CHAPTER 2

The Process and Problems of Social Research

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Domestic violence is a major problem in countries around the world. An international survey by the World Health Organization of 24,000 women in 10 countries estimated lifetime physical or sexual abuse ranging from a low of 15% in Japan to 71% in rural Ethiopia (WHO 2005:6) (Exhibit 2.1). In a United States survey of 16,000 men and women sponsored by the Department of Justice and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 25% of women and 7.6% of men said they had been raped and/or physically assaulted by a current or former spouse, cohabiting partner, or date at some time in their lives (Tjaden & Thoennes 2000:iii). And, most partners seem to get away with the abuse: only one-fifth of all rapes and one-quarter of all physical assaults perpetrated against female respondents by intimates were reported to the police (Tjaden & Thoennes 2000:v).

What can be done to reduce this problem? In 1981, the Police Foundation and the Minneapolis Police Department began an experiment to determine whether arresting accused spouse abusers on the spot would deter repeat incidents. The study’s results, which were widely publicized, indicated that arrests did have a deterrent effect. In part because of this, the percentage of urban police departments that made arrest the preferred response to complaints of domestic violence rose from 10% in 1984 to 90% in 1988 (Sherman 1992:14). Researchers in six other cities then conducted similar experiments to determine whether changing the location or other research procedures would result in different outcomes (Sherman 1992; Sherman & Berk 1984). The Minneapolis Domestic Violence Experiment, the studies modeled after it, and the controversies arising from it will provide good examples for our systematic overview of the social research process.

Exhibit 2.1 International Prevalence of Lifetime Physical and Sexual Violence by an Intimate Partner, Among Ever-Partnered Women, by Site

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Ever Experienced Physical Violence (%)</th>
<th>Ever Experienced Sexual Violence (%)</th>
<th>Ever Experienced Physical or Sexual Violence (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peru province</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia province</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peru city</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Republic of Tanzania province</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh province</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samoa</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand province</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil province</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Republic of Tanzania city</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>34</td>
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<tr>
<td>Namibia city</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
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<td>Brazil city</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thailand city</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
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<tr>
<td>Serbia and Montenegro city</td>
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<td>33</td>
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<td>Japan city</td>
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</table>
In this chapter, we will examine different social research strategies. We will also consider in some detail the techniques required to begin the research process: formulating research questions, finding information, reviewing prior research, and writing a research proposal. You will also find more details in the end-of-chapter exercises on proposal writing, and in Appendixes A and B about reviewing the literature. I will use the Minneapolis experiment and the related research to illustrate the different research strategies and some of the related techniques. The chapter also explains the role of social theories in developing research questions and guiding research decisions. By the chapter’s end, you should be ready to formulate a research question, design a general strategy for answering this question, critique previous studies that addressed this question, and begin a proposal for additional research on the question. You can think of Chapter 1 as having introduced the why of social research; Chapter 2 introduces the how.

**Social Research Questions**

A **social research question** is a question about the social world that one seeks to answer through the collection and analysis of firsthand, verifiable, empirical data. It is not a question about who did what to whom, but a question about people in groups, about general social processes, or about tendencies in community change such as the following: What distinguishes Internet users from other persons? Does community policing reduce the crime rate? What influences the likelihood of spouse abuse? How do people react to social isolation? So many research questions are possible that it is more of a challenge to specify what does not qualify as a social research question than to specify what does.

But that doesn’t mean it is easy to specify a research question. In fact, formulating a good research question can be surprisingly difficult. We can break the process into three stages: (1) identifying one or more questions for study, (2) refining the questions, and then, (3) evaluating the questions.

**Identifying Social Research Questions**

Social research questions may emerge from your own experience—from your “personal troubles,” as C. Wright Mills (1959) put it. One experience might be membership in a church, another could be victimization by crime, and yet another might be moving from a dorm to a sorority house. You may find yourself asking a question such as “In what ways do people tend to benefit from church membership?” “Does victimization change a person’s trust in others?” or “How do initiation procedures influence group commitment?” What other possible research questions can you develop based on your own experiences in the social world?

