

**PAMELA DAVIES   PETER FRANCIS**

# **DOING CRIMINOLOGICAL RESEARCH**

**THIRD  
EDITION**

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B 1/1 1 Mohan Cooperative Industrial Area  
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Editor: Natalie Aguilera  
Assistant editor: Delayna Spencer  
Production editor: Sarah Cooke  
Copyeditor: Sharon Cawood  
Proofreader: William Baginsky  
Indexer: Judith Lavender  
Marketing manager: Susheel Gokarakonda  
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## GLOSSARY TERMS

decision making	primary data
research questions	secondary data
reflexivity	interview
generalizability	participant observation
research design	ethnography
validity	case study
research proposal	

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# DECISION MAKING AND REFLEXIVITY IN DOING CRIMINOLOGICAL RESEARCH

PAMELA DAVIES AND PETER FRANCIS

## INTRODUCTION

Criminology as a subject of study is diverse, wide-ranging, international and fragmented. It is carried out by a variety of researchers (for example, students, academics, policy analysts and practitioners) who study and work within a variety of institutions (for example, universities, central and local government, criminal justice agencies, voluntary and third-sector bodies), working with a variety of different discipline bases (for example, sociology, politics, psychology, geography, economics, history, law and business). Criminologists are likely to ask questions about the following: the nature of crime and its extent; the perpetrators of crime; victims of crime; institutions of the criminal justice system and their workings; and how each of these interacts with wider social structural dimensions such as power, inequality, age, social class, gender, sexuality, race and ethnicity. Typical research questions might include ‘How much crime is there and how is it geographically and socially distributed?’; ‘What kinds of people commit crimes?’; ‘Are there any patterns to victimization in society?’; ‘In what ways does the criminal justice system discriminate against categories of people?’. Such research questions are broad but are an essential element in decisions about what to study and what to research.

Your criminological imagination can be stimulated in all manner of ways and yet, for some of us, turning ideas into research projects can be quite daunting, and difficult. Starting to do criminological research may be individualized, but, more likely than not, it often starts as a collaborative effort, whether working alongside a supervisor, with co-investigators as part of a wider research team, or with research partners, sometimes stretching across geographical boundaries and sometimes across strategic corporate organizations and businesses. Doing criminological research is something we can all do, but it does require particular disciplinary knowledge, abilities and skills, and we all need to engage in critical reflection and continue to grow and develop our own thinking and approach to doing it. Often, that can be done by learning from the mistakes and errors that we make in doing research – it does not always go as planned. We can also learn from what our peers – supervisors, colleagues, reviewers, markers, etc. – say about it. You may find yourself taking risks that pay off or that lead to disappointing results. Your criminological imagination may sometimes need to be reined in and tempered as you realize the practical considerations, and ethical and professional standards that are demanded and expected by your supervisors, peers and professional bodies.

In putting together this book, we have been keen to address the needs of those of you who are fairly new to doing criminological research, but whose criminological imagination is flourishing. You may well be an undergraduate criminology student or a postgraduate researcher. However, you may also be an academic lecturer who is teaching doing criminological research or supervising masters or postgraduate



researchers. And we have also been keen to acknowledge that much criminological research is now conducted within organizations, third-sector bodies and public and private institutions. We have therefore attempted to acknowledge that there are a variety of researchers who would find a book on doing criminological research helpful and useful. With that in mind, we have not only tried to bring together the end-to-end cycle of doing criminological research within a single volume, we have also been keen to build on the real strengths of earlier editions of this book – that is, bringing together some of the best researchers doing criminology and letting them tell it like it is – warts and all. For us, this is the best way to learn – from the best there are, and from honest and reflective accounts of doing criminological research in the field. There is no better way – apart from doing it yourself. In delivering our vision for the book, we kept in mind a number of golden threads – or cross-cutting themes – that we wanted the book and its contributors to address. These are discussed below.

### Golden threads and cross-cutting themes

The first golden thread that runs throughout the book and its chapters is that doing research involves engaging in a process of **decision making**. *Doing Criminological Research* commences by stressing the importance of: preparing and planning your research; designing your research project such that it will shed a light on your **research questions**; reflective thinking about decisions you have made and are making; and forward thinking about how you will undertake the research and analyse, write up and present it. Focusing on decision making at the preparation and planning stage encourages you to take decisions to rule out, as far as possible, potential risks and threats to the validity of your conclusions (see more below). One key initial decision concerns the choice of subject matter of research, or what is sometimes referred to as the research problem. This decision is pivotal because the research subject or problem provides the main focus for your research project and is a major influence on subsequent decisions about the ways in which your project is to be accomplished.

Another key decision that the book is concerned with is the kinds of methods to use and the sorts of data to collect. Crucially, each decision must be properly reasoned and justified to ensure that the research is as valid, reliable and robust as it can be. All of the chapters explore the many ways in which criminological research is entered into and carried out. They consider the exciting and innovative ways in which criminological researchers execute their research. This book assembles a collection of chapters that illustrate the importance of planning, preparing, doing and presenting criminological research, with each of the contributors giving some thought to these various stages. Importantly, they do this by drawing on their own experiences of doing criminology in the field, and by describing and reflecting on the decisions they made throughout that process.

The second golden thread that runs throughout the book and its chapters is that of the excitement, fun and reward of doing high-quality criminological research. Despite the need for good decision making, in what is often an uncertain and messy environment of working, doing criminological research is really exciting. Whether you are a third-year undergraduate student embarking on your dissertation; a postdoctoral researcher undertaking a funding council fellowship; an associate professor or a professor of criminology leading a collaborative research project, outlining the topic and the reasons for the research, developing your thinking and ideas as the evidence unfolds against a research question that you have formulated in light of an identified problem, can be hugely rewarding. Why wouldn't it be – after all, it involves doing what you want to do, in an area that you are interested in, with the intention of generating new and original research outputs and outcomes. Done well, it can stoke the criminological imagination; certainly it can ensure curiosity, challenge and criticality remain central to your thinking and practice – essential for being a good researcher. With this in mind, central to this book is the importance of the criminological imagination to doing criminological research. Indeed, each contributor focuses on how criminological research is accomplished. Each chapter does so through illustrations and exemplifications from those who have experienced doing criminological research in the field – even when their field is an office, library, archive and desk!

A third golden thread that runs throughout the book and its chapters is that despite the best-laid plans, the practice and experience of doing criminological research can be, and often is, different to that envisaged. That is, whilst decision making is key, sometimes those decisions may turn out to be wrong, or sometimes you may well need to make additional decisions that run counter to those you first made, to address errors in previous thinking or issues that have arisen in practice. Research is a social activity often influenced by factors external to and outside the control of the investigator. It is not possible to escape the reality that even the best-laid plans and designs have to be actualized in social, institutional, economic, cultural and political contexts. Many of these factors, often in different combinations, can be constraints and can have a profound effect on the outcome of research. Feminist scholars have long argued that 'methodology matters' (Stanley, 1993), yet it remains usual for the messiness of research to be sanitized, de-emotionalized and glossed over in published reports. Following Stanley and Wise (1993), Letherby (2003: 79) reminds us of the "dirtiness" of so-called "hygienic" research'. The untold hours of personal, ethical and reflexive pondering that goes on in preparing for and planning criminological research, around research design and operationalization, entry to the field, during fieldwork, on exiting the field and in the analysis, writing up, dissemination, conclusion and impact of research, are rarely acknowledged. This is often hard and challenging emotional toil and labour which researchers do and experience,

yet often they are encouraged to pretend they do not. Contributors to this volume dwell on some of these details and reflect, where possible, on how they might have overcome them.

