

READING

How to Read a Research Article

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As you travel through your criminal justice/criminology studies, you will soon learn that some of the best known and/or emerging explanations of crime and criminal behavior come from research articles in academic journals. This book has research articles throughout the book, but you may be asking yourself, “How do I read a research article?” It is my hope to answer this question with a quick summary of the key elements of any research article, followed by the questions you should be answering as you read through the assigned sections.

Every research article published in a social science journal will have the following elements: (1) introduction, (2) literature review, (3) methodology, (4) results, and (5) discussion/conclusion.

In the introduction, you will find an overview of the purpose of the research. Within the introduction, you will also find the hypothesis or hypotheses. A hypothesis is most easily defined as an educated statement or guess. In most hypotheses, you will find that the format usually followed is: If X, Y will occur. For example, a simple hypothesis may be: “If the price of gas increases, more people will ride bikes.” This is a testable statement that the researcher wants to address in his/her study. Usually, authors will state the hypothesis directly, but not always. Therefore, you must be aware of what the author is actually testing in the research project. If you are unable to find the hypothesis, ask yourself what is being tested and/or manipulated, and what are the expected results?

The next section of the research article is the literature review. At times the literature review will be separated from the text in its own section, and at other times it will be found within the introduction. In any case, the literature review is

an examination of what other researchers have already produced in terms of the research question or hypothesis. For example, returning to my hypothesis on the relationship between gas prices and bike riding, we may find that five researchers have previously conducted studies on the increase of gas prices. In the literature review, I will discuss their findings and then discuss what my study will add to the existing research. The literature review may also be used as a platform of support for my hypothesis. For example, one researcher may have already determined that an increase in gas prices causes more people to roller-blade to work. I can use this study as evidence to support my hypothesis that increased gas prices will lead to more bike riding.

The methods used in the research design are found in the next section of the research article. In the methodology section you will find the following: who/what was studied, how many subjects were studied, the research tool (e.g., interview, survey, observation . . .), how long the subjects were studied, and how the data that was collected was processed. The methods section is usually very concise, with every step of the research project recorded. This is important because a major goal of the researcher is “reliability,” or, if the research is done over again the same way, will the results be the same?

The results section is an analysis of the researcher’s findings. If the researcher conducted a quantitative study (using numbers or statistics to explain the research), you will find statistical tables and analyses that explain whether or not the researcher’s hypothesis is supported. If the researcher conducted a qualitative study (non-numerical research for the purpose of theory construction), the results will usually be

displayed as a theoretical analysis or interpretation of the research question.

Finally, the research article will conclude with a discussion and summary of the study. In the discussion, you will find that the hypothesis is usually restated, and perhaps a small discussion of why this is the hypothesis. You will also find a brief overview of the methodology and results. Finally, the discussion section will end with a discussion of the implications of the research and what future research is still needed.

Now that you know the key elements of a research article, let us examine a sample article from your text.

✎ The Use and Usefulness of Criminology, 1751-2005: Enlightened Justice and Its Failures

By Lawrence W. Sherman

1. What is the thesis or main idea from this article?

◆ The thesis or main idea is found in the introductory paragraph of this article. Although Sherman does not point out the main idea directly, you may read the introduction and summarize the main idea in your own words. For example: The thesis or main idea is that criminology should move away from strict analysis and towards scientific experimentation in order to improve the criminal justice system and crime control practices.

2. What is the hypothesis?

◆ The hypothesis is found in the introduction of this article. It is first stated in the beginning paragraph: “As experimental criminology provides more comprehensive evidence about responses to crime, the prospects for better basic science—and better policy—will improve accordingly.” The hypothesis is also restated in the middle of the second section of the article.

Here, Sherman actually distinguishes the hypothesis by stating: “The history of criminology . . . provides an experimental test of this hypothesis about analytic versus experimental social science: *that social science has been most useful, if not most used, when it has been most experimental, with visibly demonstrable benefits (or harm avoidance) from new inventions.*”

3. Is there any prior literature related to the hypothesis?

◆ As you may have noticed, this article does not have a separate section for a literature review. However, you will see that Sherman devotes attention to prior literature under the heading Enlightenment, Criminology, and Justice. Here, he offers literature regarding the analytical and experimental history of criminology. This is a brief overview to help the reader understand the prior research that explains why social science became primarily analytic.

