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PREDICTING RECIDIVISM IN A MEDIUM SECURITY CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTION

FRANCIS J. CARNEY

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In this study, base expectancy categories, which predict the likelihood of recidivism based on a cluster of salient variables, are derived for 363 inmates released from a medium security correctional institution. Some of the major uses of base expectancy categories are discussed, especially with reference to institutional and parole decisions and to their crucial role in evaluative research. The combination of age at present commitment and prior penal record is found to be a highly predictive set of variables. Some possible interpretations of this finding, as well as related findings, are suggested.

The Massachusetts Correctional Institution at Norfolk is a medium security, male institution which was officially opened in 1931. In its physical environment, it is more suggestive of a college campus than of the traditional stereotype of a prison. The men live in dormitories which are built on the perimeter of a large, open quadrangle. The original goal of this type of architecture was to create, as much as possible, an atmosphere of community life.¹

The Department of Correction is selective in choosing the inmate population of MCI-Norfolk. Men are not committed there directly from the courts, but are transferred after a careful screening process. Therefore, the population tends to include the most hopeful inmates in terms of rehabilitation, as well as the best behaved inmates in terms of institutional adjustment, who are committed to the supervision of the Department of Correction. It need hardly be pointed out that one of the above characteristics does not necessarily imply the other. In 1964 the average daily population of MCI-Norfolk was 802.²

It seems clear that every inmate who is released

from MCI-Norfolk—or from any correctional institution, for that matter—does not have the same likelihood of becoming a recidivist. Some inmates serve their time and are never again returned to a correctional institution. Others are returned over and over again—truly “hard core” recidivists. Therefore, in terms of research interests, policy considerations, and parole decisions, it would seem quite worthwhile if categories of individuals along a success-failure continuum could be established. Such categories would indicate what type of inmate would be most likely—and what type would be least likely—to become a recidivist. Further, several intermediate categories would be provided, which would be associated with varying gradations of probable recidivism or non-recidivism. The derivation of such categories—called base expectancy categories—for a sample of MCI-Norfolk inmates is the goal of this report.

The derivation of base expectancy categories has been carried out for samples of inmates in other Massachusetts Correctional Institutions. Metzner and Weil have established such categories for a sample of inmates released from MCI-Concord, a maximum security institution for younger male offenders.³ DeVault and Haughey conducted an initial and a validation study geared to derive the base expectancy categories for parolees from

¹ For an interesting history of the early development of MCI-Norfolk, see COMMONS, YAHKUB, & POWERS, *A REPORT ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF PENOLOGICAL TREATMENT AT NORFOLK PRISON COLONY IN MASSACHUSETTS* (1940).

² STATISTICAL REPORT OF THE COMMISSIONER OF CORRECTION FOR THE YEAR ENDING DECEMBER 31, 1964 14 (Public Document No. 115, 1965).

³ Metzner & Weil, *Predicting Recidivism: Base Rates for Massachusetts Correctional Institution, Concord*, 54 J. CRIM. L., C. & P. S. 307-316 (1963).

MCI-Framingham, the institution for female offenders.⁴ Likewise, the present writer carried out an initial and a validation investigation which focused on the derivation of base expectancy categories for drunkenness offenders at MCI-Framingham.⁵ Since drunkenness offenders are not paroled—i.e., they have no formal supervision following release—and since they were considered to be a special category of offenders, it was felt that the latter study would provide important complementary data to the DeVault and Haughey study. At any rate, the important point here is that the present report should add to a growing body of data relative to recidivism in various Massachusetts Correctional Institutions. (It should also be noted that a study aimed at deriving the base expectancy rates for MCI-Walpole, a maximum security male institution, is planned for a subsequent report.)

Uses of Base Expectancy Categories. Before presenting the findings of the Norfolk study, it was felt that it would be useful to consider briefly some of the major uses of base expectancy categories. These categories may be utilized as an aid in decision making—especially with respect to parole decisions. Also, they provide the necessary base information for empirically evaluating the impact of treatment programs or, more generally, of any policy innovation. Further, they can give an indication as to what type of individual is most likely (as well as what type is least likely) to benefit from various treatment programs. The relevance of base expectancy categories to parole decisions will be discussed first.