The fourth and final golden thread that runs throughout the book and its chapters is the importance of **reflexivity**. In the main, social and criminological researchers are concerned with individuals – although not always at first hand – and these are people with feelings, opinions, motives, likes and dislikes. What is more, typically, criminological research is a form of interaction and what comes to pass as ‘knowledge’ can be the result of interactions in the research process. We have already noted that decision making is a theme that we see as key to conducting criminological research from start to finish. Reflecting on the decisions which have been taken in research and on the problems which have been encountered is an essential element of doing research. In fact, it is often the case that a reflexive account is published as part of a research report or a book; indeed, whole articles, chapters and even books have been written on this very topic. Typically, such an account covers all phases and aspects of the research process. For example, it will outline and discuss how a research problem came to take the shape that it did, how and why certain cases were selected for study and not others, the difficulties faced in data collection, and the various influences on the formulation of conclusions and their publication. Reflexive accounts should not be solely descriptive but should also be analytical and evaluative. Reflexivity is not a self-indulgent exercise akin to showing photographs to others to illustrate the ‘highs’ and ‘lows’ of a recent holiday. Rather, it is a vital part of demonstrating the factors which have contributed to the social production of knowledge. The contributors to this book reflect on, and offer transparent accounts of, the various constraints and impediments to research, the decisions they made, the operational rules they followed and the methodological choices they often had to continuously ‘make up’ during the research process, in order to ensure their research stands up to ethical scrutiny and is valid.

## Reading and using *Doing Criminological Research*

*Doing Criminological Research* is a hugely successful book. This third edition is completely new and refocused. Of course, the previous two editions had strengths, namely:

- the focus on decision making and reflexivity throughout the research process
- the range of examples and case studies used to demonstrate different methods in practice
- the accessibility of the book and the learning features used throughout.

However, this new edition offers much more than those previous volumes, builds further on their strengths, by expanding the scope and depth of methodological interrogation and breadth of contributors doing criminological research in new, innovative, dynamic and novel ways. It is our belief that this third edition represents a single point of reference and a comprehensive resource. We have been keen to identify a common format for each chapter that helps your reading and understanding in order to:

- ensure consistency in approach and to secure a thorough review of all aspects of the academic and scholarly research literature
- strengthen the student-centred nature of the book, allowing for a focused, accessible and user-friendly approach
- provide a more useful and ‘ready-made’ teaching and learning tool
- signpost theoretical, research, practical and reflective aspects of the book.

Where relevant, each chapter offers:

- a concise critical overview and review of the academic and scholarly research on particular related topics
- a robust discussion of the literature on the methodology and methods used
- an examination of the use of the methods in practice
- judicious use of presenting visual material (lists, bullet points, tables, boxes, etc.)
- summary/review sections, questions/activities, suggested further readings, creating a more interactive internal structure generally.

Chapters variously also incorporate the following features:

- enhanced and consistent use of definitions and explanations, key themes, concepts, terminologies, etc.
- greater and more specific cross-referencing for ease and speed of use within and between chapters – signposts (jigsaws) throughout the text direct you to the glossary
- textual illustration and exemplification/case studies
- good use of diagrammatic illustration and visual imagery, such as tables, boxes, extracts
- questions within each chapter as well as tasks to complete.

*Doing Criminological Research* (third edition) is a book that can be read from start to finish, yet it is also a book that can be dipped into, with individual chapters serving as resources in their own right and relating to specific and particular aspects of doing criminological research. We hope that you enjoy it.

## THINKING CRITICALLY ABOUT DOING CRIMINOLOGICAL RESEARCH

Here, we pull out the salient structural elements of the book and its chapters, and offer new and additional material that we think will help you develop not only your approach to doing criminological research, but also your criminological imagination.

### Defining the topic, cases, context and time

Deciding ‘what to study’ and what your research problem is together form the first important decision you have to make. There must be some initial statement of the territory to be examined. This acts as a benchmark against which progress is measured. One of the hallmarks of effective research is the clear formulation of research problems and questions. These will guide you as the researcher to constantly return to key issues, whilst not acting as strait-jackets to inhibit creative inquiry (and possibly reformulation of the research problem) as the project progresses. One of the hallmarks of ineffective research is a research problem which allows an investigator to lose his or her way, with the outcome that conclusions do not address what was intended. A key decision, then, concerns topic – what to study? For most criminologists, the starting point for a research topic is an idea or a topic that is of interest to them, the source of which may be many and varied and can include personal interest, the research literature, social problems or a new development in society.

Typically, research questions begin by being broad and unfocused. What is more, they form a platform for making decisions about who to study, where and when. That is, there are decisions not just about topic but also about cases, context, and time. Broad research questions can be refined and reformulated to be more incisive and penetrative to take the form of, for example, ‘How do urban and rural areas (context) differ in terms of victimization of racially motivated crimes (cases) in the period between 1980 and 2010 (time)?’ In this way, decisions are taken to open up some dimensions of a broad topic to inquiry and not others. Peter Francis in Chapter 2 describes the process of formulating research questions.

### End purpose of research

Many factors influence decisions about the topic, cases, context and time, one of the most important of which is the end purpose of research. For example, where an investigator is commissioned to evaluate the introduction of some aspect of crime prevention policy, or a particular initiative, the selection of topic, cases, context and time will typically be specified in advance by the sponsor. Rob White, in Chapter 22, explores in detail the process and opportunities that come with doing criminological evaluation, and, importantly, he offers some reflection on the similarities and

differences between criminological research and evaluation research. Box 1.1 details an example of an evaluation project that was designed by the police. This new approach to tackling domestic abuse by serial perpetrators had five key objectives, and the evaluation needed to be designed such that it could report on the outcomes with respect to these after one year and then again at the end of a two-year period.



Even where there is a commitment to a broad academic aim of making some contribution to knowledge and to theory, it will be necessary to ground empirical inquiry in specific cases, contexts and time periods. The significance of decisions about such ‘grounding’ lies in the limits of **generalizability**. That is, all research takes place in particular contexts, studying particular cases at specific times, and yet aims to make broad claims beyond the particularistic scope of inquiry. The extent to which it can do so depends on the representativeness and typicality of the contexts, cases and times which have been chosen. The project referred to in Box 1.1 was confined to a northern police region. The evaluation was case (domestic abuse), context (the MATAC), area (northern area) and time specific (over two years). Though there are general principles that might be replicated in other areas and thus there may be some aspects of the approach that are generalizable, it is not possible to claim that the results can be generalized. The end purpose of this research was for the local commissioners and project team.

### BOX 1.1 DESIGNING AN EVALUATION OF A MULTI-AGENCY PROJECT AND STUDY QUESTION

Evaluation of an approach to tackling domestic abuse developed in a northern police area. Multi-Agency Tasking and Co-ordination (MATAC) was launched as a new approach to tackling perpetrators of domestic abuse. MATAC had five key objectives:

- to prevent further domestic abuse related to offending
- to improve victim safety
- to improve criminal justice system outcomes
- to improve offender behaviour
- to improve partnership engagement.