4. What methods are used to support the hypothesis?

◆ Sherman’s methodology is known as a historical analysis. In other words, rather than conducting his own experiment, Sherman is using evidence from history to support his hypothesis regarding analytic and experimental criminology. When conducting a historical analysis, most researchers use archival material from books, newspapers, journals, etc. Although Sherman does not directly state his source of information, we can see that he is basing his argument on historical essays and books, beginning with Henry Fielding’s *An Enquiry Into the Causes of the Late Increase of Robbers* (1751) to the social experiments of the 1980s by the National Institute of Justice. Throughout his methodology, Sherman continues to emphasize his hypothesis of the usefulness of experimental criminology, yet how experiments have also been hidden in the shadows of analytic criminology throughout history.

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5. Is this a qualitative study or quantitative study?

◆ To determine whether a study is qualitative or quantitative, you must look at the results. Is Sherman using numbers to support his hypothesis (quantitative) or is he developing a non-numerical theoretical argument (qualitative)? Because Sherman does not utilize statistics in this study, we can safely conclude that this is a qualitative study.

6. What are the results and how does the author present the results?

◆ Because this is a qualitative study, as we earlier determined, Sherman offers the results as a discussion of his findings from the historical analysis. The results may be found in the section titled Criminology: Analytic, Useful, and Used. Here, Sherman explains that “*the vast majority of published criminology remains analytic and nonexperimental.*” He goes on to say that although experimental criminology has been shown to be useful, it has not always been used, or has not been used correctly. Because of the misuse of experimental criminology, criminologists have steered towards the safety of analysis rather than experimentation. Therefore, Sherman concludes that “[a]nalytic social science still dominates field experiments by 100 to 1 or better in criminology. . . . Future success of the field may depend upon a growing public image based on experimental results. . . .”

7. Do you believe that the author/s provided a persuasive argument? Why or why not?

◆ This answer is ultimately up to the reader, but looking at this article, I believe that it is safe to assume that the readers will agree that Sherman offered a persuasive argument. Let us return to his major premise: The advancement of theory may depend on better experimental evidence, but, as history has illustrated, the vast majority of criminology remains analytical. Sherman supports this proposition with a historical analysis of the great thinkers of criminology and the absence

of experimental research throughout a major portion of history.

8. Who is the intended audience of this article?

◆ A final question that will be useful for the reader deals with the intended audience. As you read the article, ask yourself, to whom is the author wanting to speak? After you read this article, you will see that Sherman is writing for not only students, but also professors, criminologists, historians, and/or criminal justice personnel. The target audience may most easily be identified if you ask yourself, “Who will benefit from reading this article?”

9. What does the article add to your knowledge of the subject?

◆ This answer is best left up to the reader because the question is asking how the article improved your knowledge. However, one way to answer the question is as follows: This article helps the reader to understand that criminology is not just about theoretical construction. Criminology is both an analytical and experimental social science, and in order to improve the criminal justice system, as well as criminal justice policies, more attention needs to be given to the usefulness of experimental criminology.

10. What are the implications for criminal justice policy that can be derived from this article?

◆ Implications for criminal justice policy are most likely to be found in the conclusion or the discussion sections of the article. This article, however, emphasizes the implications throughout the article. From this article, we are able to derive that crime prevention programs will improve greatly if they are embedded in well-funded experimental-driven data rather than strictly analytical data. Therefore, it is in the hands of policy-makers to fund criminological research and apply the findings in a productive manner to criminal justice policy.

Now that we have gone through the elements of a research article, it is your turn to continue through your text, reading the various articles and answering the same questions. You may find that some articles are easier to follow

than others, but do not be dissuaded. Remember that each article will follow the same format: introduction, literature review, methods, results, and discussion. If you have any problems, refer to this introduction for guidance.

