CHAPTER 2

The Process and Problems of Criminological Research

In this chapter, you will learn that one source of the motivation to do research is criminological theory. In criminology, as in any other science, theory plays an important role as a basis for formulating research questions and later understanding the larger implications of one’s research results. Another motivation for research is one’s personal interests. There are other motivational sources for research that we will explore in this chapter, including helping to answer questions illuminated by earlier research. We use the Minneapolis experiment and the SARP replication research to illustrate the three main research strategies: deductive, inductive, and descriptive research. In all three, theory and data are inextricably linked. The chapter ends with scientific and ethical guidelines that should be adhered to no matter what research strategy is used, and shows how the Minneapolis experiment followed these guidelines. By the chapter’s end, you should be ready to formulate a criminological research question, design a general strategy for answering this question, and critique previous studies that have addressed this question.

WHAT DO WE HAVE IN MIND?

Consider the impact of criminological research on the crime of domestic violence. Intimate partner violence (violence between spouses or intimates), sometimes referred to as domestic violence, is a major problem in our society, with police responding to between 2 million and 8 million complaints of assault by a spouse or lover yearly (Sherman 1992: 6). Moreover, it is estimated from victimization surveys that many of these assaults are never reported to police (Bachman & Saltzman 1995; Tjaden & Thoennes 2000). Domestic violence is not just a frequent crime, it is also costly both in terms of the injuries suffered by the parties involved and the shattered families it leaves in its wake. What to do about this major social problem is an important policy question. Perhaps the police could respond to incidents of domestic violence in such a way that the offender would be less likely to be violent in the future—that is, proper police response could possibly prevent some acts of domestic violence. But what is the proper police response?
In 1981, the Police Foundation and the Minneapolis Police Department began an experiment to determine whether arresting accused spouse abusers on the spot would deter future offending incidents. In responding to police calls for service in misdemeanor domestic cases, the responding officer randomly assigned the case to be resolved by either arresting or not arresting the suspect on the scene. The experimental treatment, then, was whether the suspect was arrested, and the researchers wanted to know whether arrest was better than not arresting the suspect in reducing recidivism (subsequent assaults against the same victim). The study’s results, which were widely publicized, indicated that arrest did have a deterrent effect. Partly as a result of the reported results of this experiment, the percentage of urban police departments that made arrest the preferred response to complaints of domestic violence rose from 10% in 1984 to 90% in 1988 (Sherman 1992: 14). Six other cities then hosted studies like the Minneapolis experiment (collectively, this was called the Spouse Assault Replication Program [SARP]), but the results were not always so clear-cut as in the original study (Buzawa & Buzawa 1996; Hirschel, Hutchinson, & Dean 1992; Pate & Hamilton 1992; Sherman 1992; Sherman & Berk 1984). In some cities (and for some people), arrest did seem to prevent future incidents of domestic assault; in other cities, it seemed only to make matters worse, contributing to additional assault; and in still other cities, arrest seemed to have no discernable effect. After these replications of the original Minneapolis experiment, people still wondered, “Just what is the effect of arrest in reducing domestic violence cases, and how should the police respond to such cases?” The answer was not clear. The Minneapolis Domestic Violence Experiment, the studies modeled after it, and the related controversies provide many examples for a systematic overview of the social research process.

The first concern in criminological research (indeed, in any research) is deciding what to study. That is, how does one go about selecting an issue, problem, or question to address with research?

CRIMINOLOGICAL RESEARCH QUESTIONS

A criminological research question is a question about some aspect of crime or criminals that you seek to answer through the collection and analysis of firsthand, verifiable, empirical data. The types of questions that can be asked are virtually limitless. For example, “Are children who are violent more likely than nonviolent children to use violence as adults?” “Does the race of victim who is killed influence whether someone is sentenced to death rather than life imprisonment?” “Why do some kinds of neighborhoods have more crime than others? Is it due to the kinds of people who live there or characteristics of the neighborhood itself?” “Does community policing reduce the crime rate?” “Has the U.S. government’s war on drugs done anything to reduce the use of illegal drugs?” So many research questions are possible in criminology that it is more of a challenge to specify what does not qualify as a social research question than to specify what does.

But that does not mean it is easy to specify a research question. In fact, formulating a good research question can be surprisingly difficult. We can break the process into three stages: identifying one or more questions for study, refining the questions, and then evaluating the questions.
Identifying Criminological Research Questions

Formulating a research question is often an intensely personal process in addition to being a scientific or professional one. Research questions may emerge from your “personal troubles,” as Mills (1959) put it, or your personal experiences. These troubles or experiences could range from how you felt when you were picked up by the police and perhaps arrested when you were a teenager for something you did not do to the awareness you may have that crime is not randomly distributed within a city but that there seem to be “good” or safe parts of town and “bad” or unsafe areas. Can you think of other possible research questions that flow from your own experience in the world?

The experience of others is another fruitful source of research questions. Knowing a relative who was abused by a spouse, seeing a TV special about violence, or reading a gang member’s autobiography can stimulate questions about general criminological processes. Can you draft a research question based on a relative’s experiences, a TV show, or a book?

Other researchers may also pose interesting questions for you to study. Most research articles end with some suggestions for additional research that highlight unresolved issues. Any issue of a journal in your field is likely to have comments that point toward unresolved issues.

The primary source of research questions for many criminologists is criminological theory. As you will soon learn, criminological theory provides an explanation as to why crime occurs, or why it occurs in some places and under some conditions but not others. Theory, then, is a very rich source of research ideas. Some researchers spend much of their careers conducting research intended to refine an answer to one central question. For example, you may find rational choice theory to be a useful approach to understanding diverse forms of social behavior, like crime, because you think people do seem to make decisions on the basis of personal cost–benefit calculations. So you may ask whether rational choice theory can explain why some people commit crimes and others do not, or why some people decide to quit committing crimes while others continue their criminal ways.

Finally, some research questions have very pragmatic sources. You may focus on a research question posed by someone else because doing so seems to be to your professional or financial advantage. Some criminologists conduct research on specific questions posed by a funding source in what is termed a request for proposals (RFP). (Sometimes the acronym RFA is used, meaning request for applications.) Or you may learn that the public defenders in your city are curious as to whether they are more successful in getting their clients acquitted of a criminal charge than private lawyers.

Refining Criminological Research Questions

As you have perhaps surmised by now, the problem is not so much coming up with interesting criminological questions for research as focusing on a problem of manageable size. We are often interested in much more than we can reasonably investigate with our limited time and resources (or the limited resources of a funding agency). Researchers may worry about staking a research project (and thereby a grant) on a particular problem and so address several research questions at once, often in a jumbled fashion. It may also seem
risky to focus on a research question that may lead to results discrepant with our own cherished assumptions about the social world.

The best way to avoid these problems is to develop the research question one bit at a time with a step-by-step strategy. Do not keep hoping that the perfect research question will just spring forth from your pen. Instead, develop a list of possible research questions as you go along. Narrow your list to the most interesting, most workable candidates. Repeat this process as long as it helps to improve your research questions. Keep in mind that the research on which you are currently working will likely generate additional research questions for you to answer.

Evaluating Criminological Research Questions

In the third stage of selecting a criminological research question, you evaluate the best candidate against the criteria for good social research questions: feasibility given the time and resources available, social importance, and scientific relevance (King, Keohane, & Verba 1994).

The research question in the Minneapolis Domestic Violence Experiment, “Does the formal sanction of police arrest versus nonarrest inhibit domestic violence?” certainly meets the criteria of social importance and scientific relevance, but it would not be a feasible question for a student project because it would require you to try to get the cooperation of a police department.