Study question: What sorts of data would you need to collect to measure whether or not these objectives were met by the project?

## International, cross-cultural and comparative research

Sometimes, the research is much broader in outlook, reach and scope. With the forces of globalization impacting more readily in late modern society on crime, victimization and criminal justice (see, for example, Loader and Sparks, 2007),

criminologists have become much more open to exploring doing criminological research in a comparative, cross-cultural and global context. That has required different approaches to doing criminological research, in order to address the many challenges that arise once the focus of the research becomes wider, broader and bigger. In some instances, you might be wondering what these problems are – much of the world is similar and offers similar approaches to the control and regulation of crime. Crime in one country is similar to that in another. And, yes, some are. But, as the International Crime Victims Survey (ICVS) identifies, there remains significant variation within and between countries relating to crime, victimization and experiences of criminal justice (see van Dijk, 2015; van Kesteren et al., 2014). Indeed, language challenges aside, criminal justice approaches differ significantly, as do definitional and conceptual understandings, not least with regards what we may see as simple terms such as crime and victims. Thus, alongside social, political and economic factors, globalization can and does impact considerably on how criminological research is carried out, with what tools and methodological approaches, and with what success. Matthew Hall, in Chapter 20, provides a good overview of the various approaches, challenges and opportunities of doing criminological research in a globalized, late modern world.

## Anticipating conclusions

When formulating research problems, you must not just consider what to study, where and when, but also anticipate the answer to the question, ‘What do I want to say?’ This is not to suggest that you can write a final paper or report before carrying out the research. Rather, it is to indicate that there needs to be some anticipation of the kind of conclusion that may be reached and the kind of evidence required to support it. For example, where the aim is to evaluate the effectiveness of the introduction of some form of criminal justice policy (for example, MATAC or the new law of ‘coercive control’), it is necessary to formulate research problems and questions in such a way that some conclusion can be reached about the effectiveness of the policy (see Rob White in Chapter 22). There are other ways in which researchers anticipate outcomes when formulating research questions. In a more radical and critical vein, what is sometimes termed standpoint research seeks to pose problems and address them from a particular standpoint (for example, a feminist, or gender-sensitive, perspective) and anticipates reaching conclusions which reflect that standpoint. Such research may be less likely to be concerned with questions about the effectiveness of specific policies and more concerned with addressing fundamental issues such as discrimination, inequality, oppression and justice (see, for example, Walklate et al., 2018).

It is not just about anticipating the conclusions that need some thought from the outset. It is also useful to think through the writing up and presenting of the research findings. Often, the findings will be written up for publication in a journal article and, sometimes, as a manuscript for publication by one of the leading academic book publishers, such as SAGE. During the research process itself, conference papers and



presentations may well be delivered as well, providing a useful opportunity to share initial findings and thoughts and reflections on what the research is starting to uncover. Where the research is for a funding council or an organization that has, for example, funded a piece of evaluation, often a research report will need to be produced. Students will be expected to produce a dissertation or a PhD thesis, and again these may form the basis for further publications, such as journal articles and book chapters. Anticipating these from the outset of the research can help in the process of doing the research itself, a point well made by Alexandra Hall in Chapter 7, who explores the writing up and presentation of criminological research.

## Audiences of research

When thinking of your research, you need to pose not just the question ‘What do I want to say?’ but also ‘To whom do I want to say it?’ The audiences of research findings include academic supervisors and peers, policy-makers who have commissioned research, practitioners who are interested in applying the findings in their day to day work, pressure groups who want to put forward a particular viewpoint and politicians who want to formulate or justify policies. Increasingly, researchers are building ‘impact’ into their research from the outset. Delivering impacts from research is increasingly important in research bidding and grant applications and in assessments of research excellence. The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) define research impact as ‘the demonstrable contribution that excellent research makes to society and the economy’ (ESRC 2018). Impact then, is about beneficial changes that will happen in the real world, as a result of research. This can involve academic impact, economic and societal impact or both. Impacts occur through processes of knowledge exchange and the co-production of knowledge. Most researchers and funders tend to focus on instrumental impacts such as actual changes in policy or practice, though there can also be ‘negative impacts’, such as evidence that prevents the introduction of a new and potentially harmful piece of legislation. Conceptual impact is impact that contributes to the understanding of policy issues or refames debates or alters attitudes, whereas capacity building impacts can be achieved through technical and personal skill or training development. Other types of impact include attitudinal or cultural impacts and enduring connectivity impacts. The former might involve people’s increased willingness to engage in new collaborations. The latter might include follow-on interactions such as collaborative workshops, reciprocal visits and joint proposals (Reed, 2016). The nature of the intended audience – and where impact is intended – should be anticipated when formulating research problems. The effect on, change or benefit tends to be viewed as impactful if it goes beyond the world of researchers. The likelihood of achieving impact is therefore in part dependent on the way in which we formulate our research questions.

There is, therefore, a strong connection between the way in which a research problem is expressed and the types of findings and conclusions which are eventually presented. Different audiences give credibility to evidence and arguments presented



in certain ways. For example, most articles in academic journals are expected to be presented in a very formal way. Further, there is a wealth of experience which indicates that policy-makers give greater credence to statistical as opposed to non-quantitative evidence, whereas pressure groups often favour detailed studies of ‘deviant’ cases or *causes célèbres* so as to make maximum impact. There is also some evidence to suggest that research undertaken with overseas collaborators has a bigger potential impact. In Box 1.2, different types of impact are outlined. The ways in which arguments and conclusions emerge and are presented are very much influenced by early decisions about the nature of the research problem and how it is expressed.

### BOX 1.2 TYPES OF RESEARCH IMPACT

- Academic impact is the demonstrable contribution that excellent social and economic research makes in shifting understanding and advancing scientific method, theory and application across and within disciplines.
- Economic and societal impact is the demonstrable contribution that excellent social and economic research makes to society and the economy, and its benefits to individuals, organizations and/or nations.

The impact of research, be it academic, economic or social, can include:

- instrumental: influencing the development of policy, practice or service provision, shaping legislation, altering behaviour
- conceptual: contributing to the understanding of policy issues, reframing debates
- capacity building: through technical and personal skill development.

*Source:* Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) at [www.esrc.ac.uk/research/impact-toolkit/what-is-impact](http://www.esrc.ac.uk/research/impact-toolkit/what-is-impact) (accessed 09/12/17)

## The research literature

As a researcher, you also need to be aware of what has been said before, by whom and in what ways. Preparing an area for research involves making sense of that which has been undertaken before, how, why and with what results. In making decisions about what to study, you will draw on an initial review of the academic and scholarly literature. After all, the objective here is to discover relevant material published on the topic area in order to help support the framing of the research questions. Alison Wakefield, in Chapter 3, provides a thorough discussion of the various types of research literature. Yet reviewing the research literature continues

throughout the process of doing criminological research. The purpose of reviewing the literature is to identify the key issues and problems and controversies surrounding the proposed research area. This may be by identifying a gap in existing knowledge, articulating the weakness of argument of a particular approach, or assessing the evidence against competing perspectives. Thus, a literature review allows you to locate your research within the work of others. In doing so, you will explore the conceptual literature on the topic area, written by the leading researchers and which gives insight into theories, concepts and ideas, as well as the research literature, offering specific accounts and findings of other research projects carried out in the field.

## METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO DOING CRIMINOLOGICAL RESEARCH

Decision making does not just occur at the outset of doing criminological research. It continues throughout the process. Thus, in preparing criminological research, you will also make decisions about the kinds of methods to use and the sorts of data to collect.



1. You will need to develop a research strategy and **research design**.
2. You will need to identify what data to collect and how to collect it.
3. You will have to make a number of decisions regarding the operationalization of the approach and methods chosen, and include sampling, access and ethical issues.

Hannah Bows gives an overview of the broad approaches and distinctions between qualitative and quantitative approaches in Chapter 4, though she, Vicky Heap and Jaime Waters, in Chapter 5, and Jerzy Sarnecki and Christoffer Carlsson, in Chapter 13, make it clear that triangulation and mixed methods approaches mean that separating qualitative from quantitative research is often an artificial exercise.

Decisions will therefore be taken in the context of the purpose of the research and the time and resources available. Crucially, each decision must be properly reasoned and justified to ensure that the research is as valid, reliable and robust as it can be. Green (2008) asks the following in relation to the connections between research questions and research design:

- Are your approaches and research strategies commensurate with the question you are asking?
- Is your proposed sample consistent with the groups, organizations, relationships or processes specified in the question?
- What methodological strategies are implied by the purposes and objectives of your research question?

- What methods of data collection are most consistent with the objectives of the research, as they are embedded in the question?
- Does the question need adjusting in light of your proposed research design, or could you rework your research design on the basis of your reconsidered question?

## Validity

A primary factor in determining the content of a research project is the research problem: you will seek to design a strategy of research that will reach conclusions which are as valid as possible to the research problem. There are two aspects of **validity** which need to be emphasized. The first concerns whether the conclusions you reach are credible for the particular cases, context and time period under investigation. Conclusions are neither 'right' nor 'wrong'; they are more or less credible. The extent to which they are credible is the extent to which they are said to be internally valid. For example, if you are investigating the effects of security improvements on levels of crime in a particular area, the strength of validity will depend on whether there is evidence that a drop in crime levels followed the introduction of security measures and also evidence that no other factor could have produced or affected the change (such as the introduction of police beat patrols). Nick Tilley, Graham Farrell and Andromachi Tseloni touch on this in Chapter 10. A second aspect of validity concerns whether it is possible to generalize the conclusions to other cases, contexts and time periods. The extent to which this is possible is the extent to which conclusions are said to be externally valid. External validity is very much dependent on the cases, contexts and time periods which form part of the research design having representativeness and typicality.

The hallmark of a sound **research proposal** is the extent to which the research decisions which comprise it anticipate the potential threats to validity. This aspect of validity is concerned with the degree of 'fit' between a research problem and the strategy proposed to investigate it – is the proposed design likely to produce valid conclusions in relation to the research problem? Several factors are likely to influence the degree of fit between research problem and research design and are therefore likely to affect validity. For example, decisions about research design have to be taken in the context of constraints imposed by cost and time, and there are many forms of research which cannot be justified on the grounds of ethics. Also, it is not possible to anticipate threats to validity which may occur unexpectedly and when research is under way. So, all research, whether in the planning stage or in the operational stage, is a compromise between what is desirable in pursuit of validity and what is practicable in terms of cost, time, politics and ethics. This can be termed the validity 'trade-off'.

All of this underlies the value of viewing research as a form of decision making. Focusing on decisions taken when research is under way helps us evaluate the ways in which the validity of conclusions has been affected in ways which were not – and

perhaps could not be – anticipated. This is vital to the evaluation of research which has already been completed.

As criminological researchers, we can collect data from existing resources, including using other people’s data. This is generally known as secondary research or secondary analysis. Or, we can collect data from the subjects of research first hand. This is generally known as primary research or primary analysis. These categories can overlap and research designs will often triangulate methods to ensure that validity of measurement and valid conclusions are arrived at. Broad distinctions between primary and secondary research, alongside a range of common operational themes, allow us to consider some of the ways that criminological research takes shape. Here, we follow these broad distinctions and the initial discussion is divided into two:



- existing resources
- data from subjects/**primary data** collection – in particular, a number of key operational themes are addressed including sources and types of data, surveys, sampling, interviews, observations and ethnography.

## Existing resources as data

There are several ways in which existing resources can be used as valid research data by criminologists and victimologists. Typically, advice and guidance in criminological research texts would refer here to the use of secondary analysis of official statistics and we too discuss the use of crime data in criminological research.

### *Secondary analysis of official statistics*



Secondary analysis is a form of investigation which is based on existing sources of data and can be distinguished from primary research and analysis where you would collect the data for yourself at first hand. **Secondary data** refers to any existing source of information which has been collected by someone other than you and with some purpose other than the current research question. There is a wide range of secondary sources potentially available, such as police or Crown Prosecution Service or youth justice data, institutional records, diaries and letters and other documentary and mediated resources. Pam Cox, Heather Shore and Barry Godfrey, in Chapter 8, discuss doing historical analysis of crime, victims and justice. In Chapter 10, Nick Tilley, Graham Farrell and Andromachi Tseloni explore the use of secondary data to explain the crime drop in England and Wales since 1995.

The forms of data that are routinely used for criminological research are official statistics on crime. Crime in England and Wales has, since the early 2000s, been annually reported on in a complementary series that combines the reporting of police-recorded crime and the British Crime Survey (BCS)/Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW). There remain three key stages in the crime-recording process:

1. Reporting a crime – someone reports a crime to the police or the police themselves discover a crime. The police register these reports as a crime-related incident and then decide whether or not it is a ‘notifiable’ (recorded crime) offence and whether to record it as a crime.
2. Recording a crime – the police decide to record the report or their discovery of a crime and need to determine how many crimes to record and what the offence type(s) is/are.
3. Detecting a crime – once a crime is recorded and investigated, and evidence is collected to link the crime to a suspect, it can be detected.

Thus, these ‘counting rules’ need to be thoroughly understood, together with how they have changed over time, as this affects comparisons and trends. Also, despite there being more consistency and better quality of crime recording over time, there is still the problem of ‘attrition’ and the mismatch between what people report and what is recorded by the police. The discrepancy in some areas and for some crimes remains worryingly disparate. Nevertheless, such statistics provide a good measure of trends in well-reported crimes. They are an important indicator of police workload and can be used for local crime pattern analysis.

The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) is an important monitor of the extent of crime in England and Wales. It is used by the government to evaluate and develop crime-reduction policies as well as providing vital information about the changing levels of crime over the last 30 years. The survey measures crime by asking members of the public, such as you, about their experiences of crime over the last 12 months. In this way, the survey records all types of crime experienced by people, including those crimes that may not have been reported to the police. The value of the survey is its ability to find out about crimes which do not get reported to, or recorded by, the police. It has previously shown that only 4 in 10 crimes are actually reported to the police, so conducting the survey is very valuable in understanding all of the other crimes which go unreported. Typically, the Crime Survey records a higher number of crimes than police figures because it includes these unreported crimes. As well as measuring crime, the Crime Survey for England and Wales looks at:

- identifying those most at risk of crime, which is used in designing crime-prevention programmes
- people’s attitudes to crime and the Criminal Justice System, including the police and the courts
- people’s experiences of anti-social behaviour and how this has affected their quality of life.

