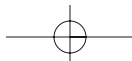
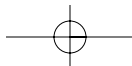
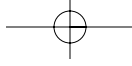


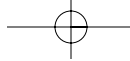


# Functions

**I**







# Research: What, Why, and How

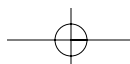
# 1

## Vignette 1-1 The Research Paper

*Research Methods:* It is a required course, so you had no choice but to take it. But, you wondered, how hard could it be? The big project is just preparing to write a research paper. No big deal! You have written several “research papers” in college, so how hard could it be to simply go through the stages to prepare to write such a paper? The first class session is about to begin; you settle into your desk and wait to hear what, exactly, is expected in this course.

As the professor begins the introduction to the class, you recall that other students have said this professor is fair but extremely tough. She has very high expectations of students and does not give too many breaks. Again, no problem—you are not afraid of a little work or a challenge. Besides, you feel that you can write pretty well and have had fairly good grades on previous criminal-justice and criminology papers, so you should do all right. Suddenly your attention is caught when the professor advises the class that anyone who thinks they have written a research paper in their other major courses actually has not—but instead, has written what she calls a “literature review” paper. She explains that what is most often required in most college courses are papers where students choose a topic, find a certain amount of resources or “references,” and then write a descriptive or explanatory paper. Yes, it might have had an introduction, thesis statement, evidence, and a conclusion, but it was not a research paper—at least not in the same sense as what you will be doing in this class.

The instructor continues by noting that in answering the following questions, you will soon see that there is a difference between what you had believed to be a research paper and what a research paper really is. The questions include: What is criminal-justice research? Why conduct the research? How is this research done? The professor finishes by advising the



class that by the end of the first week, you will have been introduced to the foundations for conducting research on criminological and criminal-justice-related topics. So, let the learning begin!

### Chapter Objectives

**After studying this chapter, the student should be able to:**

- Discuss tradition and authority as sources of human learning. Contrast their strengths and weaknesses.
- Present and discuss the errors that plague casual observation.
- Define what is meant by the scientific method. Explain how it seeks to remedy the errors of casual observation.
- Compare and contrast the relationship between theory and research within the inductive- and deductive-logic processes.
- Define research and explain its purpose.
- Compare and contrast basic, applied, and multipurpose research.
- Present and discuss the various types of research.
- Present and discuss the reasons for research in criminal justice and criminology.
- Present and discuss the various factors that influence research decisions.
- Describe the primary steps in conducting research.

The purpose of this text is to assist criminal-justice and criminology students in developing an understanding (and hopefully an appreciation) of the basic principles of social research. We do not seek to turn you into a research scientist in one short course of study. However, we do hope to give you a rudimentary foundation that can be built upon, should you be interested in doing criminological or criminal-justice research in the future. This primer will enable you to grasp the importance of scientific research, to read and comprehend all but the most complex research methodologies of others, and to provide you with the basic tools to conduct your own social research.

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## ■ The Nature of Scientific Inquiry

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It was not that long ago, at least in our minds, that we were criminal-justice students taking a first course in research methods. Our thoughts ran something like this: *We want to be police officers—why do we need to take this course? This is even worse than criminal theory, another useless course. What does it have to do*

*with the real world that we want to work in?* Later, police experience in the “real world” taught us the value of both theory and research in the field of criminal justice. When we subsequently returned to school for graduate studies, the importance of theory and research was more readily apparent to us. We had learned that scientific investigation is very similar to criminal investigation: the use of a logical order and established procedures to solve real-world problems.

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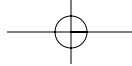
## ■ Social-Science Research and the “Real World”

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As police officers, we (the authors) sought to determine whether a crime had been committed (what occurred and when it occurred), who had done it, how they had done it, and why they had done it. We then sought to use that investigatory knowledge to develop a successful prosecution of the offender. Our endeavors in the field taught us that the theory course that we had grudgingly endured had provided the rationale for human behavior upon which the strategies of policing, courts, and corrections were based. We also discovered that those theories were not developed in some esoteric vacuum. They were, in fact, the products of trial-and-error experiments conducted in policing, the courts, and corrections—experiments that had been refined and reapplied to their appropriate subject area. Today’s police-deployment strategies, legal processes, and correctional techniques are all solidly based on prior theory and research.