The research literature is often the best source for research questions. Every article or book will bring new questions to mind. Even if you’re not feeling too creative when you read the literature, most research articles highlight unresolved issues and end with suggestions for additional research. For example, Lawrence Sherman and Douglas Smith (1992), with their colleagues, concluded an article on some of the replications of the Minneapolis experiment on police responses to spouse abuse by suggesting that “deterrence may be effective for a substantial segment of the offender population. . . . However, the underlying mechanisms remain obscure” (p. 706). A new study could focus on these mechanisms: Why does the arrest of offenders deter some of them from future criminal acts? Any research article in a journal in your field is likely to have comments that point toward unresolved issues.
Many social scientists find the source of their research questions in social theory. Some researchers spend much of their careers conducting research intended to refine an answer to one research question that is critical for a particular social theory. For example, you may have concluded that labeling theory can explain much social deviance, so you may ask whether labeling theory can explain how spouse abusers react to being arrested.

Finally, some research questions have very pragmatic sources. You may focus on a research question someone else posed because it seems to be to your advantage to do so. Some social scientists conduct research on specific questions posed by a funding source in what is termed an RFP, a request for proposals. (Sometimes the acronym RFA is used, meaning request for applications.) The six projects to test the conclusions of the Minneapolis Domestic Violence Experiment were developed in response to such a call for proposals from the National Institute of Justice. Or, you may learn that the social workers in the homeless shelter where you volunteer need help with a survey to learn about client needs, which becomes the basis for another research question.

Refining Social Research Questions

It is even more challenging to focus on a problem of manageable size than it is to come up with an interesting question for research. We are often interested in much more than we can reasonably investigate with limited time and resources. In addition, researchers may worry about staking a research project (and thereby a grant or a grade) on a single problem, and so they may address several research questions at once. Also, it might seem risky to focus on a research question that may lead to results discrepant with our own cherished assumptions about the social world. The prospective commitment of time and effort for some research questions may seem overwhelming, resulting in a certain degree of paralysis.

The best way to avoid these problems is to develop the research question gradually. Don’t keep hoping that the perfect research question will just spring forth from your pen. Instead, develop a list of possible research questions as you go along. At the appropriate time, look through this list for the research questions that appear more than once. Narrow your list to the most interesting, most workable candidates. Repeat this process as long as it helps improve your research question.

Evaluating Social Research Questions

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

Feasibility

We must be able to conduct any study within the time and resources available. If time is short, questions that involve long-term change may not be feasible. Another issue is to what people or groups we can expect to gain access. Observing social interaction in corporate boardrooms may be taboo. Next, we must consider whether we will have any additional resources, such as research funds or other researchers with whom to collaborate. Remember that there are severe limits on what one person can accomplish. On the other hand, we may be able to piggyback our research onto a larger research project. We also must take into account the constraints we face due to our schedules and other commitments and our skill level.

The Minneapolis Domestic Violence Experiment shows how ambitious a social research question can be when a team of seasoned researchers secures the backing of influential groups. The project required hundreds of thousands of dollars, the collaboration of many social scientists and criminal justice personnel,
and the volunteer efforts of 41 Minneapolis police officers. Of course, for this reason, the Sherman and Berk (1984) question would not be a feasible one for a student project. You might instead ask the question “Do students think punishment deters spouse abuse?” Or, perhaps you could work out an arrangement with a local police department to study the question, “How satisfied are police officers with their treatment of domestic violence cases?”

Social Importance

Social research is not a simple undertaking, so it’s hard to justify the expenditure of effort and resources unless we focus on a substantive area that is important. Besides, you need to feel motivated to carry out the study. Nonetheless, “importance” is relative, so for a class assignment, student reactions to dormitory rules or something similar might be important enough.