It would seem that the base expectancy categories would have an important role to play in the context of parole decisions—especially since the majority of inmates are released on parole from MCI-Norfolk. (In the present sample, 76% of the inmates were released on parole.) However, the exact nature of the role to be played by the base expectancy categories in parole decisions should be specified here. It should be stressed that these categories are meant to serve as a helpful *supplement* in this decision making context. They constitute only one aspect of the overall decision making process, and should not be construed as a sub-

stitute for the other important factors involved in this process—e.g., the insight which parole board members have acquired with experience, the particular circumstances surrounding each individual case, etc. In connection with this point, Sheldon Glueck has written:

It needs to be emphasized because it is too often overlooked by critics, that the creators of prediction devices do not urge that such tables be applied in any mechanical routine fashion; they are adjuncts to both the individual case history and individual experience of the parole board member.⁶

A key advantage of the use of base expectancy categories in the area of parole decisions is that they introduce an objective factor into what is, in general, a subjective decision making process. Often parole decisions tend to be based on “common sense” or on the hunches of board members or other administrative personnel. These categories, on the other hand, provide empirical data which may be useful in terms of incorporating a certain degree of objectivity into the context of parole decisions.

Another feature of base expectancy categories with regard to parole decisions is that they may spotlight some salient factors which parole board members might otherwise overlook. It may happen that some factors might become unduly over-emphasized or underemphasized. The base expectancy categories point out those variables which are most powerful in terms of discriminating between probable recidivists and non-recidivists. Finally, these categories may serve as a guide to the intensiveness of supervision on parole. For example, those with a low probability of recidivism will generally not require as intensive supervision as those with a high probability of recidivism.

The foregoing discussion suggests some possible advantages of the use of base expectancy categories in parole decisions. Attention will now be directed to the use of these categories relative to the evaluation of treatment programs or policy changes. As an illustration of the importance of the base expectancy categories in this area, the writer will cite how useful he found them to be in the evaluation of the impact of the group therapy program for drunkenness offenders at MCI-Framingham.⁷ The initial evidence in this investigation

⁴ DeVault & Haughey, *Base Expectancy Categories for Predicting Parole Failure*, Massachusetts Department of Correction, mimeographed (1965).

⁵ Carney, *Base Expectancy Categories for Predicting Recidivism of Female Drunkenness Offenders: Combined Data*, Massachusetts Division of Legal Medicine, mimeographed (1965).

⁶ Quoted by Evjen, *Current Thinking on Parole Prediction Tables*, 8 CRIME AND DELINQUENCY 217 (1962).

⁷ Carney, *An Evaluation of the Group Therapy Pro-*

TABLE I

TYPE OF OFFENSE FOR WHICH COMMITTED TO M.C.I.-
NORFOLK

Type of Offense	N	% of Sample	Recidivism Rate
Offense against person.....	92	25.3%	53.3%
Sex against minor.....	41	11.3%	26.8%
Sex against major.....	8	2.2%	37.5%
Offense against property.....	94	25.9%	66.0%
Forgery.....	17	4.7%	41.2%
Auto theft.....	10	2.8%	70.0%
Technical parole violation.....	56	15.4%	58.9%
Other offenses.....	6	1.7%	16.7%
Combination of offenses.....	39	10.7%	64.1%
Total.....	363	100.0%	54.5%

showed that the recidivism rate of group members was significantly lower than that of non-members. However, a check of the base expectancy categories indicated that those subjects who were most likely to be non-recidivists were the ones who tended to participate in the group therapy program in the first place. Thus, it was not clear whether the lower recidivism rate of group members was due to the impact of the treatment program or to the process of self selection. But, since the base expectancy categories spotlighted which were the most powerful variables in terms of discriminating between recidivists and non-recidivists, it was possible to readily determine which variables should be controlled in comparing members with non-members. Therefore, by matching group members with non-members on these highly predictive variables, a more meaningful picture of the impact of group therapy emerged. Further, this procedure enabled the researcher to indicate what type of individual would be most likely to be helped by group therapy and what type would be likely to do just as well (or just as poorly) without it. Also, by deriving the base expectancy categories for the group members alone, the description of the type of individual most likely (and least likely) to benefit from participation in the group therapy program was further clarified. An overall result of this enterprise was that a target group was provided, so that if group therapy leaders were to become more selective in choosing members, they would have a good idea of what type of individual would be most appropriate for selection.

gram for Alcoholics, Massachusetts Division of Legal Medicine, mimeographed (1965).

METHOD

The Sample. The sample consisted of all inmates who were released from MCI-Norfolk between January 1, 1960 and December 31, 1960. There were 371 subjects released during this period. Of these, nine subjects were known to have died during the four year follow-up period. Eight of the deceased were dropped from the sample. The ninth was included as a failure since he was shot in a holdup attempt. Thus, the total number of subjects in the study was 363.