Feasibility

You must be able to conduct any study within the timeframe and resources you have. If time is short, questions that involve long-term change—for example, “If a state has recently changed its law so that it now permits capital punishment for those convicted of murder, does it eventually see a reduction in the homicide rate over time?”—may not be feasible. This is an interesting and important question, but one that requires years of data collection and research. Another issue is the people or groups to whom you can expect to gain access. Although well-experienced researchers may be granted access to police or correctional department files to do their research, less seasoned and less well-known researchers or students may not be granted such access.

Social Importance

Criminological research is not a simple undertaking, so you must focus on a substantive area that you feel is important and that is either important to the discipline or important for public policy. You also need to feel personally motivated to carry out the study; there is little point in trying to answer a question that does not interest you.

In addition, you should consider whether the research question is important to other people. Will an answer to the research question make a difference for society? Again, the Minneapolis Domestic Violence Experiment is an exemplary case. If that study showed that a certain type of police response to domestic violence reduced the risk of subsequent victimization, a great deal of future violence could be prevented. But clearly, criminology and criminal justice are not wanting for important research questions.
**Scientific Relevance**

Every research question in criminology should be grounded in the existing empirical literature. By *grounded* we mean the research we do must be informed by what others before us have done on the topic. Whether you formulate a research question because you have been stimulated by an academic article or because you want to investigate a current public policy problem, you must turn to the criminological literature to find out what has already been learned about this question. (Appendix A explains how to find information about previous research, using both printed and computer-based resources.)

For example, the Minneapolis experiment was built on a substantial body of contradictory theorizing about the impact of punishment on criminality (Sherman & Berk 1984). Deterrence theory predicted that, because it was a more severe penalty, arresting people would better deter them from repeat offenses than not arresting them. Labeling theory, on the other hand, predicted that arrest would make repeat offenses more likely because it would stigmatize offenders. Studies among adults and nonexperimental research had not yielded consistent findings about the effects of arrest on recidivism in domestic violence cases. Clearly, the Minneapolis researchers had good reason for another study. Prior research and theory also helped them develop the most effective research design.

**THE ROLE OF CRIMINOLOGICAL THEORY**

We have already pointed out that criminological *theory* can be a rich source of research questions. What deserves more attention at this point is the larger role of theory in research. Criminological theories do many things:

- They help us explain or understand things like why some people commit crimes or more crimes than others, why some people quit and others continue, and what the expected effect of good families, harsh punishment, or other factors might be on crime.
- They help us make predictions about the criminological world: "What would be the expected effect on the homicide rate if we employed capital punishment rather than life imprisonment?" "What would be the effect on the rate of property crimes if unemployment were to substantially increase?"
- They help us organize and make sense of empirical findings in a discipline.
- They help guide research.
- They help guide public policy: "What should we do to reduce the level of domestic violence?"

Social scientists, such as criminologists, who connect their work to theories in their discipline can generate better ideas about what to look for in a study and develop conclusions with more implications for other research. Building and evaluating theory are therefore among the most important objectives of a social science like criminology.
Theory A logically interrelated set of propositions about empirical reality. Examples of criminological theories are social learning, routine activities, labeling, general strain, and social disorganization theory.

For centuries, scholars have been interested in developing theories about crime and criminals. Sometimes these theories involve very fanciful ideas that are not well developed or organized, whereas at other times they strike us as being very compelling and well organized. Theories usually contain what are called theoretical constructs. In criminology, these theoretical constructs describe what is important to look at to understand, explain, predict, and “do something about” crime. Some criminological theories reflect a substantial body of research and the thinking of many social scientists; others are formulated in the course of one investigation. A few have been widely accepted, at least for a time; others are the subject of vigorous controversy, with frequent changes and refinements in response to criticism and new research.

We can use the studies of the police response to domestic assault to illustrate the value of theory for social research. Even in this very concrete and practical matter, we must draw on social theories to understand how people act and what should be done about those actions. Consider the three action options that police officers have when they confront a domestic assault suspect (Sherman & Berk 1984: 263). Fellow officers might urge forced separation to achieve short-term peace; police trainers might prefer mediation to resolve the underlying dispute; feminist groups might urge arrest to protect the victim. None of these recommendations is really a theory, but each suggests a different perspective on crime and legal sanctions. The traditional police perspective sees domestic violence as a family matter that should not be the object of formal legal action. The preference for mediation reflects the view that domestic violence involves a family crisis that can be solved with special counseling. The pro-arrest position views domestic violence as a crime as serious as that between strangers and favors arrest for its presumed deterrent effect.

You will encounter these different perspectives if you read much of the literature on domestic violence, or even if you talk with your friends about it. Each perspective reflects different assumptions about gender roles, about the sources of crime, and about the impact of punishment. In turn, these assumptions reflect different experiences with family conflict, police actions, and the legal system. What we believe about one crime and the appropriate response to it relates to a great many other ideas we have about the social world. Recognizing these relationships is a first step toward becoming a theoretically guided social researcher and a theoretically informed consumer of social research.

Remember, however, that social theories do not provide the answers to the questions we confront as we formulate topics for research. Instead, social theories suggest the areas on which we should focus and the propositions that we should consider for a test. That is, theories suggest testable hypotheses about things and research verifies whether those hypotheses are true. In fact, one of the most important requirements of theory is that it be testable, or what philosophers of science call falsifiable; theoretical statements must be capable of being proven wrong. If a body of thought cannot be empirically tested, it is more likely philosophy than theory.

Sherman and Berk’s (1984) domestic violence research was actually a test of predictions derived from two alternative theories of the impact of punishment on crime, deterrence theory, and labeling theory:
Deterrence theory presumes that human beings are at least marginally rational beings who are responsive to the expected costs and benefits of their actions. Committing a crime nets certain benefits for offenders; therefore, if we want to inhibit crime, there must be a compensating cost. One cost is the criminal sanction (arrest, conviction, punishment). Deterrence theory expects punishment to inhibit crime in two ways. General deterrence occurs when people see that crime results in undesirable punishments for others, that “crime doesn’t pay.” The persons who are punished serve as examples for those who have not yet committed an offense but might be thinking of what awaits them should they engage in proscribed acts. Specific deterrence occurs when persons who are punished decide not to commit another offense so they can avoid further punishment (Lempert & Sanders 1986: 86–87). Deterrence theory leads to the prediction that arresting spouse abusers will reduce the likelihood of their reoffending when compared with a less serious sanction (not being arrested but being warned or counseled).

Labeling theory distinguishes between primary deviance—the acts of individuals that lead to public sanctions—and secondary deviance—the deviance that occurs in response to public sanction (Hagan 1994: 33). Arrest or some other public sanction for misdeeds labels the offender as deviant in the eyes of others. Once the offender is labeled, others will treat the offender as a deviant, and he or she is then more likely to act in a way that is consistent with the deviant label. Ironically, the act of punishment stimulates more of the very behavior that it was intended to eliminate (Tannenbaum 1938). This theory suggests that persons arrested for intimate partner violence are more likely to reoffend than those who are caught but not punished because the formal sanction of arrest is more stigmatizing than being warned or counseled. This prediction about the effect of formal legal sanctions is the reverse of the deterrence theory prediction.

Exhibit 2.1 summarizes how these general theories relate to the question of whether to arrest spouse abusers.