READING

Introduction to “*The Use and Usefulness of Criminology, 1751-2005*”

In this article, Lawrence Sherman adds to our knowledge about the history of criminology. His premise is that after a useful beginning in the eighteenth-century Enlightenment as both an experimental and analytic social science, criminology sank into two centuries of inactivity. Its resurrection in the late twentieth-century crime wave successfully returned criminology to the forefront of discovering useful, if not always used, facts about prevailing crime patterns and responses to crime. Criminology’s failures of “use” in creating justice more enlightened by knowledge of its effects is linked to the still-limited usefulness of criminology, which lacks a comprehensive body of evidence to guide sanctioning decisions. Yet that knowledge is rapidly growing, with experimental (as distinct from analytic) criminology now more prominent than at any time since Henry Fielding founded criminology while inventing the police. In short, Sherman wants us to put criminology to use by experimenting with different replicable crime control practices, using experimental and control groups when possible, rather than simply being a theory-testing science.

The Use and Usefulness of Criminology, 1751-2005

Enlightened Justice and Its Failures

Lawrence W. Sherman

Criminology was born in a crime wave, raised on a crusade against torture and execution, and then hibernated for two centuries of speculation. Awakened by the rising crime rates of the latter twentieth century, most of its scholars chose to pursue analysis over experiment. The twenty-first century now offers more policy-relevant science

than ever, even if basic science still occupies center stage. Its prospects for integrating basic and “clinical” science are growing, with more scholars using multiple tools rather than pursuing single-method work. Criminology contributes only a few drops of science in an ocean of decision making, but the number of drops is growing steadily.

Editors’ Note: This article is from *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* Vol. 600, No. 1, 115–135 (2005).

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As experimental criminology provides more comprehensive evidence about responses to crime, the prospects for better basic science—and better policy—will improve accordingly.

✉ Enlightenment, Criminology, and Justice

The entire history of social science has been shaped by key choices scholars made in that transformative era, choices that are still made today. For criminology more than most disciplines, those Enlightenment choices have had enormous consequences for the use and usefulness of its social science. The most important of these consequences is that justice still remains largely un-Enlightened by empirical evidence about the effects of its actions on public safety and public trust.

Historians may despair at defining a coherent intellectual or philosophical content in the Age of Enlightenment, but one idea seems paramount: “that we understand nature and man best through the use of our natural faculties” (May 1976, xiv) by systematic empirical methods, rather than through ideology, abstract reasoning, common sense, or claims of divine principles made by competing religious authorities. Kant, in contrast, stressed the receiving end of empirical science in his definition of Enlightenment: the time when human beings regained the courage to “use one’s own mind without another’s guidance” (Gay 1969, 384).

Rather than becoming *experimental* in method, social science became primarily *analytic*. This distinction between experimental manipulation of some aspect of social behavior versus detached (if systematic) observation of behavioral patterns is crucial to all social science (even though not all questions for social science offer a realistic potential for experiment). The decision to cast social science primarily in the role of critic, rather than of inventor, has had lasting consequences for the enterprise, especially for the credibility of its conclusions. There may be nothing so practical as a good theory, but it is hard to visibly—or

convincingly—demonstrate the benefits of social analysis for the reduction of human misery. The absence of “show-and-tell” benefits of analytic social science blurred its boundaries with ideology, philosophy, and even emotion. This problem has plagued analytic social science ever since, with the possible exception of times (like the Progressive Era and the 1960s) when the social order itself was in crisis. As sociologist E. Digby Baltzell (1979) suggested about cities and other social institutions, “as the twig is bent, so grows the tree.” Social science may have been forged in the same kind of salon discussions as natural science, but without some kind of empirical reports from factories, clinics, or farm fields. Social science has thus famously “smelled too much of the lamp” of the library (Gay 1969). Even when analytic social science has been most often used, it is rarely praised as useful.

That is not to say that theories (with or without evidence) have lacked influence in criminology, or in any social science. The theory of deterrent effects of sanctions was widely used to reduce the severity of punishment long before the theory could be tested with any evidence. The theories of “anomie” and “differential association” were used to plan the 1960s “War on Poverty” without any clear evidence that opportunity structures could be changed. Psychological theories of personality transformation were used to develop rehabilitation programs in prisons long before any of them were subject to empirical evaluation. Similarly, evidence (without theory) of a high concentration of crime among a small proportion of criminal offenders was used to justify more severe punishment for repeat offenders, also without empirical testing of those policies.