Of the total 363 subjects, 141 (38.8%) were committed for offenses against person, 121 (33.3%) for offenses against property, 56 (15.4%) for technical parole violations, and 45 (12.4%) for combinations of offenses or other offenses. Table I presents a more detailed breakdown of the offenses for which the individuals in the sample were committed. This table also gives a preview of the findings of the study inasmuch as the recidivism rates for each type of offense are included.

The mean age for the sample at the time of the present commitment was 30 years, with a range extending from 13 to 65 years of age. In terms of race, there were 299 (82.4%) whites and 64 (17.6%) non-whites. The mean length of the present commitment was 2 years, 2 months, and 5 days. For a more detailed description of the sample, see Table v, 1-14. Although these tables are primarily designed to show the significance of each variable in terms of the power to discriminate between recidivists and non-recidivists, they also provide descriptive data on the sample for each factor that was analyzed.

Data Collection. Data for this report were collected by members of the social service staff at MCI-Norfolk under the direction of Mr. Ray Brennan. The variables analyzed in this study were the same as those used in the Metzner and Weil study at MCI-Concord. These included: age at present commitment, age at first arrest, number of prior arrests, prior penal commitments, type of present offense, length of present commitment, institutional conduct, home contacts during commitment, race, behavioral disorders, military record, type of release (i.e., paroled vs. discharged), type of home to which released, and community to which released. It is noteworthy that these variables include information about the subject prior to his present commitment (e.g., military record, previous arrests and penal com-

mitments), during his present commitment (e.g., institutional conduct, home contacts), and after his release (e.g., type of release, type of home and community to which released).

Definition of Recidivism. Of crucial importance in this study is the definition of recidivism. For this study any subject who was returned to a Federal or State Prison, or to a County House of Correction or jail for 30 days or more was counted as a recidivist. The follow-up period was four years. The following table (Table II) gives an indication of the time within which the 198 recidivists were re-committed.

Table II indicates that almost 6 out of 10 subjects who will become recidivists within four years do so within one year of their release. The majority of these recidivists (62.9%) were parole violators. The table also shows that just about half of all the recidivists (50.5%) were returned to the correctional institution as parole violators.

It should be noted that, as a yardstick for measuring success or failure upon release from a correctional institution, the recidivism rate tends to be rather problematic. For example, an individual must be *caught* in some criminal behavior or parole violation before he is counted as a recidivist. Also, the term recidivism encompasses a wide range of behavior in terms of the degree of seriousness that is involved. An ex-inmate may be returned to prison for a petty, technical parole infraction or for the commission of a major felony. Despite these limitations, the recidivism rate, tends to be the most objective and clear-cut criterion for distinguishing between so-called "successes" and "failures". Therefore, recidivism was used in the present analysis as the basis for the derivation of the base expectancy categories. In order to keep this point in mind, the terms, recidivists and non-recidivists, will be used instead of the less appropriate terms, successes and failures, in the analysis that follows.

Statistical Analysis. The primary statistical tool used in this report is called successive dichotomization. According to this technique, the sample is divided into two subgroups for each variable that is included in the analysis—e.g., for the factor, age at present commitment, the subgroups might be those 29 and younger vs. those 30 and older. Then, a recidivism rate is derived for the two subgroups of each variable. The variable whose subgroups discriminate best between recidivists and non-

TABLE II
TIME WITHIN WHICH RECIDIVISTS WERE
RE-COMMITTED

Length of Time Before Re-commitment	N	% of Recidivists	Cumulative %	% Who Were Parole Violators
Within 1 month.....	17	8.6%	8.6%	70.6%
1-6 mos.....	52	26.3%	34.9%	71.2%
6 mos.—1 yr.....	47	23.7%	58.6%	51.1%
1-2 yrs.....	40	20.2%	78.8%	35.0%
2-4 yrs.....	42	21.2%	100.0%	31.0%
Total.....	198	100.0%	—	50.5%

recidivists is selected, and the procedure is continued with the subgroups until the N's become too small to produce meaningful results. In order to determine the variable whose subgroups were most discriminating on each breakdown a chi-square was computed. That variable whose subgroups resulted in the most significant chi-square was selected on each breakdown.