In 2015/16, around 50,000 households across England and Wales were invited to participate in the survey. In previous years, three quarters of the households invited to take part agreed to participate. Data from the CSEW and other large data sets can be used by researchers and teachers. In 2017, the Office for National Statistics (ONS)

announced a consultation on a proposal that, in the context of public sector financial constraints, the future level of funding for the CSEW would be reduced with effect from October 2017. Further to this, the ONS put forward a range of proposals to reduce the cost of the CSEW in 2017/18 and future years. See Box 1.3 for a summary of the proposed changes.

## BOX 1.3 CHANGES TO THE CRIME SURVEY FOR ENGLAND AND WALES

### ONS CONSULTATION 2017

The consultation asked for responses to the following questions:

- What are your views on the proposed cost savings?
- Of the proposed cost-saving options, which would you prefer ONS to adopt?

**Option A:** Reduce target response rate (to 69%)

**Option B:** Reduce sample size (by 1,800 interviews)

**Option C:** Remove additional questions from CSEW to reduce survey to core questions required to produce quarterly crime estimates

The consultation proposes that all the following will be removed from the CSEW questionnaire from October 2017:

- all questions in the 'Performance of the Criminal Justice System' module, excepting those related to the performance of the police
- all questions in the 'Experiences of the Criminal Justice System' module
- all questions in the 'Attitudes to the Criminal Justice System' module
- Questions relating to victims' experiences of the court system and use of victim services from the 'Victimization' module.

**Option D:** Mixed approach – reduce target response rate (to 71%) and reduce sample size

Questions:

- What are your views on the proposed cost savings?
- Of the proposed cost-saving options, which would you prefer ONS to adopt?
- Is there a particular reason for your stated preference?
- What impact would these potential options have on your use of CSEW data?
- Do you have any other comments?

Outcome:

The main feedback was:

- A majority of respondents (40%) identified Option D – reducing the response rate to 71% and the sample size by 600 – as the best option of those available for achieving the required cost savings.
- Many respondents raised concerns regarding the removal of questions related to victims' experiences of the court system and use of victim services.
- In particular, 34 respondents (28%) specifically identified the removal of the questions on restorative justice from the 'Victimisation' module as a major concern.

The ONS:

- Reduced CSEW sample size for the 2017/18 survey year by 600 households and reduced the survey response rate to 71% from October 2017 (Option D).
- Removed the three modules of questions asked of respondents about the performance of, their experiences of and their attitudes to the criminal justice system from October 2017.
- Retained questions related to victims' experiences of the court system and use of victim services included in the 'Victimisation' module of the CSEW that were previously proposed for removal.

Such large-scale data sets are invaluable sources and resources that enable researchers to confront real-life research. The consultation by the ONS described in Box 1.3 received a total of 123 responses from academics, police forces and police and crime commissioners, local or regional government organisations, other government departments, charities and voluntary organisations. These responses were impactful in terms of influencing the outcome. Data collections such as the CSEW, the Young People and Crime Survey, and the Youth Lifestyles Survey constitute well-documented examples of real-life data collection and allow students as researchers to engage critically with methods and methodologies. They are rich sources of raw material for data analysis and can be used to engage in secondary analysis. They are sources of evidence that can be interrogated.

In Chapter 11, Lyria Bennett Moses and Janet Chan explore the emerging use of Big Data in criminology and criminal justice, and highlight some of the challenges and issues that Big Data bring to those wishing to undertake criminological research with and/or on it. They note that there are two main areas where Big Data has been used for researching crime and justice: first, the use of Big Data such as social media streams as *data* in criminological research; and, second, the use of Big Data for real-time

monitoring or to make predictions that can be used for law enforcement or criminal justice purposes, such as increasing situational awareness, preventing crime and enhancing efficiency. These categories obviously overlap, and research in the first category may be applied in the second.

## Primary data collection

Above, we considered data arising from secondary sources and secondary analysis. Often, such data will be used in conjunction with other data collected first hand in order to achieve triangulation and increased validity. Primary research and analysis can be conducted in several ways by criminologists and victimologists. Here, we note a number of common methodological issues that relate to obtaining data from subjects first hand. We focus on surveys and samples, interviews, observations and ethnography.

### *Surveys and samples*

One important method of collecting data from subjects is the social survey. Social surveys have been used extensively in criminological research, and crime/victim surveys typically use structured questions as a means of collecting data from individual respondents first hand. This can be done by interviewing them or by requesting that respondents fill in a self-completion questionnaire. The CSEW mentioned above is one such survey. Survey research lends itself to the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data. The cases surveyed in criminological research can include a wide range of units of analysis, including interactions or documents. Individuals and categories of individuals are popular as primary and supplementary sources of data for criminological researchers. Whilst questions posed are typically structured, allowing the researcher to present the same stimuli and thereby collect the same kinds of data from a large number of people quickly, cheaply and with comparability of response, such questions in surveys run the risk of being too structured. Clearly, as you can already see, survey research involves complex issues (see Jo Deakin and Jon Spencer, Chapter 9).

It is very rare to collect data from the whole of the population in which a researcher is interested: this is a very costly and time-consuming exercise. For this reason, social surveys are usually sample surveys. A sample survey is a form of research design which involves collecting data from, or about, a subset of the population with a view to making inferences from, and drawing conclusions about, that population (the term ‘census’ is generally used when all members of a population are included in a study). There are skills in selecting a sample which is representative of the wider population and several chapters in this volume refer to sampling issues, some in the context of gathering data from respondents first hand (see for example Chapter 2 by Peter Francis).

Several contributions in the chapters that follow discuss doing criminological research that involves gathering data first hand from respondents. Whether their



work has involved surveying sample populations, interviewing individual respondents and/or conducting focus groups, all have sought to avoid being overly structured, impersonal, and inflexible in their approach to gathering data first hand in order to demonstrate how these techniques can be used to produce valid, ethical, effective, rigorous and comprehensive data. Victim-oriented surveys inevitably deal with sensitive and emotive issues. Respondents are asked to reflect on personal and intimately harmful topics and experiences that they may not have disclosed previously, with strangers or via keying in data, albeit in a confidential manner. Hannah Bows in Chapter 4 and Vicky Heap and Jaime Waters in Chapter 5 illustrate how surveys can be employed when mixing methods. A persistent criticism of traditional crime surveys is that they tend to be confined to restricted ages of the population. Those under the age of 16 and those living in institutions as well as the homeless – all of whom might be deemed ‘vulnerable populations’ – are often excluded from national and supra-national/international surveys. From 2009 the CSEW has included a separate survey to record the experiences of young people aged 10–15. This interview is shorter than the adult one. Young people are selected to take part from the same households selected to take part in the adult survey. Permission from a parent or guardian is always obtained before an interview is conducted with anyone aged 10–15 (Francis, 2007). Both the sensitive topic and age-restriction critique are addressed head on in Chapter 9 by Jo Deakin and Jon Spencer, who discuss tackling difficult subjects and gathering sensitive data with vulnerable populations through large-scale national surveys.