The criminologists’ general preference for analysis over experiment has not been universal in social science. Enlightenment political science was, in an important—if revolutionary—sense, experimental, developing and testing new forms of government soon after they were suggested in print. The Federalist Papers, for example, led directly to the “experiment” of the Bill of Rights.

Perhaps the clearest exception to the dominance of analytic social science was within

criminology itself in its very first work during the Enlightenment. The fact that criminologists do not remember it this way says more about its subsequent dominance by analytic methods than about the true history of the field. Criminology was born twice in the eighteenth century, first (and forgotten) as an experimental science and then (remembered) as an analytic one. And though experimental criminology in the Enlightenment had an enormous impact on institutions of justice, it was analytic criminology that was preserved by law professors and twentieth-century scholars as the foundation of the field.

The history of criminology thus provides an experimental test of this hypothesis about analytic versus experimental social science: *that social science has been most useful, if not most used, when it has been most experimental, with visibly demonstrable benefits (or harm avoidance) from new inventions.* The evidence for this claim in eighteenth-century criminology is echoed by the facts of criminology in the twentieth century. In both centuries, the fraternal twins of analysis and experiment pursued different pathways through life, while communicating closely with each other. One twin was critical, the other imaginative; one systematically observational, the other actively experimental; one detached with its integrity intact, the other engaged with its integrity under threat. Both twins needed each other to advance their mutual field of inquiry. But it has been experiments in every age that made criminology most useful, as measured by unbiased estimates of the effects of various responses to crime.

The greatest disappointment across these centuries has been the limited usefulness of experimental criminology in achieving “geometric precision” (Beccaria 1764/1964) in the pursuit of “Enlightened Justice,” defined as “the administration of sanctions under criminal law guided by (1) inviolate principles protecting human rights of suspects and convicts while seeking (2) consequences reducing human misery, through means known from (3) unbiased empirical evidence of what works best” (Sherman 2005). While some progress has been made, most justice

remains unencumbered by empirical evidence on its effects. To understand why this disappointment persists amid great success, we must begin with the Enlightenment itself.

✉ **Inventing Criminology: Fielding, Beccaria, and Bentham**

The standard account of the origin of criminology locates it as a branch of moral philosophy: part of an aristocratic crusade against torture, the death penalty, and arbitrary punishment, fought with reason, rhetoric, and analysis. This account is true but incomplete. Criminology’s forgotten beginnings preceded Cesare Beccaria’s famous 1764 essay in the form of Henry Fielding’s 1753 experiments with justice in London. Inventing the modern institutions of a salaried police force and prosecutors, of crime reporting, crime records, employee background investigations, liquor licensing, and social welfare policies as crime prevention strategies, Fielding provided the viable preventive alternatives to the cruel excesses of retribution that Beccaria denounced—before Beccaria ever published a word.

The standard account hails a treatise on “the science of justice” (Gay 1969, 440) that was based on Beccaria’s occasional visits to courts and prisons, followed by many discussions in a salon. The present alternative account cites a far less famous treatise based on more than a thousand days of Fielding conducting trials and sentencing convicts in the world’s (then) largest city, supplemented by his on-site inspections of tenements, gin joints, brothels, and public hangings. The standard account thus chooses a criminology of analytic detachment over a criminology of clinical engagement.

The standard account in twentieth-century criminology textbooks traced the origin of the field to this “classical school” of criminal law and criminology, with Cesare Beccaria’s (1738–1794) treatise *On Crimes and Punishments* (1764) as the first treatise in scientific criminology. (Beccaria is also given credit [incorrectly], even by Enlightenment scholars, for first proposing

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that utility be measured by “the greatest happiness divided among the greatest number”—which Frances Hutcheson, a mentor to Adam Smith, had published in Glasgow in 1725 before Beccaria was born [Buchan 2003, 68–71]). Beccaria, and later Bentham, contributed the central claims of the deterrence hypothesis on which almost all systems of criminal law now rely: that punishment is more likely to prevent future crime to the extent that it is certain, swift, and proportionate to the offense (Beccaria) or more costly than the benefit derived from the offense (Bentham).