It should be noted that by the use of this statistical technique, only the most discriminating variable is selected on each breakdown. Therefore, it is possible—especially on the first breakdown—to overlook a variable or variables which, although not the most discriminating, might be quite significant. To avoid this pitfall, chi-squares will be presented for each variable on the first breakdown of the sample into the various subgroups. Thus, the relative power of each variable to discriminate between recidivists and non-recidivists will be spotlighted.

RESULTS

The recidivism rate for the entire sample was 54.5%. Table III presents the data which have been analyzed by the technique of successive dichotomization. Eight categories with return rates ranging from 0.0% to 79.4% were derived from the following predictive variables: (1) age at present commitment, (2) prior penal commitments, (3) type of offense, and (4) age at first arrest or length of present commitment. These eight base expectancy categories are given in Table IV.

In Table V, 1-14, the chi-squares are presented for the first breakdown. Note that seven of the fourteen variables analyzed discriminated between recidivists and non-recidivists at a statistically significant level. These factors are, in order of

their significance: (1) age at present commitment, (2) prior penal commitments, (3) age at first arrest, (4) number of prior arrests, (5) institutional conduct (6) type of offense, and (7) behavior disorders (e.g. alcoholism, drug addiction).

These data indicate that age at present commitment was a very significant variable. For example, Table III shows that age was the most powerful variable in terms of discriminating between recidivists and non-recidivists on the first breakdown, and again on the third breakdown for those 30 years old and older. Since this factor tended to be so salient, some further statistical analyses were carried out on it.

Table VI shows that the mean age of recidivists (26.9) was significantly lower than that of non-recidivists (33.6). Such a difference is so striking that the probability of it occurring by chance is less than one in a thousand—i.e. $p < .001$.

Table VII gives a more detailed comparison of recidivists and nonrecidivists in terms of age.

In this table the proportion of recidivists and non-recidivists in several age categories are compared. Some interesting findings emerged from the development of this table. For example, it was discovered that slightly over half of the recidivists (51.0%) were twenty-five or younger at the time of their present commitment, while only about one-third of the non-recidivists (33.0%) fell into this age range. Also, it was found that about one out of five non-recidivists (20.7%) were forty-five or older, while only one out of fifty of the recidivists (2.0%) were in this category.

In terms of type of offense it was found that sex offenders (against minors) had the lowest recidivism rate (26.8%). The highest recidivism rate was discovered to be associated with property offenders (including auto theft, but not forgery). The return rate of this group was 66.3%.

Another variable of interest here is the length of the present commitment. As was pointed out earlier, the average length of commitment for the

TABLE III
BREAKDOWNS FOR DERIVATION OF BASE EXPECTANCY CATEGORIES FOR OFFENDERS AT MCI-NORFOLK

					Return
Total Group N = 363 54.5% return	30 or older at present commitment N = 161 41.6% return	No previous House of Corrections or MCI commitments N = 47 17.0% return	41 and older	N = 22	0.0%
			30 to 40 years of age	N = 25	32.0%
		Previous H. of Corr. or MCI commitment(s) N = 114 51.8% return	39 and older	N = 50	36.0%
			30 to 38 years of age	N = 64	64.1%
	29 or younger at present commitment N = 202 64.9% return	No previous H. of Corr. or MCI commitments N = 71 53.5% return	1st arrest at 20 or older OR pres. comm. 1 yr., 8 mos., or more*	N = 19	26.3%
			1st arrest at 19 or younger OR pres. comm. less than 1 yr., 8 mos.*	N = 52	63.5%
Previous H. of Corr. or MCI commitment(s) N = 131 71.0% return		Offense vs. person or parole violators	N = 63	61.9%	
		Other offenses (primarily vs. property)	N = 68	79.4%	

* When age at first arrest conflicts with length of present commitment, the former variable should be used in ranking subjects since it is, in general, a more significant factor.

overall sample was 2 years, 2 months, and 5 days. The average stay in prison for the recidivists was only 1 year, 10 months, and 25 days, while that of the non-recidivists was 2 years, 6 months, and 5 days. Thus, on the average, the recidivists were incarcerated for seven and one-third months less than the non-recidivists.

This finding has some important implications in terms of Donald Clemmer's concept of "prisonization"—i.e. the process by which the inmate learns the prison culture.⁸ One aspect of this notion is that the longer an inmate is kept in prison, the greater will his own criminality be reinforced and deepened because of a more prolonged interaction with other inmates and exposure to criminal values. Therefore, it would follow that the longer an individual is kept in prison, the more likely is he to become a recidivist. But, the data of this study indicate that the opposite is actually the case. What seems to be called for, then, is a more qualitative analysis of the behavior patterns of the recidivists vs. the non-recidivists during their stay in the correctional institution, rather than merely counting the days they have spent in prison.

