger, 1993). Perhaps most strikingly, however, childhood onset victims reported nearly twice as many incidents of offensive violence against a partner or nonpartner than did either adolescence or adulthood onset victims (only the difference between childhood and adulthood onset victims was significant). With the exception of drug dealing, these findings are consistent with the theoretical conceptualisations of early onset offenders.

**Adolescent onset.** Who is the adolescent onset offender in our sample? She was also relatively young and apt to have been unmarried at the time we interviewed her, but she was not more likely to have been sexually or physically abused or to have engaged in early consensual sex (evidence consistent with Moffitt's typological distinction, 1993). She did have significantly more criminal friends and a more extensive arrest record than did adult onset offenders, but neither was significantly different than those who began offending in childhood. Interestingly, although she spent nearly one-third of the calendar period dealing drugs, this amount was significantly less than that spent by childhood onset offenders. Also, the *Adolescent onset* offender was more apt to have used offensive violence (made the first attack) than adult onset offenders, and she was more apt to have used defensive violence (attacked second) than childhood onset offenders. Neither of these latter findings necessarily supports Moffitt (1993), but even more contradictory to her theory is that a greater proportion of adolescent onset offenders reported involvement in a nonpartner series of violent incidents than did either child or adult onset offenders (only the difference between adulthood onset reached significance). It is important to note that none of the female offenders in our sample technically qualify as *Adolescent limited* because the very criteria that made them eligible for our sample

(namely, adult offending) would exclude them from Moffitt's definition. Nonetheless, we believe that our results provide a stronger test of early versus late starter offenders than previous studies — which were based almost exclusively on juveniles or very young adults.

**Adult onset.** Our description of offenders who start offending in adulthood represents perhaps one of the greatest contributions of this study, because of the paucity of research on the causes or characteristics of adult offending behaviour — especially adult female offending. This group of offenders in our sample was relatively older at the time of their current arrest — which explains why cohort studies that follow individuals only through age 21 may be missing substantial and theoretically significant data on offending behaviour—and they were more apt to have been married during the calendar period. They had fewer criminally involved friends and less extensive criminal histories than did women who began offending earlier. Most noteworthy, adult onset offenders reported fewer incidents of using offensive violence and more violent victimisations than did childhood or adolescent onset offenders. These women were involved in fewer incidents of violence overall — and when they were, it was as victims rather than as attackers. Overall, the most important findings that emerged from our examination of age of onset are as follows:

- The majority of the women in our sample qualified as adult onset offenders (54%).
- Women who were sexually abused as children were more apt to have begun offending in childhood.
- Women who first offended in childhood were more heavily involved in drug dealing, property crime and offensive violence as adults than were later onset offenders.
- Neither childhood physical abuse nor sexual abuse had a significant association with adolescent onset offending.
- Women who first offended as adults were less likely to have used violence offensively, but more apt to experience violent victimisation in adulthood than were earlier onset offenders.

## Summary and Conclusions

Are there distinct pathways to crime in a sample of mostly African American incarcerated women? Do these pathways reveal substantially different kinds of contact with the juvenile/criminal justice system? From our principal components factor analysis, we would conclude that there are. Our results closely replicated three pathways identified by Daly (1994) from her study of 40 women in felony court in New Haven. Although our results did not completely parallel Daly's typologies, there was substantial overlap between our groups and hers primarily in the following paths: (1) *harmful and harming women*, (2) *drug-connected women* and (3) *battered women*. We also found some evidence for her *street women* and *other women* categories. Probably because of the greater size and diversity in our sample, our data produce a two-factor solution for *street women*, the two factors distinguished mainly by one's own criminal record (e.g., arrest and incarceration history) and that of

one's friends. However, the fact that having friends with felony convictions varied significantly between childhood and adult onset offenders (the latter had fewer) and that adult onset offenders had significantly fewer friends in prison suggests that delinquent peers are clearly a risk factor for younger rather than adult-onset offenders. It is not clear from our data that this risk is greater for adolescents than it is for children, as Patterson and Yoerger (1993) would suggest. Our analysis also revealed a large group of offenders who appear to have few of the risk factors for crime. Thus, consistent with Daly's *other women* pathway, these women do not have drug or alcohol problems, they did not have noxious home lives as children or a long criminal history, but as our onset age analysis revealed, they were apt to have been violently victimised as adults. Because our street women did not load on a single factor and one of the key distinguishing characteristics for 'other' women (i.e., economic motives) could not be tested with our data, we remain somewhat cautious in our claims regarding these pathways.

We also found some support for distinctive pathways among high-risk women based on age of onset. Child onset offenders were more apt to have been sexually abused as children than were later onset offenders in our sample, and they were more heavily involved in drug dealing, property crime and offensive violence in adulthood. On the other hand, adolescent onset offenders were no more likely to have been sexually or physically abused as children. Adult onset offenders were less apt to have used violence offensively, but more apt to have been violently victimised in adulthood than were earlier onset offenders.