### Exhibit 2.1 Two Social Theories and Their Predictions About the Effect of Arrest for Intimate Partner Assault

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Rational Choice Theory</th>
<th>Symbolic Interactionism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical assumption</td>
<td>People’s behavior is shaped by calculations of the costs and benefits of their actions.</td>
<td>People give symbolic meanings to objects, behaviors, and other people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminological component</td>
<td>Deterrence theory: People break the law if the benefits of doing so outweigh the costs.</td>
<td>Labeling theory: People label offenders as deviant, promoting further deviance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prediction (effect of arrest for domestic assault)</td>
<td>Abusing spouse, having seen the costs of abuse (namely, arrest), decides not to abuse again.</td>
<td>Abusing spouse, having been labeled as “an abuser,” abuses more often.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Does either deterrence theory or labeling theory make sense to you as an explanation for the impact of punishment? Do they seem consistent with your observations of social life? More than a decade after Sherman and Berk’s (1984) study, Paternoster et al. (1997) decided to study punishment of domestic violence from a different perspective. They turned to a social psychological theory called procedural justice theory, which explains law-abidingness as resulting from a sense of duty or morality (Tyler 1990). People obey the law from a sense of obligation that flows from seeing legal authorities as moral and legitimate. From this perspective, individuals who are arrested seem less likely to reoffend if they are treated fairly, irrespective of the outcome of their case, because fair treatment will enhance their view of legal authorities as moral and legitimate. Procedural justice theory expands our view of the punishment process by focusing attention on how police act and how authorities treat subjects, rather than just on the legal decisions they make. Thus it gives us a sense of the larger importance of the research question.

Are you now less certain about the likely effect of arrest for intimate partner violence? Will arrest decrease abuse because abusers do not wish to suffer from legal sanctions again? Will it increase abuse because abusers feel stigmatized by being arrested and thus are more likely to act like criminals? Or will arrest reduce abuse only if the abusers feel they have been treated fairly by the legal authorities? By suggesting such questions, social theory makes us much more sensitive to the possibilities and so helps us to design better research. Before, during, and after a research investigation, we need to keep thinking theoretically.

SOCIAL RESEARCH STRATEGIES

All social research, including criminological research, is the effort to connect theory and empirical data, the evidence we find in the real world. As Exhibit 2.2 shows, theory and data have a two-way, mutually reinforcing relationship. Research that begins with a theory implying that certain data should be found involves **deductive reasoning**, which moves from general ideas (theory) to specific reality (data). In contrast, **inductive reasoning** moves from the specific to the general.

Both deductive reasoning and inductive reasoning are essential to criminologists. We cannot test an idea fairly unless we use deductive reasoning, stating our expectations in advance and setting up a test in which our idea could be shown to be wrong (falsified). A theory that has not survived these kinds of tests can be regarded only as very tentative. Yet theories, no matter how cherished, cannot make useful predictions for every social situation or research problem that we seek to investigate. Moreover, we may find unexpected patterns in the data we collect, called **serendipitous findings** or **anomalous findings**. In either situation, we should reason inductively, making whatever theoretical sense we can of our unanticipated findings. Then, if the new findings seem sufficiently important, we can return to deductive reasoning and plan a new study to formally test our new ideas.
EXHIBIT 2.2 The Links Between Theory and Data

The Research Circle

This process of conducting research, moving from theory to data and back again, or from data to theory and back again, can be characterized as a research circle. Exhibit 2.3 depicts this circle. Note that it mirrors the relationship between theory and data shown in Exhibit 2.2 and that it comprises three main research strategies: deductive research, inductive research, and descriptive research.

Deductive Research

As Exhibit 2.3 shows, deductive research proceeds from theorizing to data collection and then back to theorizing. In essence, a specific expectation is deduced from a general premise and then tested.

Notice that a theory leads first to a hypothesis, which is a specific implication deduced from the more general theory. Researchers actually test a hypothesis, not the complete theory itself, because theories usually contain many hypotheses. A hypothesis proposes a relationship between two or more theoretical constructs or variables. A variable is a characteristic or property that can vary. A constant is a characteristic or a property that cannot vary. For example, if we were to conduct some research in a male adult penitentiary, the theoretical construct “type of crime committed” would be a variable because persons will have been incarcerated for different offenses (one person for armed robbery, another for rape, etc.). However, the theoretical construct “gender” would be a constant because every inmate in the penitentiary would be male.
Hypothesis  A tentative statement about empirical reality, involving a relationship between two or more variables.

Example of a hypothesis:  The higher the level of residential mobility in a community, the higher its rate of crime will be.

Variable  A characteristic or property that can vary (take on different values or attributes).

Constant  A characteristic or property that does not vary but takes on only one value.

Variables are of critical importance in research because, in a hypothesis, variation in one variable is proposed to predict, influence, or cause variation in the other variable. The proposed influence is the independent variable; its effect or consequence is the dependent variable. After the researchers formulate one or more hypotheses and develop research procedures, they collect data with which to test the hypothesis.

Independent variable  A variable that is hypothesized to cause, or lead to, variation in the dependent variable.

Example of an independent variable:  Residential mobility (residents moving in and out of the community).

Dependent variable  A variable that is hypothesized to vary depending on or under the influence of the independent variable.

Example of a dependent variable:  The rate of crime in a community per 1,000 residents.
Hypotheses can be worded in several different ways, and identifying the independent and dependent variables is sometimes difficult. When in doubt, try to rephrase the hypothesis as an if–then statement: “If the independent variable increases (or decreases), then the dependent variable increases (or decreases).” Exhibit 2.4 presents several hypotheses with their independent and dependent variables and their if–then equivalents.

**EXHIBIT 2.4 Examples of Hypotheses**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original Hypothesis</th>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
<th>If-Then Hypothesis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The greater the social disorganization in a community, the higher the rate of crime.</td>
<td>Social disorganization</td>
<td>Crime rate</td>
<td>If social disorganization is higher, then the crime rate is higher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. As one’s self-control gets stronger, the fewer delinquent acts one commits.</td>
<td>Self-control</td>
<td>Self-reported delinquency</td>
<td>If self-control is higher, then the number of delinquent acts is lower.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. As the unemployment rate in a community decreases, the community rate of property crime decreases.</td>
<td>Unemployment rate</td>
<td>Rate of property crime</td>
<td>If the unemployment rate is lower, then the rate of property crime is lower.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. As the discrepancy between one’s aspirations and expectations increases, one’s level of strain increases.</td>
<td>Discrepancy between one’s aspirations and expectations</td>
<td>Strain</td>
<td>If the discrepancy between one’s aspirations and expectations is high, then the level of strain is high.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Crime is lower in those communities where the police patrol on foot.</td>
<td>Presence of foot patrols</td>
<td>Crime</td>
<td>If a community has police foot patrols, then the level of crime is lower.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Exhibit 2.4 demonstrates another feature of hypotheses: **direction of association**. When researchers hypothesize that one variable increases as the other variable increases, the direction of the association is positive (Hypotheses 1 and 4 in the exhibit); when one variable decreases as the other variable decreases, the direction of association is also positive (Hypothesis 3). In positive relationships, then, the independent and dependent variables move in the same direction (as one increases, the other increases; or as one decreases, the other decreases). But when one variable increases as the other decreases, or vice versa, the direction of association is negative, or inverse (Hypothesis 2). In a negative relationship, then, the independent and dependent variables move in opposite directions (as one increases, the other decreases; or as one decreases, the other increases). Hypothesis 5 is a special case in which the independent variable is categorical. The independent variable cannot be said to increase or decrease. In this case, the concept of direction of association does not apply, and the hypothesis simply states that one category of the independent variable is associated with higher values on the dependent variable.