The above statements can also be applied to social-science research in general. Typical “real-world” conclusions are often flawed due to a number of issues that cause our observations as well as our reasoning to be inaccurate. The scientific method seeks to provide a means of investigation to correct (or at least limit) the inaccuracies of ordinary human inquiry. Earl Babbie (2004) argues that we learn from direct observation and from what we are taught by others. How we interpret our own observations as well as what we learn from others is based on tradition and authority. Tradition is the cultural teaching about the real world: “Poisonous snakes are dangerous. Beware of them!” You don’t have to be bitten by a rattlesnake to appreciate its hazard. You have been taught by other members of your culture to respect the threat to you. This is an example of positive learning from tradition. It is based on the experiences of others in your society who passed their knowledge on to you. Unfortunately, knowledge based on tradition is often erroneous. “Women are not suited to be police officers. They are too weak and too emotional.” A multitude of highly competent and professional police officers have proved this sexist stereotype to be a fallacy.

The other source of secondhand knowledge cited by Babbie (2004) is authority. Authority refers to new knowledge that is provided from the observations of others whom we respect. The cool aunt or uncle (or older cousin) who explained the “facts of life” to you was an authority figure. How accurate their explanations were, we leave to you to decide. As you got older, you learned that much free advice was worth what you paid for it, and that a great deal of “bought advice” had little value as well. The importance of knowledge gained from au-



thority figures depends on their qualifications relative to the subject being discussed. Therefore, you go to a physician for help with your health problems, and you hire a plumber to fix a broken water pipe. These individuals are expected to have the expertise to provide solutions that laypeople do not have. Like tradition, the knowledge gained from dealings with authority figures can be extremely accurate or highly erroneous.

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## ■ Science Versus Casual Inquiry

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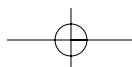
Casual inquiry is influenced by the sources of knowledge discussed in the previous section. In addition, there are other pitfalls that create errors in our own observations. It has been noted that casual inquiry may be flawed due to inaccurate observation, overgeneralization, selective observation, or illogical reasoning (Babbie 2004; Glicken 2003; Leedy and Ormond 2005).

Inaccurate observation occurs when we make conclusions based on hasty or incomplete observations. As an example, a young police officer once walked by a break room where a young records clerk was in tears. Sitting on each side of her were the captain in charge of Internal Affairs and an IA investigator. In a harsh tone of voice, the captain was telling her to stop crying. The officer walking by immediately thought, “Those jerks. They could have at least taken her into their office before interrogating her.” Several years later, the officer, then a sergeant for whom the woman in question now worked, learned that she had been extremely distraught over the breakup of her marriage, and that the captain was a father figure to her who had actually been consoling her.

Overgeneralization occurs when we make conclusions about individuals or groups based on our knowledge of similar individuals or groups. “All lawyers are liars!” would be an example. Despite the preponderance of lawyer jokes and any bad experiences that you or a friend may have had with an attorney, you cannot accurately make that conclusion about all lawyers. There are simply too many attorneys (men and women of honesty and integrity as well as those of questionable ethics) to make such a conclusion without an individual knowledge of the person.

Selective observation is when you see only those things that you want to see. Racial and ethnic stereotyping would be an example of negative selective observation. The attitude that “All whites are racists who seek to oppress minorities” may cause the observer to see what he or she believes in the behaviors of all European Americans with whom they come into contact. Selective observation may also be positively biased: “My darling wonderful child has never done anything like that.” Such selective observation can lead to major disappointment, such as when “He’s a wonderful man who caters to my every whim” becomes “He’s a selfish jerk who doesn’t ever consider my feelings.”

Finally, illogical reasoning happens when we decide that despite our past observations, the future will be different. For example, the individual who plays the lottery, loyally believing that eventually he has to win because someone always does, is an example of illogical reasoning. If the odds of success are unlikely, it is illogical to assume that by sheer willpower you can make it occur.