### Interviews

**Interviews** can be defined as a method of data collection, information or opinion gathering that specifically involves asking a series of questions. Typically, interviews represent a formal meeting or dialogue between people where personal and social interaction occurs (Davies, 2006). They are typically associated with qualitative social research and are often used alongside other methods. They can vary enormously in terms of the context or setting in which they are carried out, the purpose they serve as well as how they are structured and conducted. This means they are a flexible and adaptable tool and there are many different types of interview. Most commonly, interviews are conducted on a face-to-face basis and they can include one or more interviewers who are normally in control of the questions that are put to one or more interviewees or respondents. However, interviews can be informal, unstructured, naturalistic, or in-depth discussions in which the shape of the interview is largely determined by the individual respondent, through to very structured discussions according to a format with answers offered from a prescribed list in a questionnaire or ideal standardized interview schedule. An example of an interview with little interaction between the researcher and the researched is Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) where interviewers enter responses into a laptop computer, self-keying, to answer questions themselves. Since 1994 this mode



of interviewing has been used in the BCS/CSEW for more sensitive topics. The type, nature and range of interviews used within criminology are explored by various contributors to this book, including Pamela Davies in Chapter 12, Elizabeth Stanley in Chapter 14, Marie Segrave and Sanja Milivojevic in Chapter 15, Ross McGarry and Zoe Alker in Chapter 16 and Majid Yar in Chapter 18.

Sometimes interviews may be conducted by telephone, Skype or by way of electronic communication such as e-mail. Interviews of this nature are popular for reasons of cost-effectiveness and the speed of data collection. Telephone interviews are routinely used for the conducting of opinion polls by market researchers. Political opinion polls are some of the most well-known types of interview conducted by this method.

As a means of collecting data first hand, interviews can be an invaluable source of information that generate valid, representative and reliable data. They enable you to follow up and probe responses, motives and feelings and in many of their forms, non-verbal communications, facial expressions and gestures, for example, can enrich the qualitative aspects of the data. However, assuming the use of the interview as the obvious method of choice for qualitative research can generate inappropriate or unmanageable data unfit for specific contexts and for specific purposes. In addition to this, there are skills to the practice of interviewing itself. Every aspect of the interview process can invite critique, for example over whether they are generating valid, sound and reliable data, and whether there is bias (including unconscious bias) surrounding the interviewer–respondent relationship.

Alternative types of interviews are associated with distinct advantages and disadvantages. Unstructured interviews, where the respondent talks freely around a topic, can produce rich grounded data but can be very time-consuming to analyse and the potential for bias on behalf of the interviewer might be increased. The more guided or focused the interview, generally speaking, the less time-consuming and less problematic is the analysis due to the more standardized nature of the responses. In opting for the latter form of interview, there is generally an increased likelihood that the researcher might not be asking the most significant questions.

### *Observations and ethnography*



**Participant observations** and **ethnography** are among the most common methodological traditions in criminological research (see Dolman and Francis, 2010). Observational research can probably best be described as the ‘hanging out’ school of research. Observations can be used in various criminal justice settings, including the prison, and might well be used in conjunction with other methods such as interviews. In the pilot stages of research it is desirable and often necessary to spend some time among the research populations and/or in the institutional setting, particularly if this happens to be a prison, before embarking on interviews or survey work (Martin, 2000).

The ethnographic researcher will enter the field as soon as possible and is likely to undertake other tasks such as a literature review and conceptualization during and

on completion of fieldwork (Silverman, 2007). Participant observation and ethnographic methods, conversational and discourse analysis, documentary analysis, film and photography and life histories, can attract criticism. Often, they are seen as producing ‘soft’ data rather than ‘hard’ factual data (Hollands, 2000) and certainly ‘thick’, ‘rich’ and ‘intense’ are three strong words to describe the data produced from ethnographic research. Steve Hall and Simon Winlow (Winlow and Hall, 2009), the former a contributor to this current book, have long been involved in ethnographic research and readers are encouraged to see for themselves the intense meanings and understandings that are derived from such inquiry. See Chapter 17 by Steve Hall and Chapter 18 by Majid Yar.

### BOX 1.4 ETHNOGRAPHIC AND QUALITATIVE RESEARCH THAT ADDRESSES THE CHANGING NATURE OF YOUTH IDENTITIES IN CONTEMPORARY BRITAIN

Winlow, S. and Hall, S. (2009) ‘Living for the weekend: youth identities in northeast England’, *Ethnography*, 10(1): 91–113. The author’s empirical data comes from ethnographic and qualitative research that addresses the changing nature of youth identities in contemporary Britain. To whet the reader’s appetite, a brief description of the methodology is given here:

- 43 young people between the ages of 18 and 25 were interviewed.
- Interviews were conducted in order to gain some insight into their attitudes towards:
  - marriage
  - relationships and kids
  - work
  - leisure
  - body image
  - fashion
  - consumerism
  - friendship and life course.
- Interviews were unstructured and included friendship cohorts.
- Key research contacts and snowball sampling were used,

#### Case study research

Case study research is also an important approach to doing criminological research. Kathleen Daly, in Chapter 21, begins by stating that despite its long and varied history in social science related research, case study research is not well understood



amongst social scientists. Case study research is a complex and far-reaching approach to doing criminological research and there is no one way to deliver it. It has a background in the Chicago School of Criminology, utilizing a range of data, methods of investigation and approaches to analysis and interpretation. Case study research usually focuses on a case or cases, and utilizes a range of methods and types of data collection and analysis to bring depth and breadth to the topic area under review. It can be both quantitative and qualitative in nature.

## Visual Methodologies

Ronnie Lippens in Chapter 19 provides a robust overview of the development and use of visual methodologies in criminological research. As such, he begins his assessment honestly by noting that the ‘emerging field of visual criminology is quite varied and many criminologists have their own ideas about what it should comprise’. Certainly, there is no one definition of what visual criminology comprises. For us, given its emergent status (despite being around longer than you would initially think, dating back to the late nineteenth century in one form or another), such methodologies can involve both secondary and primary research approaches, and are used for a variety of reasons. For some, it can involve social media, participatory diagramming and the use of visual research tools, and visual media. You may use images already available in archives or galleries, or in individual collections (such as the photographs that you or I take with our families and friends, or on holiday). Here, your key aim is to make sense of the image, use the image and understand what the image is about and why. The image can also be used as method – to allow for a discussion or to tease out specific reflections or thoughts from a research subject. And the image can also be an outcome of the research itself. For example, you could use this as part of a research project looking at the way in which the image, rather than the voice, can be a means through which individual actions, behaviours, thoughts and ideas can be captured and presented. For example, one of us, Peter Francis, along with Rachel Pain (Pain and Francis, 2003), used the visual image alongside participatory research methods to capture the ideas and lifestyles of a range of young people in a northern city (see also Francis, 2007).

### BOX 1.5 EXAMPLE OF AN ABSTRACT

Pain, R. and Francis, P. (2003) ‘Reflections on participatory research’, *Area*, 35(1): 46–54.

#### ABSTRACT

Participatory research approaches are increasingly popular with geographers in developed as well as developing countries, as critical qualitative methodologies

which, at their best, work with participants to effect change. This article adds to recent debates over the methodologies, practices, philosophical and political issues involved. Drawing on a project on young people, exclusion and crime victimization in Newcastle upon Tyne, England, we discuss the limitations of participatory diagramming and illustrate some of the social and political barriers to meaningful participation in, and action from, this type of research.