You can get a better sense of what the direction of a relationship means by looking at Exhibits 2.5 through 2.9, which correspond to the five hypotheses shown in Exhibit 2.4. In these graphs, the independent variable is displayed as the x or horizontal axis and the dependent variable is displayed as the y or vertical axis. Exhibit 2.5 illustrates the hypothesis that social disorganization and a community’s crime rate are positively related. The positive association implies that as social disorganization (the independent variable) increases (moves from being low to being high), the expected change is that the dependent variable will also increase (move from being low to high). This is the same thing as saying that, as the level of social disorganization in a community moves from low to high, the level of crime also moves from low to high. In other words, the more social disorganization, the more crime there is. Notice that in a positive relationship, the independent and dependent variables are moving in the same direction; as social disorganization increases, so does crime.
Exhibit 2.6 illustrates a graph for a negative association. This graph shows that, as one’s self-control becomes high (where more self-control means greater restraint over one’s impulses), then the number of delinquent acts one commits declines or moves to low. This means that as self-control increases or strengthens, the frequency of delinquent behavior declines or decreases in number. Notice two things about this negative relationship. First, the independent and dependent variables move in opposite directions; as the independent variable (self-control) increases, the dependent variable (delinquency) decreases. Notice also that this negative relationship is shown as a downward-sloping line on the graph.

Finally, Exhibit 2.7 illustrates a relationship with a graph that is slightly different. Here, the hypothesis (Hypothesis 5 in Exhibit 2.4) states that we expect to see lower crime in communities that have foot patrols compared with communities that do not have foot patrols. Unlike the other independent variables, the independent variable “foot patrol” does not vary from low to high: Either there are foot patrols in the community or there are not. If the hypothesis is true, what we should expect to see is that most of the communities that do not have foot patrols should have high rates of crime, whereas most of those communities that do have foot patrols should have lower rates of crime. This expectation is shown in Exhibit 2.7 with the clump of points (representing communities) for the “no foot patrol” communities at the high range of crime and the clump of points for the “yes foot patrol” communities at the low range of crime.

The motives for deductive research include both explanation and evaluation (as described in chapter 1). An example of explanatory deductive research is the Minneapolis Domestic Violence Experiment, in which Sherman and Berk (1984) sought to explain what sort of response by the authorities might keep a spouse abuser from repeating the offense. The researchers deduced from deterrence theory the expectation that arrest would deter domestic violence. They then collected data to test this expectation.
An example of evaluative deductive research is the study of the Second Step violence prevention curriculum, by Grossman et al. (1997), that was discussed in chapter 1. The developers of the Second Step program had deduced from previous research in the violence prevention literature that violence in children could be inhibited if they learned and had practice with empathy, impulse control, and anger management. Based on this trinity of approaches, Second Step was devised to reduce the expressed violence among those children in the program. Grossman and colleagues collected data to test this expectation.

In both explanatory and evaluative research, the statement of expectations for the findings and the design of the research to test these expectations strengthens the confidence we can place in the test. Deductive researchers show their hand or state their expectations in advance and then design a fair test of those expectations. Then “the chips fall where they may”—in other words, the researcher accepts the resulting data as a more or less objective picture of reality.

**Inductive Research**

In contrast to deductive research, *inductive research* begins at the bottom of the research circle and then works upward (see Exhibit 2.3). The inductive researcher begins with specific data, which are then used to develop (induce) a general explanation (a theory) to account for the data. The patterns in the data are then summarized in one or more *empirical generalizations*. 
The motive for inductive research is exploration. In chapter 1, you read about an exploratory study of individuals’ responses to an incident involving a school shooting (Asmussen & Creswell 1995). The incident took place at a public university where a gunman tried to shoot the students in his class. Fortunately, the gun jammed and all the students escaped uninjured. Because there was very little previous work in this area, Asmussen and Creswell (1995) conducted in-depth interviews with the students and tried to classify typical responses to the situation. Although the researchers did not develop a theory from their work, they did develop a classification scheme or taxonomy of different responses to traumatic events.

In strictly inductive research, researchers already know what they have found when they start theorizing, or attempting to explain what accounts for these findings. The result can be new insights and provocative questions. But the adequacy of an explanation formulated after the fact is necessarily less certain than an explanation presented prior to the collection of data. Every phenomenon can always be explained in some way. Inductive explanations are thus more trustworthy if they are tested subsequently with deductive research.

**A Qualitative Exploration of the Response to Domestic Violence**

Qualitative research is often inductive: Researchers begin by observing social interaction or interviewing social actors in depth and then developing an explanation for what has been found. The researchers often ask questions like “What is going on here?” or “How do people interpret these experiences?” Rather than testing a hypothesis, the researchers are trying to make sense of some social phenomenon. Bennet, Goodman, and Dutton (1999) used this approach to investigate one of the problems that emerge when police arrest domestic batterers: The victims often decide not to press charges. Bennett and colleagues did not set out to test hypotheses with qualitative interviews (there was another, hypothesis-testing, component in their research), but sought, inductively, to “add the voice of the victim to the discussion” and present “themes that emerged from [the] interviews” (1999: 762).

Research assistants interviewed 49 victims of domestic violence in one court; Lauren Bennett also worked in the same court as a victim advocate. The researchers were able to cull from their qualitative data four reasons why victims became reluctant to press charges: Some were confused by the court procedures, while others were frustrated by the delay; some were paralyzed by fear of retribution; and still others did not want to send the batterer to jail.

Explanations developed inductively from qualitative research can feel authentic because we have heard what people have to say “in their own words” and we have tried to see the social world “as they see it.” One victim interviewed by Bennett, Goodman, and Dutton (1999) felt that she “was doing time instead of the defendant;” another expressed her fear by saying that she would like “to keep him out of jail if that’s what it takes to keep my kids safe” (1999: 768–769). Explanations derived from qualitative research will be richer and more finely textured than those resulting from quantitative research, but they are likely to be based on fewer cases from a limited area. We cannot assume that the people studied in this setting are like others or that other researchers would develop explanations similar to ours to make sense of what was observed or heard.
The Sherman and Berk (1984) study of domestic violence that we have been discussing in this chapter is a good example of how the research circle works. In an attempt to determine ways to prevent the recurrence of intimate partner violence, the researchers repeatedly linked theory and data, developing both hypotheses and empirical generalizations.

**Phase 1: Deductive Research**

The first phase of Sherman and Berk’s (1984) study was designed to test a hypothesis. According to deterrence theory, punishment will reduce recidivism, or the propensity to commit further crimes. From this theory, Sherman and Berk deduced a specific hypothesis: “Arrest for spouse abuse reduces the risk of repeat offenses.” In this hypothesis, arrest is the independent variable, and variation in the risk of repeat offenses is the dependent variable (it is hypothesized to depend on arrest).

Sherman and Berk (1984) tested their hypothesis by setting up an experiment in which the police responded to complaints of spouse abuse in one of three ways, one of which was to arrest the offender. When the researchers examined their data (police records for the persons in their experiment), they found that of those arrested for assaulting their spouse, only 13% repeated the offense, compared with a 26% recidivism rate for those who were separated from their spouse by the police without any arrest. This pattern in the data, or empirical generalization, was consistent with the hypothesis that the researchers deduced from deterrence theory. The theory thus received support from the experiment (see Exhibit 2.8).

**EXHIBIT 2.8 The Research Circle: Minneapolis Domestic Violence Experiment**

- **Theory**
  - Deterrence theory

- **Empirical generalizations**
  - **Action**
    - Arrest
    - Separation
  - **Racidivism**
    - 13%
    - 26%

- **Hypothesis**
  - More arrests, less recidivism

- **Data**
  - Measures for 330 domestic assault cases
In designing their study, Sherman and Berk (1984) anticipated an important question: “How valid was the connection they [the researchers] were trying to make between theory and data?” The three dimensions of validity—measurement validity, generalizability, and causal validity—were at issue.