By imposing order and rigor on our observations, science seeks to reduce the possibility of these common errors occurring. The means of doing so is the application of the scientific method.

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## ■ The Scientific Method

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The scientific method seeks to prevent the errors of casual inquiry by utilizing procedures that specify objectivity, logic, theoretical understanding, and knowledge of prior research in the development and use of a precise-measurement instrument designed to accurately record observations. The result is a systematic search for the most accurate and complete description or explanation of the events or behaviors that are being studied. Just as a criminal investigation is a search for “the facts,” and a criminal trial is a search for “the truth,” the scientific method is a search for knowledge. The criminological researcher seeks to use the principles of empiricism, skepticism, relativism, objectivity, ethical neutrality, parsimony, accuracy, and precision to assess a particular theoretical explanation.

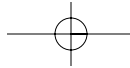
In the above formula, empiricism is defined as seeking answers to questions through direct observation. Skepticism is the search for disconfirming evidence and the process of continuing to question the conclusions and the evidence that are found. Relativism refers to theories whose conceptions are not absolute but rather relative to the individual who proposes that theory. Objectivity mandates that conclusions be based on careful observation that sees the world as it really is, free from personal feelings or prejudices. Criminological researchers often acknowledge that total objectivity is unattainable, but every reasonable effort is made to overcome any subjective interests that might influence the research outcomes. This is known as intersubjectivity. Ethical neutrality builds on objectivity by stressing that the researcher’s beliefs or preferences will not be allowed to influence the research process or its outcomes. Parsimony is the attempt to reduce to the smallest possible number the sum of possible explanations for an event or phenomenon. Accuracy requires that observations be recorded in a correct manner exactly as they occurred. Precision is specifying the number of available subcategories of a concept. (Definitions adapted from Adler and Clark 2003; Fitzgerald and Cox 2001; and Senese 1997.)

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## ■ The Relationship Between Theory and Research

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As was discussed in a prior section, the practice of criminal justice is based on theories about the causes of crime and how to respond to them. Criminology is an academic discipline that studies the nature of crime, its causes, its consequences, and society’s response to it. Criminal justice as an academic discipline tends to focus more on the creation, application, and enforcement of criminal laws to maintain social order. (For a detailed analysis of the complex interrelationships between criminology and criminal justice, *Criminology and Criminal Justice: Comparing, Contrasting, and Intertwining Disciplines* [Dantzker 1998] is recommended reading.) There is so much of an overlap between the two disciplines that within this



text we deal with the two as one discipline (as, indeed, many criminologists and criminal-justice experts consider them to be). Regardless of the reader's orientation, theory is integral to the development of research. Likewise, theory that has been validated by research is the basis for practice in the criminal-justice system.

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## ■ Theory

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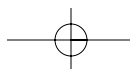
Theory is that which explains how things are in reality, as opposed to what we might want them to be. Personal ideologies are of no value in criminological theory unless they can be evaluated scientifically. We define theory as “an attempt to explain why a particular social activity or event occurs.” A theory is a generalization about the phenomenon that is being studied. From this broad theory, more-precise statements (concepts) are developed. Specific measurable statements are hypotheses. It is through observation and measurement that the validity (correctness or ability to actually predict what it seeks to examine) of a hypothesis is examined. If the hypothesis cannot be rejected, then support for the theory is shown. The method by which the hypothesis is observed and measured is research. The relationship between theory and research may be either inductive or deductive in nature.

### Inductive Logic

In the stories by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, his detective hero Sherlock Holmes continuously assails Dr. Watson, a man of science, about the merits of “deductive logic.” It is through deductive logic that Holmes is said to solve his cases. In actuality, the process that Holmes describes is inductive logic. In this process, the researcher observes an event, makes empirical generalizations about the activity, and constructs a theory based on them. Only rarely does Holmes engage in the deduction of which he speaks so highly. Another example of inductive logic would be Sir Isaac Newton's alleged formulation of the theory of gravity after observing an apple fall from a tree.