For most research undertakings, we should consider whether the research question is important to other people. Will an answer to the research question make a difference for society or for social relations? Again, the Minneapolis Domestic Violence Experiment is an exemplary case. But the social sciences are not wanting for important research questions. The April 1984 issue of the American Sociological Review, which contained the first academic article on the Minneapolis experiment, also included articles reporting research on elections, school tracking, discrimination, work commitment, school grades, organizational change, and homicide. All these articles addressed research questions about important social issues, and all raised new questions for additional research.

Scientific Relevance

Every research question should be grounded in the social science literature. Whether we formulate a research question because we have been stimulated by an academic article or because we want to investigate a current social problem, we should first turn to the social science literature to find out what has already been learned about this question. You can be sure that some prior study is relevant to almost any research question you can think of.

The Minneapolis experiment was built on a substantial body of contradictory theorizing about the impact of punishment on criminality (Sherman & Berk 1984). Deterrence theory predicted that arrest would deter individuals from repeat offenses; labeling theory predicted that arrest would make repeat offenses more likely. Only one prior experimental study of this issue was about juveniles, and studies among adults had yielded inconsistent findings. Clearly, the Minneapolis researchers had good reason for another study. Any new research question should be connected in this way to past research.

How do we find prior research on questions of interest? You may already know some of the relevant material from prior coursework or your independent reading, but that won’t be enough. When you are about to launch an investigation of a new research question, you must apply a very different standard than when you are studying for a test or just seeking to “learn about domestic violence.” You need to find reports of previous investigations that sought to answer the same research question that you wish to answer, not just those that were about a similar topic. If there have been no prior studies of exactly the same research question on which you wish to focus, you should seek to find reports from investigations of very similar research questions. Once you have located reports from prior research similar to the research that you wish to conduct, you may expand
your search to include investigations about related topics or studies that used similar methods. You want to be able to explain what your proposed study adds to prior research as well as how it takes into account what has already been learned about your research question.

Although it’s most important when you’re starting out, reviewing the literature is also important at later stages of the research process. Throughout a research project, you will uncover new issues and encounter unexpected problems; at each of these times, you should search the literature to locate prior research on these issues and to learn how others responded to similar problems. Published research that you ignored when you were seeking to find other research on domestic violence might become very relevant when you have to decide which questions to ask people about their attitudes toward police and other authorities.

**Searching the Literature**

Conducting a thorough search of the research literature and then reviewing critically what you have found lays an essential foundation for any research project. Fortunately, much of this information can be identified online, without leaving your desktop, and an increasing number of published journal articles can be downloaded directly onto your own computer (depending on your particular access privileges). But, just because there’s a lot available online doesn’t mean that you need to find it all. Keep in mind that your goal is to find relevant reports of prior research investigations. The type of reports you should focus on are those that have been screened for quality through critique by other social scientists prior to publication. Scholarly journals, or refereed journals that publish peer reviewed articles, manage this review process. Most often, editors of refereed journals send articles that authors submit to them to three or more other social scientists for anonymous review. Based on the reviewers’ comments, the journal editor then decides whether to accept or reject the article, or to invite the author to “revise and resubmit.” This process results in the rejection of most articles (top journals like the *American Sociological Review* or the *American Journal of Sociology* may reject about 90% of the articles submitted), while those that are ultimately accepted for publication normally have to be revised and resubmitted first. This helps to ensure a much higher-quality standard, although journals vary in the rigor of their review standards, and of course, different reviewers may be impressed by different types of articles; you thus always have to make your own judgment about article quality.

Newspaper and magazine articles may raise important issues or summarize social science research investigations, but they are not an acceptable source for understanding the research literature. The web offers much useful material, including research reports from government and other sources, sites that describe social programs, and even indexes of the published research literature. You may find copies of particular rating scales, reports from research in progress, papers that have been presented at professional conferences, and online discussions of related topics. Web search engines will also find academic journal articles that you can access directly online, although usually for a fee. Most of the published research literature will be available to you online only if you go through the website of your college or university library. The library pays a fee to companies that provide online journals so that you can retrieve this information without paying anything extra yourself. Of course, no library can afford to pay for every journal, so if you can’t find a particular issue of a particular journal that you need online, you will have to order the article that you need through interlibrary loan or, if the hard copy of the journal is available, walk over to your library to read it.