Determining whether spouses were assaulted after the initial police intervention was the key measurement concern. Official records of subsequent assaults by the suspect would provide one measure. But most spousal assaults are not reported to the police, so research assistants also sought out the victims for interviews every two weeks during a six-month follow-up period. Although fewer than half the victims completed all the follow-up interviews, the availability of the self-report measure allowed the researchers to shed some light on the validity of the official data. In general, the two measures yielded comparable results, although some discrepancies troubled critics.

The generalizability of the study’s results was the researchers’ greatest concern. Minneapolis is no more a typical U.S. city than any other, and we cannot assume that police policies which are effective in Minneapolis will be equally effective in cities with very different political histories, criminal justice agencies, and population characteristics. Sherman and Berk (1984) warned readers, “External validity will have to wait for replications” (1984: 269)—that is, for repetitions of the study using the same research methods to answer the same research question.

Finally, Sherman and Berk’s (1984) claims about the causal validity of their results rested primarily on the experimental design they used. The 330 domestic assault cases in the study were handled by the police in one of three ways: an arrest, an order that the offending spouse leave the house for eight hours, or some type of verbal advice by the police officers. The officers were not allowed to choose which treatment to apply (except in extreme cases, such as when severe injury had occurred or when the spouse had demanded that an arrest be made). Instead, the treatments were carried out by police in random order, according to the color of the next report form on a pad that had been prepared by the researchers.

By insisting on the random assignment of cases to treatments, the researchers tried to ensure that police officers would not arrest just the toughest spouses or the spouses who seemed most obnoxious or the spouses they encountered late in the day. In other words, the random assignment procedure made it unlikely that arrested spouse abusers would differ, on average, from the other spouse abusers except for the fact that they were arrested (although, because of chance factors, the possibility of other differences cannot completely be ruled out). The researchers’ conclusion that arrest caused a lower incidence of repeat offenses therefore seems valid.

Phase 2: Deductive Research

Because of their doubts about the generalizability of their results, Sherman, Berk, and new collaborators began to journey around the research circle again, with funding from the National Institute of Justice for replications (repetitions) of the experiment in six more cities. These replications used the same basic research approach but with some improvements. The random assignment process was tightened up in most of the cities so that police officers would be less likely to replace the assigned treatment with a treatment of their own choice. In addition, data were collected about repeat violence against other victims as well
as against the original complainant. Some replications also examined different aspects of
the arrest process, to see whether professional counseling helped and whether the length
of time spent in jail after arrest mattered at all.

By the time results were reported from five of the cities in the new study, a problem was
apparent. In three cities—Omaha, Nebraska; Charlotte, North Carolina; and Milwaukee,
Wisconsin—researchers were finding long-term increases in domestic violence incidents
among arrestees. But in Colorado Springs, Colorado; and Dade County, Florida; the predicted
deterrent effects seemed to be occurring (Sherman et al. 1992).

Researchers had now traversed the research circle twice in an attempt to answer the orig-
inal research question, first in Minneapolis and then in six other cities. But, rather than lead-
ing to more confidence in deterrence theory, the research results were calling it into
question. Deterrence theory now seemed inadequate to explain empirical reality, at least as
the researchers had measured this reality. So the researchers began to reanalyze the follow-
up data from several cities to try to explain the discrepant results, thereby starting the
research circle once again (Berk et al. 1992; Pate & Hamilton 1992; Sherman et al. 1992).

Phase 3: Inductive Research

At this point, the researchers’ approach became more inductive, and they began trying to
make sense of the differing patterns in the data collected in the different cities. Could sys-
tematic differences in the samples or in the implementation of arrest policies explain the
differing outcomes? Or was the problem an inadequacy in the theoretical basis of their
research? Was deterrence theory really the best way to explain the patterns in the data they
were collecting?

Sherman et al. (1992) now turned to control theory (Töby 1957), yet another broad expla-
nation for social behavior. It predicts that having a stake in conformity (resulting from inclu-
sion in social networks at work or in the community) decreases a person’s likelihood of
committing crimes. The implication is that people who are employed and married are more
likely to be deterred by the threat of arrest than those without such stakes in conformity. This
is because an arrest for domestic violence could jeopardize one’s job and one’s marriage, thus
making arrest more costly for the employed and married. This, indeed, is what a reexamina-
tion of the data revealed: Individuals who were married and employed were deterred from
repeat offenses by arrest, but individuals who were unmarried and unemployed were actu-
ally more likely to commit repeat offenses if they were arrested. This was an important the-
teoretical insight. It suggested that one powerful way that formal sanctions work is that they can
potentially trigger informal sanctions or costs (e.g., loss of respect from friends and family).

Now the researchers had traversed the research circle almost three times, a process per-
haps better described as a spiral (see Exhibit 2.9). The first two times the researchers had
traversed the research circle in a deductive, hypothesis-testing way: They started with theory
and then deduced and tested hypotheses. The third time they traversed the research circle
in a more inductive, exploratory way: They started with empirical generalizations from the
data they had already obtained and then turned to a new theory to account for the unex-
pected patterns in the data. At this point, their belief was that deterrence theory makes cor-
correct predictions given certain conditions and that another theory, control theory, may
specify what these conditions are.
After two and one-half cycles through the research circle, the picture became more complex but also conceptually richer. The researchers came closer to understanding how to inhibit domestic violence, but they cautioned us that their initial question, the research problem, was still not completely answered. Employment status and marital status alone do not measure the strength of social attachments; they also are related to how much people earn and the social standing of victims in court. So perhaps social ties are not really what makes arrest an effective deterrent to domestic violence. More research was still needed (Berk et al. 1992).

**EXHIBIT 2.9 The Research Spiral: Minneapolis Domestic Violence Experiment**

**Phase 4: Deductive Research**

In 1997, Paternoster et al. reexamined data from the Milwaukee Domestic Violence Experiment to test hypotheses derived from yet another theory, procedural justice theory. As explained earlier, procedural justice theory predicts that people will comply with the law out of a sense of duty and obligation if they are treated fairly by legal authorities. In the Milwaukee sample, arrest had a criminogenic effect: Those who were arrested were subsequently more likely to abuse their spouses than those who were simply warned. Paternoster et al. (1997) thought that this effect might have been due to the way subjects were treated
when they were arrested rather than simply to the fact that they were arrested. One of their hypotheses spells out the reasoning:

Among those persons arrested for spouse assault, those who perceive themselves as being treated in a procedurally unfair manner will be more likely to commit acts of spouse assault in the future than those arrested persons who perceive themselves as being treated in a procedurally fair manner, net of other determinants of violence. (1997: 173)

To carry out this study, Paternoster et al. (1997) reexamined data collected earlier in Milwaukee, where the findings had seemed anomalous. However, this reanalysis of the data qualifies as deductive research, because the hypotheses were derived from theory and then tested with the data, rather than being induced by the data.

The procedural justice hypotheses were supported: Persons who were arrested in the Milwaukee experiment became more likely to reoffend only if they perceived that they had been treated unfairly by the police. Otherwise, their rate of rearrest was similar to that for the persons who were not arrested. Thus another element was added to our understanding of the effects of the police response to domestic violence.

Clearly our understanding of effective responses to domestic violence will never truly be complete, but research to date has greatly improved our understanding of this social problem. The future should yield an even better understanding, even though at times it may be hard to make sense out of conflicting findings from different studies. Science is an ongoing enterprise in which findings cumulate and eventually yield greater understanding, or even radical revisions in our understanding. Needless to say, researchers do not need to worry about running out of work to do.

GUIDELINES FOR CRIMINOLOGISTS

The guidelines followed by social researchers fall into two categories: those that help keep research scientific and those that help keep research ethical. Both types of guidelines are essential for a field of inquiry that seeks empirical generalizations about human society. To point out their value, we use examples from the domestic violence research.