DISCUSSION

Some of the results have been discussed briefly thus far. An attempt will be made now to suggest some general interpretations of the findings. For example, inspection of Table IV indicates that there is a substantial gap between categories four and five. In fact, this gap is so considerable that it tends to dichotomize the sample into two general categories; a "good risk" category and a "poor risk" category. The overall recidivism rate for the 116 subjects in categories 1-4 was 26.7%, while that of the 247 subjects in categories 5-8 was 67.6%. It is rather striking that the entire sample could be divided into two general categories with such divergent recidivism rates. It would be interesting to discuss the possible generalizations that might emerge from such a finding.

The most crucial variables in terms of predicting recidivism or non-recidivism were found to be the combination of age at present commitment and prior penal record. Table VIII gives the recidivism rates for the combination of these two factors.

It is clear that those subjects who are relatively old and who have had no previous commitments

TABLE IV
BASE EXPECTANCY CATEGORIES

Description	N	% in Sample	% of Return
1. 41 or older at present commitment; no previous House of Corr. or MCI commitments...	22	6.1%	0.0%
2. 29 or younger at pres. comm.; no previous H.C. or MCI comms.; first arrest at 20 or older, OR pres. comm. 1 yr., 8 mos., or more*	19	5.2%	26.3%
3. 30-40 yrs. old at pres. comm.; no previous H.C. or MCI comms.....	25	6.9%	32.0%
4. 39 or older at pres. comm.; previous H.C. or MCI comms.....	50	13.8%	36.0%
5. 29 or younger at pres. comm.; previous H.C. or MCI comms.; offense vs. person or parole violator.....	63	17.4%	61.9%
6. 29 or younger at pres. comm.; no previous H.C. or MCI comms.; first arrest at 19 or younger, OR pres. comm. less than 1 yr., 8 mos.*.....	52	14.3%	63.5%
7. 30-38 yrs. old at pres. comm.; prev. H.C. or MCI comms.....	64	17.6%	64.1%
8. 29 or younger at pres. comm.; prev. H.C. or MCI comms.; offense other than vs. person or parole violation (primarily offense vs. property).....	68	18.7%	79.4%
Totals.....	363	100.0%	54.5%
I. Combination of categories 1-4 ("Good Risk" category).....	116	32.0%	26.7%
II. Combination of categories 5-8 ("Poor Risk" category).....	247	68.0%	67.6%

* When age at first arrest conflicts with length of present commitment, the former should be used in ranking subjects.

are quite likely to be non-recidivists. Further, Table III indicates that the older they are, the less likely are they to become recidivists. (In the present sample, none of the 22 subjects who were 41 or older and had no previous commitments were recidivists.) On the other hand, those who are relatively young and who have been previously committed to a state or county correctional institution are likely to be recidivists. Finally, the data in Table VIII show that those who are older and have had previous commit-

⁸ CLEMMER, THE PRISON COMMUNITY (1940).

TABLE V: 1-14
CHI-SQUARES FOR FIRST BREAKDOWN

※1* Age at Present Commitment

	29 and under N = 202	30 and older N = 161	Total N = 363
Non-Recidivists.....	71 (35.1)	94 (58.4)	165 (45.5)
Recidivists.....	131 (64.9)	67 (41.6)	198 (54.5)

$X^2 = 19.51, df = 1, p < .001$

※2 Prior Penal Commitments

	No Prev. H.C. or MCI Comms. N = 118	Prev. H.C. or MCI Comm. (s) N = 245	Total N = 363
Non-Recidivists.....	72 (61.0)	93 (38.0)	165 (45.5)
Recidivists.....	46 (39.0)	152 (62.0)	198 (54.5)

$X^2 = 17.08, df = 1, p < .001$

※3 Age at First Arrest

	19 or younger N = 244	20 or older N = 119	Total N = 363
Non-Recidivists.....	93 (38.1)	72 (60.5)	165 (45.5)
Recidivists.....	151 (61.9)	47 (39.5)	198 (54.5)

$X^2 = 16.17, df = 1, p < .001$

※4 Number of Prior Arrests

	5 or fewer N = 127	6 or more N = 236	Total N = 363
Non-Recidivists.....	73 (57.5)	92 (39.0)	165 (45.5)
Recidivists.....	54 (42.5)	144 (61.0)	198 (54.5)