### Deductive Logic

Deductive logic begins with a theoretical orientation. The researcher then develops research hypotheses that are tested by observations. These observations lead to empirical generalizations that either support or challenge the theory in question. Had our hero Holmes followed up his theory construction with such observation, he then would have been engaged in deduction. The scientific method is based on deductive-theory construction and testing. In criminological research, the distinctions between inductive and deductive logic are often obscured because the two processes are actually complementary. Although it has been described as a circular model (Babbie 2004; Wallace 1971), the elements of both inductive and deductive logic may also be viewed as part of a never-ending continuum that begins with theory, which encourages creation of hypotheses, which in turn calls for observations. The result of observations is generalizations, and the conclusions of the generalizations assist in modification of the theory.





## The Purpose of Research

The average college student truly believes he or she knows what it means to conduct research. Many have written a “research paper” either in high school or for a college course. Realistically, though, few have ever had the opportunity to truly write a research paper because even fewer have ever conducted scientific research.

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## ■ What Research Is

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*Research* is the conscientious study of an issue, problem, or subject. It is a useful form of inquiry designed to assist in discovering answers. It can also lead to the creation of new questions. For example, a judge wants to know how much effect her sentencing has had on individuals convicted of drug possession, particularly as it compares to another judge’s sentencing patterns. She asks that research be conducted that focuses on recidivism of these individuals. The results indicate that 30 percent of drug offenders sentenced in her court are rearrested, compared with only 20 percent from the other judge’s court. In comparing the two courts, the inquiring judge has discovered that her sentencing does not appear to be as effective. This answered the primary question of the research, but it has also created new questions, such as, Why are her methods not working as well as those of the other judge?

Research creates questions, but ultimately, regardless of the subject or topic under study, it is the goal of research to provide answers. One of the more common uses of the term *research* is a description of what a student might be asked to accomplish for a college class. Many times you hear instructors and students refer to the choosing of a topic, using several sources, and writing a descriptive paper on the topic as research. If done thoroughly and objectively, this may actually constitute qualitative research (discussed in detail in Chapter 5). Unfortunately, these “research papers” are too often essays based more on the individual’s ideologies than on scientific discovery. For the purpose of this text, the emphasis shall be on *empirical research* that yields scholarly results.

There are many formal definitions for the term research. We use the following: *Research is the scientific investigation into or of a specifically identified phenomenon* (Dantzker 1998, 128), and is applicable to recognizable and undiscovered phenomena. Therefore, in terms of criminal justice and criminology, related research can be viewed as *the investigation into or of any phenomenon linked to any or all aspects of the criminal-justice system*.

Using this definition, criminal justice and criminological research are not limited to any one area.

Along with the plethora of research topics, there are several methods for conducting the research. They include surveys, observation, conducting case studies, and reviewing official records. These methods will be discussed in further detail, but before we do so, it is important to understand all the underlying characteristics of research. To begin with, criminal justice and criminological research are often divided into two forms: applied and basic.

## Applied Research

Perhaps the most immediately useful type of research in criminal justice is applied research, which is primarily an inquiry of a scientific nature designed and conducted with practical application as its goal. In other words, applied research is the collection of data and the analysis of the collected data with respect to a specific issue or problem so that the applications of the results can influence change (see **Box 1-1**).

A major form of applied research is evaluative research, which focuses on answering questions (Eck and La Vigne 1994, 6) such as:

1. *Is the program, policy, or procedure doing what it was meant to do?*
2. *If not, how is the program, policy, or procedure deficient?*
3. *How can it be improved?*
4. *Should it be continued as is, changed, or discontinued?*

In essence, applied research provides answers that can be used to improve, change, or help decide to eliminate the focus of study. It can be quite useful to criminal-justice practitioners. Despite its usefulness, applied research is not conducted as frequently in criminology or criminal-justice research as is basic research.