Scientific Guidelines

The following nine guidelines are applicable to any type of scientific research, but they are particularly useful to criminologists and to those who read about criminology and criminal justice. Adherence to these guidelines will reduce the temptation “to project on what is observed whatever [they] want the world to be for [their] own private purposes” (Hoover 1980: 131).

1. Test ideas against empirical reality without becoming too personally invested in a particular outcome. This testing approach is reflected in the research process and is implicit in the goal of validity. Empirical testing requires a neutral and open-minded
approach: Scientists are personally disinterested in the outcome and not swayed by the popularity or the social status of those who would prefer other outcomes. This does not mean that the researchers are not personally involved or interested in the research—they must be; rather, the point is that they cannot have so much invested in a research project personally or professionally that they try in subtle or not-so-subtle ways to affect the outcome.

2. **Plan and carry out investigations systematically.** Social researchers have little hope of conducting a careful test of their ideas if they do not think through in advance how they should go about the test and then proceed accordingly. But a systematic approach is not always easy. For example, Sherman and Berk (1984) needed to ensure that spouse abusers were assigned to be either arrested or not on a random basis, rather than on the basis of the police officers' personal preferences. So the researchers devised an elaborate procedure using randomly sequenced report sheets in different colors. But the researchers found that police officers did not always follow this systematic procedure. Subsequently, in some replications of the study, the researchers ensured compliance with their research procedures by requiring police officers to call in to a central number to receive the experimentally determined treatment.

3. **Document all procedures, and disclose them publicly.** Social researchers who disclose the methods on which their conclusions rest allow others to evaluate for themselves the likely soundness of these conclusions. Such disclosure is a key feature of science. Again, Sherman and Berk (1984) provide a compelling example. In their research report, after describing the formal research plan, they described at length the apparent slippage from this plan, which occurred primarily because some police officers avoided implementing the random assignment procedure.

4. **Clarify assumptions.** No investigation is complete unto itself; whatever the researcher's method, the research rests on some background assumptions. Research to determine whether arrest has a deterrent effect assumes that potential law violators think rationally, that they calculate potential costs and benefits prior to committing crimes. When a researcher conducts an election poll, the assumption is that people actually vote for the candidate they say they will vote for. By definition, research assumptions are not tested, so we do not know whether they are correct. By taking the time to think about and to disclose their assumptions, researchers provide important information for those who seek to evaluate the validity of their conclusions.

5. **Specify the meaning of all terms.** Words often have multiple or unclear meanings. Strain, differential association, social disorganization, subculture of violence, problem-oriented policing, and so on can mean different things to different people. Thus the terms used in scientific research must be defined explicitly and used consistently.

6. **Maintain a skeptical stance toward current knowledge.** Scientists may feel very confident about interpretations of the social or natural world that have been supported by repeated investigations, but the results of any particular
investigation must be examined critically. A general skepticism about current knowledge stimulates researchers to improve the validity of current research results and expand the frontier of knowledge.

7. Replicate research and accumulate knowledge. No one study can be viewed as definitive in itself; usually at least some plausible threats to the validity of the conclusions exist. And no conclusion can be understood adequately apart from the larger body of knowledge to which the study is related. Scientific investigations may begin with a half-baked or off-the-wall idea, but a search of the literature for other relevant work must be conducted in short order. The other side of the coin is that the results of scientific research must be published, to serve as a foundation for others who seek to replicate or extend the research.

8. Maintain an interest in theory. Theories organize the knowledge accumulated by numerous investigations into a coherent whole and serve as a guide to future inquiries. Even though much research is purely descriptive, this research can still serve as a basis for others to evaluate different theories. The Minneapolis Domestic Violence Experiment was devised initially as a test of the competing predictions of deterrence and labeling theory, but the researchers extended their attention to control theory to help them explain unanticipated findings. These theoretical connections make the research much more relevant to other criminologists working to understand different types of crime and social control.

9. Search for regularities or patterns. Science is concerned with classes rather than with individuals (except inasmuch as individuals are representatives of a class). Scientists assume that the natural world has some underlying order of relationships, and that every event and individual is not so unique that general principles cannot be discerned (Grinnell 1992: 27–29). The goal of elaborating individual cases is to understand social patterns that characterize many individuals.

These general guidelines are only ideals for social research. No particular investigation will follow every guideline exactly. Real investigations by criminologists do not always include much attention to theory, specific definitions of all terms, and so forth. Any study that strays far from these guidelines cannot be considered scientific.

**Ethical Guidelines**

Every methodology (e.g., surveys, experiments, participant observation) has its own unique ethical considerations. As such, we will discuss ethics in all methodology chapters in this text. However, there are some general ethical guidelines that we would like to present here. Every scientific investigation has an ethical dimension. First and foremost, the scientific concern with validity requires that scientists be honest and reveal their methods. (How else could we determine whether the requirement of honesty has been met?) Scientists also have to consider the uses to which their findings will be put. In addition, because criminological research deals with people such as criminals, criminal suspects, and incarcerated inmates, and controversial topics (involvement in crime), criminologists have some unique ethical concerns.
Honesty and Openness

Research distorted by political or personal pressures to find particular outcomes or to achieve the most marketable results is unlikely to be carried out in an honest and open fashion or to achieve valid results.

Being open about one's research is particularly important when the research is used or influential in public policy matters. For example, an economist who was interested in the study of crime, Professor Isaac Ehrlich (1975), conducted a study that examined whether capital punishment deters murder. Using national data for the time period 1933–1969, Ehrlich concluded that each execution prevented or deterred seven to eight homicides—in other words, Ehrlich claimed that executions saved seven to eight innocent crime victims. This was one of a very few studies at the time to find a deterrent effect for capital punishment. In fact, his results were cited in a U.S. Supreme Court case (Gregg v. Georgia, 1976) as evidence in support of deterrence. His reported findings caused both a stir among proponents of capital punishment and skeptical hostility among its critics. The controversy surrounding his findings grew when other researchers tried to duplicate his findings with data they collected and found that, when they analyzed slightly different years, with slightly different variables and sometimes slightly different statistical strategies, the effect of executions changed. In some analyses, executions seemed to deter murder; in some others, it seemed to increase murders (what was called a brutalization effect); and in others, it had no discernable effect at all. The controversy about Ehrlich's findings bubbled for years and might have been resolved much sooner had Ehrlich been more open and forthcoming about his data.

Openness about research procedures and results goes hand in hand with honesty in research design. Openness is also essential if researchers are to learn from the work of others. In spite of this need for openness, some researchers may hesitate to disclose their procedures or results to prevent others from building on their ideas and taking some of the credit. You may have heard of the long legal battle between a U.S. researcher and a French researcher about how credit should be allocated for discovering the AIDS virus. Although such public disputes are unusual, concerns with priority of discovery are common. Scientists are like other people in their desire to be first. Enforcing standards of honesty and encouraging openness about research is the best solution to these problems.

The Uses of Science

Scientists must also consider the extent to which they should publicize their research and the uses to which it is put. Although many scientists believe that personal values should be left outside the laboratory, some argue that it is proper, even desirable, for scientists in their role as citizens to attempt to influence public policy. In other words, if their research has something to say about how things should be done, some scientists feel that they should actively promote their work.