Fielding

This standard account of Beccaria as the *first* criminologist is, on the evidence, simply wrong. Criminology did not begin in a Milanese salon among the group of aristocrats who helped Beccaria formulate and publish his epigrams but more than a decade earlier in a London magistrate’s courtroom full of gin-soaked robbery defendants. The first social scientist of crime to publish in the English—and perhaps any—language was Henry Fielding, Esq. (1707–1754). Fielding was appointed by the government as magistrate at the Bow Street Court in London. His years on that bench, supplemented by his visits to the homes of London labor and London poor, provided him with ample qualitative data for his 1751 treatise titled *An Enquiry Into the Causes of the Late Increase of Robbers*.

Fielding’s treatise is a remarkable analysis of what would today be called the “environmental criminology” of robbery. Focused on the reasons for a crime wave and the policy alternatives to hanging as the only means of combating crime, Fielding singles out the wave of “that poison called gin” that hit mid-century London like crack hit New York in the 1980s. He theorizes that a drastic price increase (or tax) would make gin too expensive for most people to consume, thereby reducing violent crime. He also proposes more regulation of gambling, based on his interviews with arrested robbers who said they had to

rob to pay their gambling debts. Observing the large numbers of poor and homeless people committing crime, he suggests a wider “safety net” of free housing and food. His emphasis is clearly on prevention without punishment as the best policy approach to crime reduction.

Fielding then goes on to document the failures of punishment in three ways. First, the system of compulsory “voluntary policing” by each citizen imposed after the Norman Conquest had become useless: “what is the business of every man is the business of no man.” Second, the contemporary system of requiring crime victims to prosecute their own cases (or hire a lawyer at their own expense) was failing to bring many identified offenders to justice. Third, witnesses were intimidated and often unwilling to provide evidence needed for conviction. All this leads him to hint at, but not spell out, a modern system of “socialized” justice in which the state, rather than crime victims, pays for police to investigate and catch criminals, prosecutors to bring evidence to court, and even support for witnesses and crime victims.

His chance to present his new “invention” to the government came two years after he published his treatise on robbery. In August, 1753, five different robbery-murders were committed in London in one week. An impatient cabinet secretary summoned Fielding twice from his sickbed and asked him to propose a plan for stopping the murders. In four days, Fielding submitted a “grant proposal” for an experiment in policing that would cost £600 (about £70,000 or \$140,000 in current value). The purpose of the money was to retain, on salary, the band of detectives Fielding worked with, and to pay a reward to informants who would provide evidence against the murderers.

Within two weeks, the robberies stopped, and for two months not one murder or robbery was reported in Westminster (Fielding 1755/1964, 191–193). Fielding managed to obtain a “no-cost extension” to the grant, which kept the detectives on salary for several years. After Henry’s death, his brother John obtained

new funding, so that the small team of “Bow Street Runners” stayed in operation until the foundation of the much larger—and uniformed—Metropolitan Police in 1829.

The birth of the Bow Street Runners was a turning point in the English paradigm of justice. The crime wave accompanying the penny-a-quart gin epidemic of the mid-eighteenth century had demonstrated the failure of relying solely on the *severity* of punishment, so excessive that many juries refused to convict people who were clearly guilty of offenses punishable by death—such as shoplifting. As Bentham would later write, there was good reason to think that the *certainty* of punishment was too low for crime to be deterrable. As Fielding said in his treatise on robbery, “The utmost severity to offenders [will not] be justifiable unless we take every possible method of preventing the offence.” Fielding was not the only inventor to propose the idea of a salaried police force to patrol and arrest criminals, but he was the first to conduct an *experiment* testing that invention. While Fielding’s police experiment would take decades to be judged successful (seventy-six years for the “Bobbies” to be founded at Scotland Yard in 1829), the role of experimental evidence proved central to changing the paradigm of practice.