## Basic Research

Basic research, sometimes referred to as “pure” research, is the conducting of scientific inquiries that may offer little “promise or expectation of immediate, direct relevance” (Talarico 1980, 3). Instead, it is concerned with the acquisition of new information for the purpose of helping develop the scholarly discipline or field of study in which the research is being conducted. This type of research is more often consistent with criminological inquiries. The more common nature of this research is descriptive, and tries to respond to such questions as:

1. *How big is the issue or problem?*
2. *Whom or what does the issue or problem affect?*
3. *What causes the issue or problem? (Eck and La Vigne 1994, 5)*

### Box 1-1

#### Applied-Research Topics: Some Examples

##### Policing:

Stress, patrol effectiveness, use of force, job satisfaction, response times

##### Courts:

Types of sentencing, plea bargaining, race and sentencing, jury versus judge verdicts, death penalty

##### Corrections:

Rehabilitation versus punishment, effectiveness of programs, boot camps, prisonization

##### Others:

Criminal behavior, victimization, drugs, gangs, juvenile criminality

## METHODOLOGICAL

**LINKS**

To evaluate the effectiveness of Florida's mandatory human-diversity course for police and correctional officers, Ford and Williams (1999) conducted a survey among justice personnel who had completed the course. Their findings indicated that the course was seen as important, but did little to change on-the-job conduct.

Metraux and Culhane (2004) examined the incidence of and interrelationships between shelter use and reincarceration among a cohort of 48,424 people. Their findings suggested that more use of shelters limited reincarceration rates.

The findings from basic research often have little if any applicable usage in the field of criminal justice. However, such research may become the foundation upon which subsequent applied research and criminal-justice policy are based. It is such research that leads to the development of the criminological theories that guide the actions of lawmakers, police, courts, and corrections.

**Multipurpose Research**

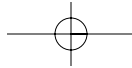
Both basic and applied research are vital to the study of crime and justice. However, a good portion of the research conducted by criminal-justice and criminological academicians tends to come under a third area of research

## METHODOLOGICAL

**LINKS**

Mueller, Giacomazzi, and Wada (2004) surveyed panel chairs from the 2003 Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences meeting. Although this research does not appear to have any direct value to criminal-justice policy or processes, its outcomes could help steer the direction of future conferences.

Garrder, Rodrigues, and Zatz (2004) examined whether and how gender, race/ethnicity, and class influence perceptions held by juvenile-court personnel, and how such perceptions may contribute to the already-limited treatment options for girls. Initially, the results of this research may not seem as if they would have any application. However, findings could assist in developing better training for court personnel on how to not let their perceptions cloud their judgment.



most accurately called *multipurpose research*. Multipurpose research is the scientific inquiry into an issue or problem that can be both descriptive and evaluative—that is, it is between the basic and applied realms. This type of research generally begins as exploratory, but is of such a nature that its results could ultimately be applicable. For example, a police chief is interested in the level of job satisfaction among his sworn employees. A job-satisfaction survey is conducted that offers a variety of findings related to officers' satisfaction. From a basic perspective, the data may simply describe how officers perceive their jobs, thus becoming descriptive in nature. However, these same findings could be used to evaluate the police agency by examining those areas where satisfaction is the lowest, and leading to efforts to determine how to improve them. This is the applied nature of the research. The result is research that is multipurpose.

Whether applied, basic, or multipurpose, research can provide interesting findings about a plethora of problems, events, issues, or activities. Regardless of the strategies utilized, criminological and criminal-justice research are necessary for understanding both crime and criminality as well as for developing suitable responses.

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## ■ Types of Research

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Prior to conducting research, one must understand something about research; that is, one must first study how research is correctly conducted. At some point in one's college career or during one's employment, a person may be asked to "look into something" or "research this topic." Often the individual has no clue where to look, how to begin, or what to look for. Then, once the information is obtained, the person may not understand how the information was found and what it actually means.

The primary reason for studying research is to be able to attain a better understanding of why it was done and how it may be used. Ultimately, if we do not understand what research is and how it works, we cannot understand the products of research. Therefore, the answer to why we study research is the same as the reason why we conduct research: to gain knowledge. This knowledge may occur in one of four formats or types: descriptive, explanatory, predictive, or intervening knowledge.