Throughout this chapter, we have been talking about one criminological experiment, the Minneapolis Domestic Violence Experiment, which found that arresting domestic violence suspects was more effective in reducing subsequent violence than not arresting them. Although Sherman and Berk (1984) were generally cautious about the kinds of conclusions that should be drawn from their work, they were both active and passive in promoting their findings. Not only was their work published in scientific journals, but it also received widespread publicity.
in the national media: one of the authors and the Minneapolis chief of police wrote an editorial in the Wall Street Journal recommending that other jurisdictions pass laws similar to those of Minneapolis, and one of the authors contracted with a Minneapolis television station to film a documentary on the research. In their published findings, they concluded,

We favor a presumption of arrest: an arrest should be made unless there are good, clear reasons why an arrest would be counterproductive. We do not, however, favor requiring arrests in all misdemeanor domestic assault cases. (1984: 270)

Sherman and Berk (1984) were criticized by other scholars on the basis that the findings of one study are not a sufficient empirical basis from which to draw such an important public policy recommendation. In fact, Sherman and Berk did caution that their findings might not be replicated in other locations, and that their position is that police should be able to arrest domestic violence suspects, not that they should be required to. Nevertheless, because Sherman publicized the results of the research in the mass media, he was criticized by some social scientists for implicitly encouraging police departments to change their policies on the basis of preliminary evidence (the results of just one study in one city) (Binder & Meeker 1993; Lempert 1989). In part, the question was whether basing policy on partial information was preferable to waiting until the information was more complete (more studies conducted in different locations). Sherman argued that public policy is better guided by partial knowledge than no knowledge at all.

Research on People

In physics or chemistry, research subjects (objects and substances) may be treated to extreme conditions and then discarded when they are no longer useful. However, social (and medical) scientists must concern themselves with the way their human subjects are treated in the course of research. This treatment may involve manipulations and deceptions in laboratory experiments, sensitive questions in survey research, observations in field studies, or analyses of personal data. Here we will briefly review current ethical standards for the treatment of human subjects and dilemmas in their application. In the chapters on data collection, chapters 5 through 8, we will examine the specific ethical problems that may arise in the course of using particular research methods.

Contemporary standards for the treatment of human subjects are set by the federal government, by professional associations, by special university review boards, and in some cases by ethics committees in other organizations. Federal regulations require that the proposals of researchers seeking federal funds for research on human subjects be reviewed by an institutional review board (IRB) before they are submitted for federal review. IRBs at universities and other agencies in turn apply ethics standards set by government agencies, like the National Institutes of Health, and may develop more specific guidelines of their own. The American Society of Criminology (ASC), one of criminology's professional organizations, is in the process of redrafting its code of ethics, but advises members to seek guidance from similar organizations, including the American Sociological Association (ASA). The ASA's standards (ASA 1997) concerning the treatment of human subjects include federal regulations and ethics guidelines emphasized by most professional social science organizations:
• Research should cause no harm to subjects.
• Participation in research should be voluntary, and therefore subjects must give their informed consent to participate in the research.
• Researchers should fully disclose their identity.
• Anonymity or confidentiality must be maintained for individual research participants, unless it is voluntarily and explicitly waived.
• The benefits of a research project should outweigh any foreseeable risks.

As simple as these guidelines may seem, they are difficult to interpret in specific cases and harder yet to define in a way agreeable to all criminologists. For example, how should we interpret the admonition that no harm should be done to subjects? Consider the question of possible harm to the subjects of a well-known prison simulation study (Haney, Banks, & Zimbardo 1973). The study was designed to investigate the impact of social position on behavior—specifically, the impact of being either a guard or a prisoner in a prison, a total institution. The researchers selected 20 young men whom they judged to be the most stable and mature, and the least antisocial, of 75 applicants. The participants signed a contract agreeing to be either a guard or a prisoner in a simulated prison for two weeks, during which time they would be paid and receive food, clothing, housing, and medical care. Some were randomly selected to be guards and were told to maintain order among the prisoners, who were then incarcerated in a makeshift basement prison. Within the first two days, marked differences in behavior emerged between the two groups. The prisoners acted in a passive and disorganized manner, and the guards became verbally and physically aggressive (although physical abuse was not allowed) and arbitrary. Five prisoners were soon released for depression, uncontrollable crying, fits of rage, and in one case a psychosomatic rash; on the sixth day the researchers terminated the experiment. However, follow-up during the next year indicated no lasting negative effects on the participants and some benefits in the form of greater insight.

Would you ban such experiments because of the potential for harm to subjects? Does the fact that the experiment yielded significant insights into the effect of a situation on human behavior, insights that could be used to improve prisons, make any difference (Reynolds 1979: 133–139)? Do you believe that this benefit outweighed the foreseeable risks?

The requirement of informed consent is also more difficult to define than is at first apparent. To be informed, consent must be given by persons who are competent to consent, have consented voluntarily, are fully informed about the research, and have comprehended what they have been told (Reynolds 1979). Can prisoners give informed consent? Can children or juveniles give their own consent? Can parents or guardians give consent on behalf of their children? Can students who are asked to participate in research by their professor give consent? Can participants in covert experiments do so?

Fully informed consent may alter participation in research and, because signing consent forms prior to participation may change participants’ responses, produce biased results (Larson 1993: 114). In addition, there is always the problem that those persons who give their support in a research project may be quite different from those who do not. This differential selection of participants has implications for both the validity of the reported results and the generalizability of the study. Experimental researchers whose research design requires some type of subject deception try to get around this problem by withholding some information
before the experiment begins but then debriefing subjects at the end. In the debriefing, the researcher explains to the subject what happened in the experiment and why.

Maintaining confidentiality is another key ethical obligation. This standard, however, should be overridden if a health- or life-threatening situation arises and participants need to be alerted. Also, the standard of confidentiality does not apply to observation in public places and information available in public records.

The potential of withholding a beneficial treatment from some subjects is also cause for ethical concern. The Sherman and Berk (1984) experiment required the random assignment of subjects to treatment conditions and thus had the potential of causing harm to the victims of domestic violence whose batterers were not arrested. The justification for the study design, however, is quite persuasive: The researchers did not know prior to the experiment which response to a domestic violence complaint would be most likely to deter future incidents (Sherman 1992). The experiment provided clear evidence about the value of arrest, so it can be argued that the benefits outweighed the risks.

The evaluation of ethical issues in a research project should be based on a realistic assessment of the overall potential for harm to research subjects rather than an apparent inconsistency between any particular aspect of a research plan and a specific ethical guideline. For example, full disclosure of what is really going on in an experimental study is unnecessary if subjects are unlikely to be harmed. Nevertheless, researchers should make every effort to foresee all possible risks and to weigh the possible benefits of the research against these risks.

CONCLUSION

Criminological researchers can find many questions to study, but not all questions are equally worthy. Those that warrant the expense and effort of social research are feasible, socially important, and scientifically relevant.

The simplicity of the research circle presented in this chapter belies the complexity of the social research process. In the following chapters, we will focus on particular aspects of that process.

As you encounter the specifics of research methods in the following chapters, do not lose sight of the basic guidelines that researchers need to follow to overcome the most common impediments to social research. Owning a large social science toolkit is no guarantee of making the right decisions about which tools to use and how to use them in the investigation of particular research problems. More importantly, our answers to research questions will never be complete or entirely certain. Thus, when we complete a research project, we should point out how the research could be extended and evaluate the confidence we have in our conclusions. Recall how the gradual elaboration of knowledge about the deterrence of domestic violence required sensitivity to research difficulties, careful weighing of the evidence, and identification of unanswered questions by several research teams.