Beccaria

In sharp contrast, Beccaria had no clinical practice with offenders, nor was he ever asked to stop a crime wave. Instead, he took aim at a wave of torture and execution that characterized European justice. Arguing the same ideology of prevention as Fielding (whose treatise he did not cite), Beccaria urged abolition of torture, the death penalty, and secret trials. Within two centuries, almost all Europe had adopted his proposals. While many other causes of that result can be cited, there is clear evidence of Beccaria’s 1764 treatise creating a “tipping point” of public opinion on justice.

What Beccaria did not do, however, was to supply a shred of scientific evidence in support of his theories of the deterrent effects of non-capital penalties proportionate to the severity of the offense. Nor did he state his theories in a clearly falsifiable way, as Fielding had done. In his method, Beccaria varies little from law professors or judges (then and now) who argue a blend of opinion and factual assumptions they find reasonable, deeming it enlightened truth *ipse dixit* (“because I say so myself”). What he lacked by the light of systematic analysis of data, he made up for by eloquence and “stickiness” of his aphorisms. Criminology by slogan may be more readily communicated than criminology by experiment in terms of fame. But it is worth noting that the founding of the British police appears much more directly linked to Fielding’s experiments than the steady abolition of the death penalty was linked to Beccaria’s book.

Bentham

Beccaria the moral-empirical theorist stands in sharp contrast to his fellow Utilitarian Jeremy Bentham, who devoted twelve years of his life (and some £10,000) to an invention in prison administration. Working from a book he wrote on a “Panopticon” design for punishment by incarceration (rather than hanging), Bentham successfully lobbied for a 1794 law authorizing such a prison to be built. He was later promised a contract to build and manage such a prison, but landed interests opposed his use of the site he had selected. We can classify Bentham as an experimentalist on the grounds that he invested much of his life in “trying” as well as thinking. Even though he did not build the prison he designed, similar prisons (for better or worse) were built in the United States and elsewhere. Prison design may justifiably be classified as a form of invention and experimental criminology, as distinct from the analytical social science approach Bentham used in

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his writings—thereby making him as “integrated” as Fielding in terms of theory and practice. The demise of Bentham’s plans during the Napoleonic Wars marked the end of an era in criminology, just as the Enlightenment itself went into retreat after the French Revolution and the rise of Napoleon. By 1815, experimentalism in criminology was in hibernation, along with most of criminology itself, not to stir until the 1920s or spring fully to life until the 1960s.

✦ Two Torpid Centuries— With Exceptions

Analytic criminology continued to develop slowly even while experimental criminology slumbered deeply, but neither had any demonstrable utility to the societies that fostered them. One major development was the idea of involuntary causes of crime “determined” by either social (Quetelet 1835/2004) or biological (Lombroso 1876/1918) factors that called into question the legal doctrines of criminal responsibility. The empirical evidence for these claims, however, was weak (and in Lombroso’s case, wrong), leaving the theoretical approach to criminology largely unused until President Johnson’s War on Poverty in the 1960s.

Cambridge-Somerville

The first fully randomized controlled trial in American criminology appears to have been the Cambridge-Somerville experiment, launched in Massachusetts in the 1930s by Dr. Richard Clark Cabot. This project offered high-risk young males “friendly guidance and social support, healthful activities after school, tutoring when necessary, and medical assistance as needed” (McCord 2001). It also included a long-term “big brother” mentoring relationship that was abruptly terminated in most cases during World War II. While the long-term effects of the program would not be known until the 1970s, the critical importance of the experimental design was recognized at the outset. It was for that reason that the outcomes test could reach its startling conclusion: “The

results showed that as compared with members of the control group, those who had been in the treatment program were more likely to have been convicted for crimes indexed by the Federal Bureau of Investigation as serious street crimes; they had died an average of five years younger; and they were more likely to have received a medical diagnosis as alcoholic, schizophrenic, or manic-depressive” (McCord 2001, 188). In short, the boys offered the program would have been far better off if they had been “deprived” of the program services in the randomly assigned control group.