## Methodological choices

There are a number of concerns and issues often encountered during the research process which a scrupulous, ethical and effective researcher should grapple with. In terms of data collection, many key issues will arise from the way in which you operationalize your research. Operationalization refers to the laying down of rules which stipulate when instances of a concept have occurred. Operational rules link abstract concepts to observations. Such observations are sometimes also known as indicators. The extent to which you, the research designer and investigator, can devise a means of observing and measuring the concepts that lie at the heart of a research problem is the extent to which there is measurement validity. General and abstract non-directly measurable concepts are the building blocks of theories. The researcher needs to operationalize these concepts after careful clarification of them. Whilst there are various checks that can be used to assess validity, including criterion validity, content validity and construct validity, we would draw attention to your ability as a researcher to engage in creative decision making. Many of you will be doing criminological research yourself, whilst others will be managing a research project. In both instances, you will face significant moments when you must make important methodological choices. When such decision-making moments are upon you, we suggest you foreground power and give due consideration to unequal relationships between the researcher and the researched.

So, you should be continuously checking and ensuring that you are studying what you want to study, that you are measuring what you should be measuring and what you intended to measure.

## Research proposals

Ultimately, the aim of research is to bring forward evidence to make an argument in relation to the research problem(s). The means by which this is to be accomplished is stipulated in a research proposal, which is a statement of preliminary decisions about the ways in which such evidence will be collected, analysed and

presented. A research proposal can have varying degrees of formality, as Peter Francis describes in Chapter 2. In the Appendix to his classic book, *The Sociological Imagination*, C. Wright Mills (Wright Mills, 1959) describes the early stages of research as involving the collecting of notes, cuttings, extracts and personal thoughts. These are organized and categorized to formulate research ideas and plans, but in a manner which is constantly under review and reformation. For Mills, the writing of research proposals is a continuous process of reflection and of stimulating the ‘sociological imagination’. However, at the more formal end of the spectrum, grant-awarding bodies and other sponsors of research require precise written statements which address specific headings and must be submitted by a stipulated deadline. There are variations in the context of a proposal but typically it will address the following:

1. There will be a statement about the mechanisms by which cases will be selected. Such cases may be individuals selected to be interviewed as part of a survey but they may also be documents to be analysed or interactions to be observed.
2. The means by which data will be collected should be outlined. This may be, for example, by interviewing, using observational methods or by the use of secondary sources such as documents to be analysed or official government statistics.
3. It is necessary to detail the ways in which data will be analysed, for example by using one or more of the computer packages which are available for this purpose.

When research is stimulated through a tendering process or is commissioned, there are likely to be research criteria already set out. The research aims, objectives and questions may already be determined by the funder. An example of how the National Rural Crime Network (NCRN) invited tenders and instructed potential bidders to develop their proposal is reproduced in Box 1.6. Other issues also need to be addressed, for instance timescale and budget; anticipated problems, such as gaining access to data; ethical dilemmas; confidentiality issues; and policy implications. A research proposal is a statement of intent about the ways in which it is anticipated the research will progress, although, as most researchers will attest to, the reality of how the project is actually accomplished is often somewhat different.

### BOX 1.6 EXAMPLE OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR A RESEARCH PROPOSAL

NCRN seeks research partner to understand domestic abuse in rural areas

Title: Understanding domestic abuse in rural areas

The call: The National Rural Crime Network is looking for a research partner to help it understand the barriers to reporting domestic abuse in rural areas,

improve reporting and improve services to victims to help them to cope and recover.

Evidence suggests there is under-reporting of domestic abuse in rural areas. Analysis of police data shows that the number of reported domestic abuse incidents from rural areas is about half that of urban areas, despite there being no evidence that the occurrence of domestic abuse is any different in rural areas than urban.

Instruction for proposals – Your proposal should include the following information:

- your understanding of the NRCN and how this would shape your approach to the brief
- three case studies of similar work for public sector clients
- your proposed process, stages of work, methodologies and a project schedule/ timings, working to the deadlines set out above
- any potential barriers and issues you anticipate and how they might be overcome
- a breakdown of your financial quote – how you will allocate the fees and any expenses within the total you are quoting as your standard day rates for the people who will deliver this project and the number of days each person will spend on the job
- your proposed project team and their biographies demonstrating why they have the skills and experience to fulfil the brief
- details of your approach to quality assurance and how you will guarantee quality research tools, analysis and deliverables
- any discounts/added value you are prepared to offer, bearing in mind that value for money will be important during the evaluation process.

## REFLECTING ON DOING CRIMINOLOGICAL RESEARCH

### The importance of reflexivity

Research findings and conclusions are not ‘things’ that are lying around waiting to be picked up by the criminologist; as we have articulated throughout this chapter, they are the outcome of research decisions which are taken at different stages (and of the factors that influence these, including factors external to and out of the control of the investigator). As Peter Francis articulates in Chapter 2, research design is an exercise in compromise whereby the investigator seeks to trade off the strengths and weaknesses of different methods when making connections with research questions. But it is not possible to escape the reality that

even the best laid plans and designs have to be actualized in social, institutional and political contexts, which can have a profound effect on the outcome of research. Giving recognition to this is important on three counts: first, it allows some assessment to be made of the likely validity of conclusions; second it ensures we are reminded of the messiness of research; and third it encourages us to reflect critically on what comes to pass as ‘knowledge’, how and why. This latter aspect is one hallmark of critical social research. The contribution of reflexivity to the assessment of validity and also to critical social research will be discussed later.

## Research as a social activity

A number of assumptions underpin this particular concern about doing criminological research. The first is that research is a social activity. Criminology is not like those physical sciences in which researchers study and engage inanimate objects. In the main, you will be concerned with individuals, and social research is a form of interaction. You should easily recognize this because one influential theoretical approach within the discipline – interactionism – emphasizes that what comes to be recognized as ‘criminal’ can be the outcome of interactions in the processes of the criminal justice system. What therefore, comes to pass as ‘knowledge’ is also the outcome of interactions in the research process.

## Research and emotion

Social scientists have tended often to emulate the pure sciences in striving for objectivity in their research. This has meant that emotive writing tends to be the exception rather than the rule. Writing in the first person is often actively discouraged though when you are engaged in research for a dissertation or PhD this seems an odd way to proceed. Pretending we are not the author through a thinly disguised use of the term ‘the researcher’ can make your writing feel stilted and laboured. One of us – Davies (2012) – has written about the use of the first person in academic writing. See Box 1.7 for an abstract of this article.

### BOX 1.7 EXAMPLE OF AN ABSTRACT

Davies, P. (2012) “‘Me’, ‘me’, ‘me’: the use of the first person in academic writing and some reflections on subjective analyses of personal experiences’, *Sociology*, 6(4): 744–52.



## ABSTRACT

This research note discusses being self-conscious methodologically. It illustrates my pains to be deeply reflexive about research and academic writing. It does so with reference to a personal experience that raised, as feminist research often does, emotional as well as intellectual issues. It specifically explores the use of the first person in academic writing. Writing as 'I' forced comparisons between the personal and impersonal which, in turn, have caused me to reflect more deeply on emotive, individual and subjective analyses of personal experiences. With reference to a case study of 'me', this note is a reminder of the materiality and sociality of writing. It shows how social scientists have emotions about the subjects they study. Furthermore, it demonstrates implications for parental experience studies research and policy and practice in child and family social work.