### Descriptive Research

Knowledge that is descriptive allows us to understand what something is. Research of this nature helps us to gain a better grasp about an issue or problem we know little about. In other words, it tends to define or describe what we are trying to understand. This type of research is also very popular regarding opinions and perceptions.

Descriptive knowledge is a very common result of criminal-justice and criminological research. Although the results may be very informative, what can be done with this knowledge is often limited.



## METHODOLOGICAL

**LINKS**

Women have taken part in many forms of crime in the United States. One area we know little about is women in organized crime. To provide some insight into this arena of thought, Liddick (1999) examined the role of women in the numbers-gambling industry in New York City. The study's findings about women in this extremely lucrative form of criminality provided knowledge that had previously been unknown.

Ventura, Lambertt, Bryant, and Pasupuleti (2004) examined the differences in attitudes toward gays and lesbians among criminal-justice and non-criminal-justice majors. This research, although limited to one university, offered insight into attitudinal differences among students at this university, especially those majoring in criminal justice. Another example of descriptive research is Vaughn, Del Carmen, Perfecto, and Charand (2004), who offered a strictly descriptive study of the journals in criminal justice and criminology.

## Explanatory Research

Explanatory research tries to tell us *why* something occurs, or the causes behind it. This research can be very important when trying to understand why certain types of individuals become serial murderers, or what factors contribute to criminality. Knowing the causes behind something can assist in finding ways to counteract the behavior or the problem.

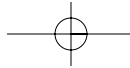
## Predictive Research

Knowledge that is predictive in nature helps to establish future actions. This type of research can be useful to all criminal-justice practitioners. For example, if research indicates that a large percentage of juveniles placed in boot-camp environments are less likely to become adult offenders, these results could be used in the future sentencing of juvenile offenders. Conversely, if boot camps are shown

## METHODOLOGICAL

**LINKS**

Why do people fear crime? What perpetuates this fear? Weitzer and Kubrin (2004) examined the role of the media in shaping crime fears. Kingsnorth and Macintosh (2004) examined more than 5,000 cases of domestic violence in an attempt to discover predictors of victim support for official action.



## METHODOLOGICAL

**LINKS**

Metraux and Culhane (2004) examined the incidence of and interrelationships between shelter use and reincarceration among a cohort of 48,424 people. Their findings suggested that more use of shelters limited reincarceration rates. The predictive value of these findings could assist in postsentencing decisions.

to have little or no effect, other alternatives may then be explored. Predictive knowledge gives some foresight into what may happen if something is implemented or tried. Because one of the concerns of criminal justice is to lower criminality, predictive knowledge could be quite useful in attaining this end.

### Intervening Research

Finally, intervening knowledge allows one to intercede before a problem or issue gets too difficult to address. This type of research can be quite significant when a problem arises that currently available means are not addressing properly. Research on the effectiveness of certain community-policing programs is a good example of intervening research. It can demonstrate whether a specific type of action taken before a given point will provide the desired results. For example, current research has shown that community-policing initiatives from “foot patrol to limiting pay phones to outgoing calls,” has helped meet desired outcomes of lowering drug-related crimes. (See Brodeur 1998; Rosenbaum 1994.)

Whether the research is descriptive, explanatory, predictive, or intervening, it is important to understand what research is and how it is valuable. If one fails to study research in and of itself, then all research is of little value. This becomes especially true for the criminal-justice and criminological academic or practitioner who wants to make use of previously conducted research or to conduct his or her own. It is important to have a grasp of what research is and why it is conducted, before one can actually conduct research.

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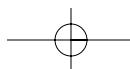
## ■ Why Research Is Necessary

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There are a number of specific reasons for conducting criminal-justice or criminological research. Three primary reasons include curiosity, addressing social problems, and the development and testing of theories.