$X^2 = 11.39, df = 1, p < .001$

※5 Institutional Conduct

	No Good Time Withheld N = 300	Some Good Time Withheld N = 63	Total N = 363
Non-Recidivists.....	147 (49.0)	18 (28.6)	165 (45.5)
Recidivists.....	153 (51.0)	45 (71.4)	198 (54.5)

$X^2 = 8.76, df = 1, p < .005$

※6 Type of Offense

	Against Person (0, 1, 2 on code) N = 141	Against Property (3, 7, 8 on code) N = 121	Other	Total
			(4, 5, 6 on code)	
			N = 101	N = 363
Non-Recidivists.....	78 (55.3)	45 (37.2)	42 (41.6)	165 (45.5)
Recidivists.....	63 (44.7)	76 (62.8)	59 (58.4)	198 (54.5)

$X^2 = 9.15, df = 2, p < .02$

best risk: sex offenders (against minors), 26.8% return

worst risk: offenders vs. property (including auto theft, but not forgery), 66.3% return

* These tables are numbered in their order of statistical significance in terms of discriminating between recidivists and non-recidivists.

TABLE V: 1-14—Continued

#7 Behavior Disorders				
	None N = 230	Alcoholism, Drug Addiction, etc. N = 133	Total N = 363	
Non-Recidivists.....	114 (49.6)	51 (38.3)	165 (45.5)	
Recidivists.....	116 (50.4)	82 (61.7)	198 (54.5)	
$X^2 = 4.28, df = 1, p < .05$				
#8 Race				
	White N = 299	Non-White N = 64	Total N = 363	
Non-Recidivists.....	141 (47.2)	24 (37.5)	165 (45.5)	
Recidivists.....	158 (52.8)	40 (62.5)	198 (54.5)	
$X^2 = 1.98, df = 1, .10 < p < .20$				
#9 Length of Present Commitment				
	1 yr., 9 mos., 19 days or less N = 208	1 yr., 9 mos., 20 days or more N = 155	Total N = 363	
Non-Recidivists.....	88 (42.3)	77 (49.7)	165 (45.5)	
Recidivists.....	120 (57.2)	78 (50.3)	198 (54.5)	
$X^2 = 1.95, df = 1, .10 < p < .20$				
#10 Home Contacts				
	Regular or Frequently N = 164	None or Occasional N = 199	Total N = 363	
Non-Recidivists.....	81 (49.4)	84 (42.2)	165 (45.5)	
Recidivists.....	83 (50.6)	115 (57.8)	198 (54.5)	
$X^2 = 1.87, df = 1, .10 < p < .20$				
#11 Type of Home to which Paroled				
	With Family or relatives N = 263	Alone or with friends N = 100	Total N = 363	
Non-Recidivists.....	114 (43.3)	51 (51.0)	165 (45.5)	
Recidivists.....	149 (56.7)	49 (49.0)	198 (54.5)	
$X^2 = 1.71, df = 1, .10 < p < .20$				
#12 Military Record				
	Honorable Discharge N = 103	Dishonorable, Undesirable or Medical Discharge N = 62	No Military Service N = 198	Total N = 363
Non-Recidivists.....	51 (49.5)	23 (37.1)	91 (46.0)	165 (45.5)
Recidivists.....	52 (50.5)	39 (62.9)	107 (54.0)	198 (54.5)
$X^2 = 2.06, df = 2, .30 < p < .50$				

TABLE V: 1-14—Continued
Community to which Paroled

*13

	10,000 or fewer N = 50	More than 10,000 N = 313	Total N = 363
Non-Recidivists.....	25 (50.0)	140 (44.7)	165 (45.5)
Recidivists.....	25 (50.0)	173 (55.3)	198 (54.5)

$$X^2 = .483, df = 1, .30 < p < .50$$

*14

Type of Release

	Paroled N = 276	Discharged N = 87	Total N = 363
Non-Recidivists.....	123 (44.6)	42 (48.3)	165 (45.5)
Recidivists.....	153 (55.4)	45 (51.7)	198 (54.5)

$$X^2 = .367, df = 1, .50 < p < .70$$

TABLE VI

COMPARISON OF RECIDIVISTS AND NON-RECIDIVISTS
IN TERMS OF AGE

	Recidivists	Non- recidivists	Total
Mean.....	26.9	33.6	30.0
Median.....	25	31	28
Mode.....	19	20	20
Range.....	37 (16-53)	52 (13-65)	52 (13-65)
Standard Devia- tion.....	7.94	12.04	10.24

$$t = 6.38, df = 361, p < .001.$$

ments, as well as those who are younger and have had no previous commitments, have recidivism rates very close to that of the overall sample.