No study in the history of criminology has ever demonstrated such clear, unintended, criminogenic effects of a program intended to prevent crime. To this day, it is “exhibit A” in discussions with legislators, students, and others skeptical of the value of evaluating government programs of any sort, let alone crime prevention programs. Its early reports in the 1950s also set the stage for a renaissance in experimental criminology, independently of the growth of analytic criminology.

✦ Renaissance: 1950-1982

Amidst growing concern about juvenile delinquency, the Eisenhower administration provided the first federal funding for research on delinquency prevention. Many of the studies funded in that era, with both federal and nonfederal support, adopted experimental designs. What follows is merely a highlighting of the renaissance of experimental criminology in the long twilight of the FDR coalition prior to the advent of the Reagan revolution.

Martinson and Wilson

While experimental evidence was on the rise in policing, it was on the decline in corrections. The comprehensive review of rehabilitation strategies undertaken by Lipton, Martinson, and Wilks (1975) initially focused on the internal validity of the research designs in rehabilitation experiments within prisons. Concluding that these designs were too weak to offer unbiased esti-

mates of treatment effects, the authors essentially said “we don’t know” what works to rehabilitate criminals. In a series of less scientific and more popular publications, the summary of the study was transformed into saying that there is no evidence that criminals can be rehabilitated. Even the title “What Works” was widely repeated in 1975 by word of mouth as “nothing works.”

The Martinson review soon became the basis for a major change in correctional policies. While the per capita rates of incarceration had been dropping throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, the trend was rapidly reversed after 1975 (Ruth and Reitz 2003). Coinciding with the publication of Wilson’s (1975) first edition of *Thinking About Crime*, the Martinson review arguably helped fuel a sea change from treating criminals as victims of society to treating society as the victim of criminals. That, in turn, may have helped to feed a three-decade increase in prisoners (Laub 2004) to more than 2.2 million, the highest incarceration rate in the world.

📄 Warp Speed: 1982–2005

Stewart

In September, 1982, a former Oakland Police captain named James K. Stewart was appointed director of the National Institute of Justice (NIJ). Formerly a White House Fellow who had attended a National Academy of Sciences discussion of the work of NIJ, Stewart had been convinced by James Q. Wilson and others that NIJ needed to invest more of its budget in experimental criminology. He acted immediately by canceling existing plans to award many research grants for analytic criminology, transferring the funds to support experimental work. This work included experiments in policing, probation, drug market disruption, drunk-driving sentences, investigative practices, and shoplifting arrests.

Schools

The 1980s also witnessed the expansion of experimental criminology into the many school-based

prevention programs. Extensive experimental and quasi-experimental evidence on their effects—good and bad—has now been published. In one test, for example, a popular peer guidance group that was found effective as an alternative to incarceration was found to increase crime in a high school setting. Gottfredson (1987) found that high-risk students who were not grouped with other high-risk students in high school group discussions did better than those who were.

Drug Courts

The advent of (diversion from prosecution to medically supervised treatments administered by) “drug courts” during the rapid increase in experimental criminology has led to a large and growing volume of tests of drug court effects on recidivism. Perhaps no other innovation in criminal justice has had so many controlled field tests conducted by so many different independent researchers. The compilations of these findings into meta-analyses will shed increasing light on the questions of when, and how, to divert drug-abusing offenders from prison.

Boot Camps

Much the same can be said about boot camps. The major difference is that boot camp evaluations started off as primarily quasi-experimental in their designs (with matched comparisons or worse), but increasing numbers of fully randomized tests have been conducted in recent years (Mitchell, MacKenzie, and Perez 2005). Many states persist in using boot camps for thousands of offenders, despite fairly consistent evidence that they are no more effective than regular correctional programs.

Child Raising

Criminology has also claimed a major experiment in child raising as one of its own. Beginning at the start of the “warp speed” era, the program of nurse home visits to at-risk first mothers

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designed by Dr. David Olds and his colleagues (1986) has now been found to have long-term crime prevention effects. Both mothers and children show these effects, which may be linked to lower levels of child abuse or better anger management practices in child raising.