However, 17 other 'key' variables had no significant association with classification based on onset age. For example, early offenders were no more likely to have been unemployed, from broken homes, or drug or alcohol abusers, while adolescent offenders were no more likely (than childhood onset offenders) to have associated with criminal friends or to have a relatively shorter criminal record. Moreover, most researchers have had little to say about the onset of criminal behaviour in adulthood (for an exception, see Farrington, Lambert, & West, 1998). In fact, Eggleston and Laub (2002) describe adult onset as a 'neglected' component of the criminal career and speculate that the phenomenon may be more common among females than males.

Our study revealed that adult onset offenders made up a large percentage of female detainees (54% in our sample). It also showed that women who begin offending as adults have few of the other 'risk factors' associated with the early or adolescent onset groups. Indeed, these women appear to have had a fairly stable lifestyle (marriage, few criminal friends, less extensive criminal history). However, one risk factor that did distinguish this group was a higher exposure to violent victimisation (rapes, robberies, assaults by partners and nonpartners). Life-course scholars generally highlight the prosocial impact of marriage (a 'good woman') leading to desistance for male offenders (Laub & Sampson, 2003; Sampson & Laub, 1993). However, feminist scholars often note the converse to be true for female offenders. Women's criminality is often directly tied to a 'bad' man. Romantic partnerships with criminally involved men increase the risk of 'exposure to criminal values, potential criminal opportunities, and victimisation' (Mullins & Wright, 2003, p. 835). Importantly, violent relationships—at least in adolescence—may be more commonplace for African American women than others (Miller & White,

2003; O'Keefe, 1997). Although we cannot unravel the manner in which female adult onset is related to marriage and victimisation in adulthood, future research should pay close attention to the possible links between experiencing a traumatic event, adult onset, and whether this relationship is conditioned by race (Couture, 2007).

As noted earlier, these analyses and interpretations are intended to be exploratory. However, we do think that our results are important for several reasons. First, the majority of crime research is conducted on boys and men. Even after 30 years of feminist admonishment, there are relatively few studies of women. In a recent *Crime and Justice* review piece, Piquero, Farrington, and Blumstein note that 'few studies have provided data on gender comparisons regarding age and crime generally and age of onset in particular' (2003, p. 425). Our research offers some insight into these important issues.

Second, this study provides empirical evidence for a pathways or typological approach to theory development. Like Daly and Richie, our analysis suggests that women come into contact with the criminal justice system through fairly distinct etiological routes (drugs, defensive violence against partners and childhood exposure to physical violence and/or sexual victimisation) and that there is an age and possible race/ethnicity component to those paths. Importantly, the feminist pathways approach brings important insights to the age of onset discussion with its emphasis on different kinds of victimisation experiences (physical, sexual/partner, nonpartner). The age of onset literature brings its own set of contributions that can inform feminist investigations (such as recognising the criminogenic role of early consensual sexual activity, delinquent friends and how victimisation affects age of onset).

Third, these findings present several challenges to the current explanations of criminal offending. If, for instance, Gottfredson and Hirschi's general theory of crime (1990) was correct, the age crime curve would be invariant and we would not find differences in criminal offending at different ages (at least after the age of 8 or 9). Similarly, Moffitt's developmental theory would predict two different kinds of offenders distinguished by age of onset (life-course persistent and adolescent-limited) but not three (adult onset). And, as noted earlier, early offenders were no more likely to have been unemployed, from broken homes, or drug or alcohol abusers, while adolescent onset offenders were no more likely (than childhood onset offenders) to have associated with criminal friends or to have a relatively shorter criminal record. Thus, some of the key mechanisms that produce offending early on (life-course persistent) versus later in adolescence are not supported in these data.<sup>18</sup> Finally, life-course theorists expect age-graded differences in offending trajectories as a function of changes in informal bonds to social institutions over the life course. Consequently, criminal offending may emerge at different times and remain stable over the life course (due, in part, to persistent heterogeneity for some offenders), but change is also anticipated as bonds to social institutions (especially marriage and work) develop and persist. However, marital bonds appear not to operate in the same ways for female offenders as they do for males — challenging this important cornerstone of the theory. Since several of the above perspectives lay claim to general theory status, this work challenges them to better account for the offending patterns of the women in this sample.

We believe that some of the important differences between our research and other 'pathway' studies likely are due to our sample characteristics (mostly African-American women) and from where we have drawn our sample (a jailed, but not convicted population). Although we would expect substantial overlap between these populations, the relative mix of offenders will be different. Future research should pay close attention to how sample selection may confound pathways classification. In addition, further analysis of more diverse populations (that can be broken down by gender, class, and race/ethnicity) is necessary to determine whether such intersections affect the extent to which paths overlap and diverge (Simpson & Elis, 1995).