How are these findings to be interpreted? One possible interpretation may be that the older group which has had no previous commitments has really internalized conventional, rather than criminal, norms and values. The fact that they have reached at least their 30's without "serving time" may support this contention. Therefore, one would conclude that they would not be likely candidates for recidivism. On the other hand, that younger group which has had previous commitments might be considered to have internalized criminalistic, rather than conventional, norms and values. The fact that they have not yet reached their 30's and have already "served time" previously might be considered evidence in support of this hypothesis. Therefore, it would follow that this group would be likely to have a high recidivism rate.

Another possible interpretation of this finding might be that those who were older and had no previous commitments might simply have been "smarter" in terms of avoiding arrest and/or conviction that the younger group who had previous commitments.

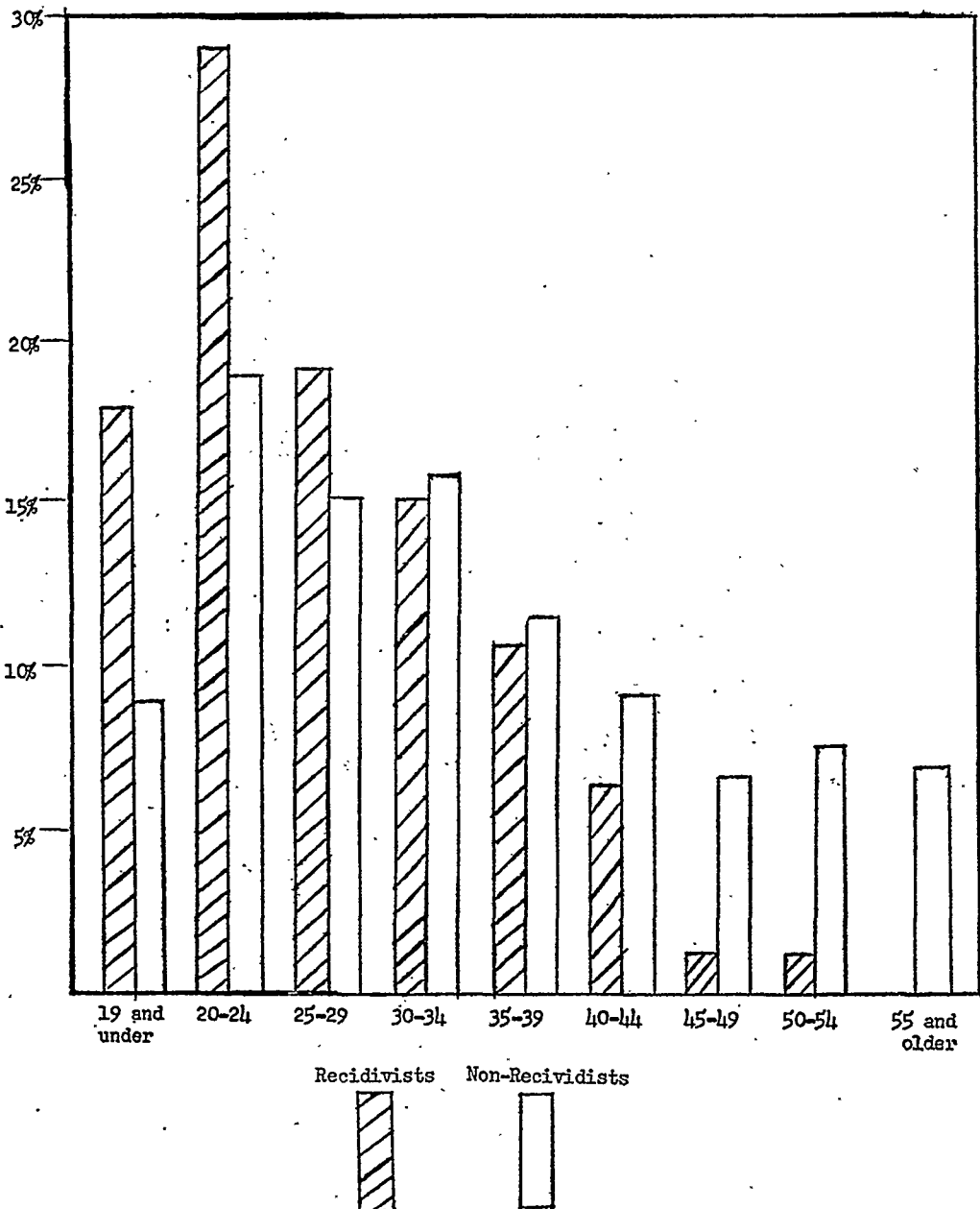
These data lend themselves to at least one other interpretation—one which follows from an orientation that is currently gaining considerable support in the sociological literature on crime and deviance. This frame of reference focuses on the "labeling process" as a crucial factor in the development of a criminal career—i.e., if a person is defined or labeled as a criminal early in his life, and this definition is frequently reinforced by some kind of special treatment, then he is likely to become a criminal. The familiar notion of the self-fulfilling prophecy is relevant here. Also, a key factor in this orientation is the self concept. The general idea is that when an individual defines himself in terms of the label of "criminal" which others have imposed upon him, he bases his behavior on this self definition or self concept and, thus, is likely to engage in criminal behavior. This brief statement obviously does not do justice to this orientation which tends to have a good empirical, as well as theoretical, base.⁹