### Curiosity

Wanting to know about an existing problem, issue, policy, or outcome is being curious. For example, in an earlier Methodological Link, Mueller, Giacomazzi, and Wada (2004) were interested in the perceptions of panel chairs from a na-



tional conference. One might say that the study by Vaughn, Del Carmen, Perfecto, Charand (2004) was also a study of curiosity.

## Social Problems

The most salient social problem related to criminal justice is crime. Who commits it? Why do they act as they do? How do they do it? These are questions of interest for many criminal-justice and criminological practitioners and academics. Concern over the effects of crime on society only adds further reason to conduct related research. This research can help identify who is more likely to commit certain crimes and why, how to better deal with the offenders and the victims, and what specific parts of the system can do to help limit or alleviate crime. As a major social problem, crime provides many reasons for research as well as avenues for exploration.

## Theory Testing

Linked more closely with pure criminological research, theories provide good cause to conduct research. The relationship between theory and research was discussed earlier in this chapter. Theory construction will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

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## ■ Factors That Influence Research Decisions

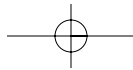
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Regardless of why the research is conducted, one must be cognizant of factors that can influence why the research is conducted and how it is conducted. Of the many influential factors, the three that appear to be the most important are social and political, practicality, and ethical considerations (Kaplan 1963; Kimmel 1988, 1996; Leedy and Ormond 2005)

The social and political influences are often specific to the given research. Criminology and criminal justice as social sciences are greatly influenced by social and political events that are taking place in society. For example, race and ethnicity, economics, and gender might be influential on research about prison environments. Research on whether a particular law is working might have political ramifications. The inability of the criminal-justice system to address problems identified by research may be due not to the lack of system resources, but to the lack of social desire or political will for the system to do so.

When it comes to conducting research, practicality can play an extremely important role. Economics and logistics are two elements of practicality. How much will the research cost? Can it be conducted in an efficient and effective manner? Would the benefits that are anticipated justify the social, political, and economic costs? Would limited resources be taken from other areas? These are just some of the questions of practicality that could influence the conducting of research and the subsequent uses of that research.

Because ethics plays an important role in conducting research, a more in-depth discussion is offered in Chapter 4. It is briefly noted here that there are three ethical considerations of importance: invasion of privacy, deception, and potential harm. Within a free society, citizens jealously protect their rights to



privacy. These rights are not just expected by citizens but are protected by law. Deception can have adverse effects not only on the research findings but also on the individuals who were deceived by the researcher. Harm to others, especially to those who did not willingly accept such risks, must be avoided. Each of these concepts will be explored in greater detail later.

Whatever the reason, researchers must be aware of the influences that have led to the research and those that might affect the research outcomes. Each could be detrimental to the outcome of the research.

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## ■ How Research Is Done

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Whether the research is applied or basic, qualitative or quantitative (to be discussed in later chapters), certain basic steps are applicable to each. There are five primary steps in conducting research:

1. Identifying the research problem
2. Research design
3. Data collection
4. Data analysis
5. Reporting of results

Each of these will be given greater attention later in the text, but a brief introduction here is appropriate.

### Identifying the Problem

Prior to starting a research project, one of the most important steps is recognizing and defining what is going to be studied. Identifying or determining the problem, issue, or policy to be studied sets the groundwork for the rest of the research. For example, embarking on the study of crime can be too great an undertaking without focusing on a specific aspect of crime, such as types, causes, or punishments. Therefore, it is important to specify the target of the research first. Doing this makes completing the remaining stages easier.

### Research Design

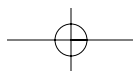
The research design is the “blueprint,” which outlines how the research is to be conducted. Although the design will depend on the nature of the research, there are several common designs used in criminal justice and criminology. Various designs will be presented in this section. They will be discussed in detail in later chapters.

#### Survey Research

Conducting surveys is one of the most often employed methods of research. This approach obtains data directly from the targeted source(s) and is often conducted through self-administered or interview questionnaires.

#### Field Research

Field research is when researchers gather data through firsthand observations of their targets. For example, if a researcher wanted to learn more about gang





membership and activities, he or she might try “running” with a gang as a participant-observer.