**Keywords:** emotions, experience, 'I', individual, personal, reflexivity, subjective

## Research and politics

Criminological research is not just a social activity; it is also a political activity. It involves some form of relationship between the subjects of research and the investigators, but there are also others who have an interest. The range of stakeholders typically includes sponsors of research, gatekeepers who control access to sources of data and the various audiences of research findings. These audiences include the media, policy-makers and professionals working in the criminal justice system, politicians and academics. Gatekeepers may have a formal role and legal powers to restrict access (for example, a prison governor) or they may be able to deny access by informal means (for example, by continually cancelling appointments). Sponsors of research include government departments, the Home Office, the Ministry of Justice, institutions of criminal justice, such as the police and charitable bodies or pressure groups such as the Howard League or Prison Reform Trust. Each of these stakeholders has interests to promote and to protect. Also, each has differential levels of power with which to promote and protect such interests. The exercise of such power is ingrained in the research process, from the formulation of problems through to the publication of results.

Research and politics connect in differing ways. For example, politics can have an impact on the doing of criminological research and also on its outcome. The kind of research which is funded and the ways in which research problems and questions are framed are very much influenced by sponsors. Often, they are interested in policy relevance (in their terms) and insist on a formal customer–contractor relationship in which 'deliverables' are clearly specified. Research is often also dependent on

whether gatekeepers give access to subjects – or other data sources – in the first place.

A second way in which politics and research connect is in the differing ways in which the activity of research and its outputs contribute to politics. One important way in which this occurs in criminology is in the conduct of policy-related research. Such research can take a variety of forms but one which has contributed substantially to the formulation and implementation of criminal justice policy is evaluation research. Sometimes this kind of work is known as administrative criminology because of its contribution to the administration and management of the criminal justice system. However, criminologists who represent a critical approach see such work not solely as contributing to policy, but, more importantly, as also justifying policy. In this sense, they look on policy-related research as playing a political role in mechanisms of social control and not as benign, value-free contributions to administration and management. David Scott, in Chapter 6, explores the politics of doing criminological research from a critical criminological perspective, while Rob White, in Chapter 22, explores evaluation research.

## Research and ethics

Research is not just a social and political activity but also an ethical activity, as David Scott further describes in Chapter 6. Ethics is about the standards to be adopted towards others in carrying out research. Sometimes these standards are mandatory to the practice of research, for example in certain kinds of medical research, whereas in other contexts and disciplines they are merely guidelines. Sometimes they are formally expressed in professional codes of conduct such as in the ethical codes of the British Society of Criminology, the British Sociological Association and the British Psychological Society, whereas in other disciplines there is a much less formal body of custom and practice.

One ethical principle which is often expressed in social research is that of informed consent. This can be rather elastic but basically it refers to the principle that the subjects of research should be informed of their participation in research, which may be taken to include giving information about possible consequences of participation. Further, it includes the belief that subjects should give their consent to participation, and its possible consequences, prior to their inclusion. Another principle which is sometimes propounded is that no person should be harmed by research, for example that the introduction of ‘experimental treatment’ in some styles of research should not cause physical or psychological damage to subjects or, perhaps, disadvantage some individuals in comparison with others.

Matters of ethics interact with the pursuit of validity and also with the political dimensions of research. If the principle of informed consent is applied in full and in

such a way that subjects are aware of all aspects of research, including its purpose, it is highly likely that they will behave or react in ways in which they would not normally do. Such reactivity on the part of subjects is a threat to the validity of findings. Further, the challenging of the ideological positions of certain groups in society – perhaps with a view to replacing them with others – is a central aim of some forms of research, especially critical research. However, this inevitably involves doing harm to the interests of such groups. In this way, the fundamental aims of critical research can come face to face with the ethical principle that research should not harm or damage individuals or groups of individuals.

### The case for reflexivity

It has been emphasized that your reflexivity is a vital part of planning and doing criminological research. This is because criminological research is a social, political and ethical activity. There are several roles which reflexivity can play in research, for example the assessment of validity. Validity is the extent to which conclusions drawn from a study are plausible and credible and the extent to which they can be generalized to other contexts and to other people. Validity is always relative, being dependent on the decisions which have had to be taken in the planning and doing of research. Making such decisions explicit and, more importantly, assessing the probable effect on validity is the main purpose of a reflexive account (which is sometimes published alongside conclusions).

## SUMMARY AND REVIEW

Throughout this book, we suggest that the conduct of research can be expressed in terms of decision making. Such decision making inevitably involves trade-offs, for example trading off the weaknesses of one course of action against the strengths of another. Some decisions have to be taken about the minutiae of research, say in deciding whether to have a sample of 100 or of 1200. Such technical issues matter, but so do the fundamental principles of criminological inquiry. These include validity (the pursuit of credible and plausible knowledge); politics (whose side am I on, if any?); and ethics (what standards should I adopt and in relation to what?). Unfortunately, as noted earlier, the pursuit of one principle may inhibit the pursuit of another. So, the most fundamental decision you must make is how to position yourself in relation to the validity, the politics and the ethics of research and the trade-offs which may have to be made between these.



## STUDY QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES FOR STUDENTS

1. Read this chapter and Chapter 2 and then write a sentence describing each of the following terms: research proposal; research focus; research problem; research question; research hypothesis.
2. Read Chapters 3, 4 and 5 and then write a sentence describing each of the following terms: research strategy; research design; quantitative research; qualitative research; systematic literature review; narrative review.
3. Read Chapter 10 and then answer the following:
  - a. What are the challenges and opportunities of doing quantitative criminological research?
4. Read Chapters 12, 14 and 17 and then answer the following:
  - a. What are the challenges and opportunities of doing qualitative criminological research?
5. Read Chapters 4 and 5 and then answer the following:
  - a. What are the challenges and opportunities of doing mixed method criminological research?
6. Read Chapters 14, 16 and 17 and then compare the strengths and weaknesses of each of the following:
  - o semi-structured interviews
  - o biographical interviews
  - o participant observation
  - o appreciative ethnography.
7. Read Chapters 11, 13 and 15 and then, drawing on the innovative ways of doing criminological research that these chapters discuss, plan a strategy to conduct research on your chosen topic. You should aim for methodological triangulation in your research design.
8. As you read Chapters 6, 15, 17 and 22, write down the differing ways in which politics intrudes into social research.
9. Reflecting on Chapters 1, 4, 6, 15 and 17, describe the main ethical issues facing criminology research.
10. What are the ways in which people can be harmed by criminological research? Are there some categories of people (e.g. corrupt police officers) who should not be protected against the harmful effects of criminological research?

11. What distinguishes critical research from policy-related research, if anything?
12. Write down the issues which you think should be addressed in a reflexive account.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

There are a number of texts on social research methods and on doing criminological research, many of varying quality and content. The two, in our view, that offer authoritative, clear and well-authored overviews of doing criminological research for students are:

Caulfield, L. and Hill, J. (2014) *Criminological Research for Beginners: A Student's Guide*. London: Routledge.

Crowther-Duffy, C. and Fussey, P. (2013) *Researching Crime*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

In relation to understanding the detail, breadth and scope of doing criminological research, we would still recommend our ex-colleague, Victor Jupp's classic criminological textbook: Jupp, V. (1989) *Researching Crime*. London: Routledge; and the first two editions of this book, namely: Jupp, V., Davies, P. and Francis, P. (eds) (2000) *Doing Criminological Research*, 1st edition. London: Sage; and Jupp, V., Davies, P. and Francis, P. (eds) (2010) *Doing Criminological Research*, 2nd edition. London: Sage.

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