The question is at this point whether or not

⁹ For a good statement of the theoretical implications of this orientation, see BECKER, *OUTSIDERS: STUDIES IN THE SOCIOLOGY OF DEVIANCE* (1963). Also, for further theoretical details, as well as a number of empirical studies done within this frame of reference, see BECKER, ED., *THE OTHER SIDE: PERSPECTIVES ON DEVIANCE* (1964).

TABLE VII

COMPARISON OF THE PROPORTION OF RECIDIVISTS AND NON-RECIDIVISTS IN SEVERAL AGE CATEGORIES



this general orientation can explain the findings of the present study. For the younger group who have had previous commitments (categories 5 and 8 in Table IV) it is probable that they had undergone the "status degradation ceremony" involved in the criminal trial and conviction early in their lives. They must have been introduced relatively early to the stigma and differential

TABLE VIII
PERCENTAGE OF RECIDIVISTS WITH AGE AND PRIOR COMMITMENTS CONTROLLED

	29 and Younger	30 and Older
No prior commitments.....	53.5%	17.0%
Some prior commitments.....	71.0%	51.8%

treatment that are part of the label of criminal. Thus, it is likely that they have incorporated the definition of themselves as criminals and have based their behavior accordingly. They would, therefore, be likely to become recidivists.

As for the younger group who had no previous commitments, it is noteworthy that one of the two discriminating variables on the third breakdown was age at first arrest (categories 2 and 6 of Table IV). Those in this group whose first arrest was not until they had reached their twenties had a relatively low recidivism rate (26.3%). Their counterparts whose first arrest came while they were teenagers or younger had a relatively high recidivism rate (63.5%). Therefore, it is likely that the "labeling process" began earlier in their lives for the latter group so that they would have been more likely to have already accepted the self concept of a criminal.

This general interpretation also seems to fit that segment of the sample which was 30 or older at the present commitment. The data indicate that the older they are at the time of their first commitment, the less likely are they to become recidivists (categories 1 and 3). In terms of the interpretation being suggested here, it would be hypothesized that the later in life that the "labeling process"—with its concomitant assault on the self concept—is initiated, the less is its impact with respect to influencing recidivism. Categories

1 and 3 lend support to this interpretation. Also, categories 4 and 7 suggest it, although in a very indirect fashion.

In conclusion, it should be stressed that the foregoing interpretation was not presented as the most logical nor the best one possible. The attempt to apply a theoretical framework to a set of data in an *ex post facto* manner, as was done here, is never a completely sound enterprise methodologically. In fact, almost any reasonable interpretation would not be invalid when applied in this *ex post facto* fashion. The above interpretation was suggested in this report because it is based on a theoretical frame of reference which tends to be coming to the fore in the current sociological literature on crime and deviance.

SUMMARY

The base expectancy categories for a sample of 363 MCI-Norfolk inmates have been presented. In the course of the report some possible uses of the categories were mentioned. Also, some of the generalizations which tended to emerge from the derivation of the base expectancy categories were suggested. As a final point, it should be emphasized that these categories should be checked periodically because a change in the inmate population or a policy innovation of some kind might alter the significance of the variables included in the base expectancy categories.