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## Endnotes

- 1 The term 'pathway', as it is used here, is a preliminary classification of phenomena into meaningful categories based on biographical factors. It is a precursor to the creation of a taxonomy or typology. 'Paths' may differentiate those who become involved in crime from those who do not, revealing several distinct tracks that lead to crime. Or the biographical data can also show how involvement with the juvenile or criminal justice system can increase the risk of further offending and contact with justice authorities (state dependence). Because all research subjects in this study are incarcerated, we cannot differentiate offenders from nonoffenders. However, we can examine whether there are patterns among the offenders that suggest unique pathways into crime, how contact with the justice system is linked to these paths, and whether offenders' pathways differ by age of onset.
- 2 Daly (1994, p. 58) also notes some race/ethnic differences in her deep sample, but her numbers are small and the source of her data (PSIs) too limited for any substantive conclusions.
- 3 The Dunedin Health and Development Study data now extend to age 32.
- 4 These data were collected as part of the Women's Experience of Violence (WEV) Project, a multisite study examining women's experiences as offenders and victims of violence in Baltimore, Minneapolis and Toronto.
- 5 During the construction of the calendar and prior to administration, the research instrument was vetted by a group of racially/ethnically diverse domestic violence victim advocates. Additionally, the instrument (in hard copy) was pretested with inmates in the BCDC setting before the calendar was computerised.
- 6 On a Likert-style question in which interviewers were asked to record their impressions of respondent accuracy of recall, assessments averaged 4.4 on a scale where 5 was the most accurate.
- 7 We originally intended to interview a random sample of all women incarcerated in the BCDC, but because we were unable to obtain any complete listing of inmates, this sampling strategy was not possible. Alternatively, every effort was made to recruit women from all living quarters of the detention centre.
- 8 Due to an initial miscommunication between the study investigators and staff, some of the first 45-50 women interviewed *may* have been selected because they had experiences with domestic violence. However, the amount of calendar period partner violence reported by these women did not significantly differ from the amount reported by the remaining 300 women in our sample. Out of 35 variables included in the present analyses, only three showed significant

(yet insubstantial) mean differences between the first 50 women interviewed and the remaining 301. These were Friends in Prison (mean for first 50 women was higher,  $t = -2.88$ ), Dealt Drugs with Family (mean for first 50 was lower,  $t = 2.47$ ), and Partner Used Drugs (mean for first 50 was lower,  $t = 2.44$ ).

- 9 Also, two women completed the study twice. We chose to count only their first interviews as valid so as to rule out any effects of question familiarity or intentional misleading of study interviewers.
- 10 BCDC houses largely adult African–American inmates awaiting trial for drug-related offenses (Franklin, 2001).
- 11 Given the small percentage of non-African–American women present in this study ( $n = 21$ ), separate analyses by race were not feasible. Although this number is small, yielding potentially unstable results in our analyses, results suggest some important differences by race. Therefore, non-African–American respondents are retained rather than excluded from the analysis.
- 12 Because many women in our sample were awaiting sentencing, one could argue they had an incentive to lie about their past criminality — or, at the very least, their current charge. However, we doubt this had any effect on the women’s reports. Each respondent was assured, in person and in writing, that responses would be confidential. Only a handful expressed any concerns at all prior to or during the interview process. Second, if a respondent was awaiting trial for her current offence, she was informed that we would not ask her any questions about the pending case (other than when it allegedly occurred and the specific charge). Finally, because the interview was conducted in a collaborative fashion (side-by-side), respondents could see that the computerised interview did not track participants by name or inmate identification number.
- 13 This classification scheme may be problematic, because it oversimplifies the conditions under which women can be categorised as victims of abuse. Sometimes, women’s use of offensive violence reflects a defensive posture that develops as a consequence of a history of abuse. We plan to explore the issue of partner-specific violent histories and interconnected instances of violence at a later date.
- 14 Although we originally anticipated that certain factors would be correlated with one another (e.g., Street Women and Harmed and Harming Women), our examination of the six-factor correlation matrix revealed no significant correlations. Thus, our reported analyses use orthogonal rotation.
- 15 Nine women (3% of the sample), did not report age of offending onset.
- 16 Richie’s battered African–American Women seem to fit better in our *Harmed and Harming Women* category.
- 17 There is no significant difference between onset in childhood and onset in adulthood for the *Offensive Violence by Nonvictims* variable due to large standard deviations for childhood onset.
- 18 We acknowledge that we cannot reproduce Moffitt’s adolescent limited classification here as the entire sample has committed at least one offense postadolescence.

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