Ethical issues should be considered when evaluating research proposals and completed research studies. As the preceding examples show, ethical issues in social research are no less complex than the other issues that researchers confront. It is inexcusable to jump into research on people without any attention to ethical considerations.
Key Terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td>Anomalous finding</td>
<td>Independent variable</td>
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<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>Inductive reasoning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Criminological research question</td>
<td>Inductive research</td>
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<td>Debriefing</td>
<td>Institutional review board (IRB)</td>
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<td>Deductive reasoning</td>
<td>Replication</td>
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<td>Deductive research</td>
<td>Research circle</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dependent variable</td>
<td>Serendipitous finding</td>
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<tr>
<td>Direction of association</td>
<td>Theoretical construct</td>
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<tr>
<td>Empirical generalization</td>
<td>Theory</td>
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<tr>
<td>Falsifiable statement</td>
<td>Variable</td>
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<td>Hypothesis</td>
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Highlights

- Research questions should be feasible (within the time and resources available), socially important, and scientifically relevant.
- Building criminological theory is a major objective of criminological research. Investigate relevant theories before starting criminological projects, and draw out the theoretical implications of research findings.
- The type of reasoning in most criminological research can be described as primarily deductive or inductive. Research based on deductive reasoning proceeds from general ideas, deduces specific expectations from these ideas, and then tests the ideas with empirical data. Research based on inductive reasoning begins with specific data and then develops general ideas or theories to explain patterns in the data.
- It may be possible to explain unanticipated research findings after the fact, but such explanations have less credibility than those that have been tested with data collected for the purpose of the study.
- The scientific process can be represented as circular, with connections from theory to hypotheses to data to empirical generalizations. Research investigations may begin at different points along the research circle and traverse different portions of it. Deductive research begins at the point of theory; inductive research begins with data but ends with theory. Descriptive research begins with data and ends with empirical generalizations.
- Replications of a study are essential to establish its generalizability in other situations. An ongoing line of research stemming from a particular question should include a series of studies that, collectively, traverse the research circle multiple times.
- Criminologists, like all social scientists, should structure their research so that their own ideas can be proved wrong, should disclose their methods for others to critique, and should recognize the possibility of error. Nine specific guidelines are recommended.
- Scientific research should be conducted and reported in an honest and open fashion. Contemporary ethical standards also require that social research not place subjects in any jeopardy, that research subjects be forewarned of any risk to them, that participation be voluntary as expressed in informed consent, that researchers fully disclose their identity, and that researchers fully and honestly report their research findings and sources of financial support.
E X E R C I S E S

Discussing Research

1. State a problem for research related to a criminological topic or issue of interest to you. Write down as many questions as you can about this topic.
   a. Considering your interest, opportunities, and the work for others, which of your research questions does not seem feasible or interesting?
   b. Pick out one question that seems feasible and that your other coursework suggests has been the focus of prior research or theorizing. Write this research question in one sentence. Elaborate on your question in a single paragraph. List at least three reasons why it is a good research question to investigate.

Finding Research

1. Search the scholarly literature on your topic of interest. Refer to Appendix A for guidance on conducting the search if necessary.
   a. Copy at least 10 citations to recent articles reporting research relevant to your research question.
   b. Look up at least three of these articles. Write a brief description of each article, and evaluate its relevance to your research question. What additions or changes to your thoughts about the research question are suggested by these sources?
   c. Would you characterize the findings of these articles as largely consistent or inconsistent? How would you explain discrepant findings?
   d. How well did the authors summarize their work in their abstracts for the articles you consulted? What important points would you have missed if you had relied on only the abstracts?

2. You have been assigned to write a paper on domestic violence and the law. To start, you would like to find out what the American Bar Association’s stance is on the issue. Go to the American Bar Association Commission on Domestic Violence’s website at www.abanet.org/domviol/mrdv/identify.html. What is the American Bar Association’s definition of domestic violence? How does it suggest one can identify a person as a victim of domestic violence?

3. Go to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) website at www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs. Go to “Publications.” Browse the list of publications for topics related to domestic violence. List the titles of all publications focusing on violence between intimate partners. Choose the most recent publication. How does the BJS define “intimate partners?” What are some of the characteristics of intimate partner violence? What trends are identified in the report?

Critiquing Research

1. Using one of the research articles you consulted in the last section, identify and look up one of the cited articles or websites. Compare the cited source to what was said about it in the original article or website. Was the discussion in the cited source accurate?

2. Using the same research article you focused on for the last exercise, identify the stages of the research project corresponding to the points on the research circle. Did the research cover all four stages? Identify the theories and hypotheses underlying the study. What data were collected or utilized for the study? What were the findings (empirical generalizations)?
Making Research Ethical

1. Review the ethical guidelines adopted by the American Sociological Association (1997: 63). Indicate whether you think each guideline was followed in the Sherman and Berk (1984) research on the policy response to domestic violence. If you find it hard to give a simple “yes” or “no” answer for each guideline, indicate the issues that make this evaluation difficult.

2. Concern with how research results are used is one of the hallmarks of ethical researchers, but deciding what form that concern should take is often difficult. You learned in this chapter about the controversy that occurred after Sherman and Berk (1984) encouraged police departments to adopt a pro-arrest policy in domestic abuse cases, based on findings from their Minneapolis study. Do you agree with the researchers’ decision to suggest policy changes to police departments based on their study, in an effort to minimize domestic abuse? Several replication studies failed to confirm the Minneapolis findings. Does this influence your evaluation of what the researchers should have done after the Minneapolis study was completed? What about Larry Sherman’s argument that failure to publicize the Omaha study finding of the effectiveness of arrest warrants resulted in some cases of abuse that could have been prevented? In one paragraph, propose a policy that researchers should follow about how much publicity is warranted and at what point in the research it should occur.

Developing a Research Proposal

The next exercises are very critical first steps in writing a research proposal.

1. State a problem for research. If you have not already identified a problem for study, or if you need to evaluate whether your research problem is doable, a few suggestions should help to get the ball rolling and keep it on course:
   a. Jot down a few questions you have had about some issue. Now take stock of your interests and your opportunities. Which of your research questions no longer seem feasible or interesting?
   b. Write out your research question in one sentence, and elaborate on it in one paragraph. List at least three reasons why it is a good research question for you to investigate.

2. Search the literature (and the web) on the research question you identified. Refer to Appendix A for guidance on conducting the search. Copy down at least 10 citations to articles and five websites reporting research that seems highly relevant to your research question. Inspect the article bibliographies and the links in the website and identify at least one more relevant article and website from each source. What additions or changes to your thoughts about the research question are suggested by the sources?

3. Propose at least two hypotheses that pertain to your research question. Justify these hypotheses in terms of the literature you have read.

4. Which standards for the protection of human subjects might pose the most difficulty for researchers on your proposed topic? Explain your answers and suggest appropriate protection procedures for human subjects.

Performing Data Analysis in SPSS

Browse the variables in YOUTH.POR, a survey of high school youth regarding attitudes toward delinquency and delinquent behavior.
1. From these variables (excluding sex of respondent), write two hypotheses about levels of delinquency (DELINQ1) among high school youth.

2. Create a bar chart for at least one of the variables you hypothesize to be associated with levels of delinquency.

3. Compare the distribution of your chosen variable across gender groups. Select all males (SEX = 1) and request a bar chart of your chosen variable; then select all females (SEX = 2) and generate the bar chart again.

4. Compare the distributions between the two bar charts and formulate a hypothesis as to the relationship between the two variables. Is there a relationship between SEX and your chosen variable?

5. From these results, what do you hypothesize is the relationship between gender and level of delinquency?

Student Study Site

The companion Student Study Website for *The Fundamentals of Research in Criminology and Criminal Justice* can be found at www.sagepub.com/frccjstudy.

Visit the Student Study Site to enhance your understanding of the chapter content and to discover additional resources that will take your learning one step further. You can enhance your understanding of the chapters by using the comprehensive study material, which includes interactive exercises, e-flashcards, web exercises, practice self-tests, and more. You will also find special features, such as Learning from Journal Articles, which incorporates SAGE’s online journal collection.