Criminology: Analytic, Useful, and Used

This recitation of a selected list of experiments in criminology must be labeled with a consumer warning: *the vast majority of published criminology remains analytic and nonexperimental*. While criminology was attracting funding and students during the period of rising crime of the 1960s to 1990s, criminologists put most of their efforts into the basic science of crime patterns and theories of criminality. Studies of the natural life course of crime among cohorts of males became the central focus of the field, as measured by citation patterns (Wolfgang, Figlio, and Thornberry 1978). Despite standing concerns that criminology would be “captured” by governments to become a tool for developing repressive policies, the evidence suggests that the greatest (or largest) generation of criminologists in history captured the field away from policymakers.

The renaissance in experimental criminology therefore addressed very intense debates over many key issues in crime and justice, providing the first unbiased empirical guidance available to inform those debates. That much made criminology increasingly useful, at least potentially. Usefulness alone, of course, does not guarantee that the information will be *used*. Police agencies today do make extensive use of the research on concentrating patrols in crime hot spots, yet they have few repeat offender units, despite two successful tests of the “invention.” Correctional agencies make increasing use of the “what works” literature in the United States and United Kingdom, yet prison populations are still fed by people returned to prison on

the unevaluated policy of incarcerating “technical” violators of the conditions of their release (who have not committed new crimes). Good evidence alone is not enough to change policy in any context. Yet absent good evidence, there is a far greater danger that bad policies will win out. Analytic criminology—well or badly done—poses fewer risks for society than badly done experimental criminology. It is not clear that another descriptive test of differential association theory will have any effect on policy making, unless it is embedded in a program evaluation. But misleading or biased evidence from poor-quality research designs—or even unrepeated experiments—may well cause the adoption of policies that ultimately prove harmful.

This danger is, in turn, reduced by the lack of influence criminology usually has on policy making or operational decisions. That, in turn, is linked to the absence of clear conclusions about the vast majority of criminal justice policies and decisions. Until experimental criminology can develop a more comprehensive basis of evidence for guiding operations, practitioners are unlikely to develop the habit of checking the literature before making a decision. The possibility of improving the quality of both primary evidence and systematic reviews offers hope for a future in which criminology itself may entail less risk of causing harm.

This is by no means a suggestion that analytic criminology be abandoned; the strength of experimental criminology may depend heavily on the continued advancement of basic (analytic) criminology. Yet the full partnership between the two has yet to be realized. Analytic social science still dominates field experiments by 100 to 1 or better in criminology, just as in any other field of research on human behavior. Future success of the field may depend upon a growing public image based on experimental results, just as advances in treatment attract funding for basic science in medicine.



Conclusion

Theoretical criminology will hold center stage for many years to come. But as Farrington (2000) has argued, the advancement of theory may depend on better experimental evidence. And that, in turn, may depend on a revival in the federal funding that has recently dropped to its lowest level in four decades. Such a revival may well depend on exciting public interest in the practical value of research, as perhaps only experiments can do.

“Show and tell” is hard to do while it is happening. Yet it is not impossible. Whether anyone ever sees a crime prevention program delivered, it is at least possible to embed an experimental design into every long-term analytic study of crime in the life course. As Joan McCord (2003) said in her final words to the American Society of Criminology, the era of purely observational criminology should come to an end. Given what we now know about the basic life-course patterns, McCord suggested, “all longitudinal studies should now have experiments embedded within them.”

Doing what McCord proposed would become an experiment *in* social science as well as *of* social science. That experiment is already under way, in a larger sense. Criminology is rapidly becoming more multi-method, as well as multi-level and multi-theoretical. Criminology may soon resemble medicine more than economics, with analysts closely integrated with clinical researchers to develop basic science as well as treatment. The integration of diverse forms and levels of knowledge in “consilience” with each other, rather than a hegemony of any one approach, is within our grasp. It awaits only a generation of broadly educated criminologists prepared to do many things, or at least prepared to work in collaboration with other people who bring diverse talents to science.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the main point of Sherman’s discussion of analytical versus experimental criminology?
2. Why should Fielding, rather than Beccaria, be considered the father of criminology, according to Sherman?
3. Sherman wants an integration of criminology with other sciences and wants criminology to be multi-method, multi-level, and multi-theoretical. What might be the ideological barriers to such integration?

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