### Experimental Research

Experimental research is also observational research. Unlike field research, however, observational studies involve the administration of research stimuli to participants in a controlled environment. Due to ethical and economic concerns, this kind of experimental research is conducted less frequently in criminal justice than are other research strategies.

### Life Histories or Case Studies

Probably one of the simplest methods of research in criminology and criminal justice is through the use of life histories or case studies. Often these studies require the review and analysis of documents such as police reports, court records, medical histories, and so forth. This type of research might focus on violent behavior where the researcher investigates the lives of serial murderers to try and comprehend why the perpetrators acted as they did.

### Record Studies

When researchers evaluate and analyze official records for relevant data, they employ the *records study* research design. For example, to determine patterns and influences of robbery, the research design might utilize data from Uniform Crime Reports.

### Content Analysis

In this research design, documents, publications, or presentations are reviewed and analyzed. A researcher might review old documents to determine how crime events were publicized in a prior century, or may monitor current television broadcasts to assess how the entertainment media influence public perceptions of crime.

Despite the options these designs offer, other design methods are possible, but will be discussed later in the text. Ultimately, the design used will depend on the nature of the study.

## Data Collection

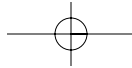
Regardless of the research design, data collection is a key component. A variety of methods (which will receive greater attention later in the text) exist. They include surveys, interviews, observations, and previously existing data.

## Data Analysis

How to analyze and interpret the data is more appropriately discussed in another course, perhaps one focusing on statistics. Still, it is an important part of the design and cannot be ignored. The most common means for data analysis today is through the use of a computer and specifically oriented software.

## Reporting

The last phase of any research project is the reporting of the findings. This can be done through various means: reports, journals, books, or computer presentations. How the findings are reported will depend on the target audience. Regardless



of the audience or the medium used, the findings must be coherent and understandable or they are of no use to anyone.

Before leaving this section, there is one last area worthy of a brief discussion. Information has been offered on why and how to conduct research, but when is it inappropriate to conduct that research?

Often it appears that research is conducted with little concern as to its appropriateness. Failing to consider this might render the findings useless. Therefore, it is necessary that the prospective researcher be able to answer all the following questions with a negative response (Eck and La Vigne 1994, 39):

1. *Does the research problem involve question(s) of value rather than fact?*
2. *Is the solution to the research question already predetermined, effectively annulling the findings?*
3. *Is it impossible to conduct the research effectively and efficiently?*
4. *Are the research issues vague and ill-defined?*

If the answer to any of these questions is yes, the research in question should be avoided.

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## ■ Summary

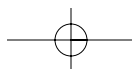
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Conducting criminological research goes beyond looking up material on a subject and writing a descriptive paper. Prior to conducting research, one must understand what it is, why it is, and how it might be conducted.

For the purposes of this text, criminal-justice and criminological research are defined together as *the investigation into or of any phenomenon linked to any or all aspects of the criminal-justice system*. The type of research conducted can be applied, basic, or multipurpose. A primary reason for conducting research is to gain knowledge, which can be descriptive, explanatory, predictive, or intervening in nature. Studying research is required to better understand the results offered.

All research tends to follow five basic steps: recognizing and defining a problem, issue, or policy for study; designing the research; collecting data through survey, interviews, observation, or examining previously collected data; analyzing the data; and reporting the findings. Finally, it is important to determine whether it is prudent to conduct the research in question.

Research plays a very important role in criminal justice and criminology. It brings questions and answers, debates, and issues. Knowing what the research is, why it is done, and how it can be accomplished is necessary if one is to study crime and criminal behavior.



## METHODOLOGICAL QUERIES

1. Your roommate has just returned from the first day of classes and says that he has to write two research papers. What questions will you ask in reference to these papers?
2. What is the first thing you need to do to prepare to start your first criminal-justice research paper? What will affect or influence this decision?
3. You have chosen a topic that fits the “multipurpose” research mode. What is that topic? Explain how it fits the applied and basic categories.
4. Identify and discuss what items might make researching your topic inappropriate.

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