As with any part of the research process, your method for searching the literature will affect the quality of your results. Your search method should include the following steps:

**Specify your research question.** Your research question should be neither so broad that hundreds of articles are judged relevant nor so narrow that you miss important literature. “Is informal social control effective?” is probably too broad. “Does informal social control reduce rates of burglary in large cities?” is probably too narrow. “Is informal social control more effective in reducing crime rates than policing?” provides about the right level of specificity.
Identify appropriate bibliographic databases to search. Sociological Abstracts or SocINDEX may meet many of your needs, but if you are studying a question about social factors in illness, you should also search in Medline, the database for searching the medical literature. If your focus is on mental health, you'll also want to include a search in the online Psychological Abstracts database, PsycINFO, or the version that also contains the full text of articles, PsycARTICLES. Search Criminal Justice Abstracts if your topic is in the area of criminology or criminal justice. You might also find relevant literature in EconLit, which indexes the economic literature, and in ContempWomenIss, which indexes literature on contemporary women's issues. It will save you a lot of time in the long run if you ask a librarian to teach you the best techniques for retrieving the most relevant articles to answer your questions.

To find articles that refer to a previous publication, like Sherman and Berk's study of the police response to domestic violence, the Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) will be helpful. SSCI is an extremely useful tool for tracing the cumulative research in an area across the social sciences. SSCI has a unique “citation searching” feature that allows you to look up articles or books, see who else has cited them in their work, and find out which articles and books have had the biggest impact in a field.

Create a tentative list of search terms. List the parts and subparts of your research question and any related issues that you think are important: “informal social control,” “policing,” “influences on crime rates,” and perhaps “community cohesion and crime.” List the authors of relevant studies. Specify the most important journals that deal with your topic.

Narrow your search. The sheer number of references you find can be a problem. For example, searching for “social capital” in March 2011 resulted in 4,863 citations in SocINDEX. Depending on the database you are working with and the purposes of your search, you may want to limit your search to English-language publications, to journal articles rather than conference papers or dissertations (both of which are more difficult to acquire), and to materials published in recent years. If your search yields too many citations, try specifying the search terms more precisely. If you have not found much literature, try using more general terms. Whatever terms you search first, don’t consider your search complete until you have tried several different approaches and have seen how many articles you find. A search for “domestic violence” in SocINDEX on March 22, 2011, yielded 7,548 hits; by adding “effects” or “influences” as required search terms and limiting the search to peer reviewed articles published since 2000, the number of hits dropped to 368.

Use Boolean search logic. It’s often a good idea to narrow down your search by requiring that abstracts contain combinations of words or phrases that include more of the specific details of your research question. Using the Boolean connector and allows you to do this, while using the connector or allows you to find abstracts containing different words that mean the same thing (see Exhibit 2.2).

Use appropriate subject descriptors. Once you have found an article that you consider to be appropriate, take a look at the “descriptors” field in the citation. You can then redo your search after requiring that the articles be classified with some or all of these descriptor terms.

Check the results. Read the titles and abstracts you have found and identify the articles that appear to be most relevant. If possible, click on these article titles and generate a list of their references. See if you find more articles that are relevant to your research question but that you have missed so far. You will be surprised (I always am) at how many important articles your initial online search missed.

Locate the articles. Whatever database you use, the next step after finding your references is to obtain the articles themselves. You will probably find the full text of many articles available online, but this will be determined by what journals your library subscribes to and the period for which it pays for online access.
The most recent issues of some journals may not be available online. Keep in mind that your library will not have anywhere near all the journals (and books) that you run across in your literature search, so you will have to add another step to your search: checking the “holdings” information.

If an article that appears to be important for your topic isn’t available from your own library, nor online, you may be able to request a copy online through your library site or by asking a member of the library staff. You can also check http://worldcat.org to see what other libraries have the journal, and http://publist.com to find out if you can purchase the article.

Be sure to take notes on each article you read, organizing your notes into standard sections: theory, methods, findings, conclusions. In any case, write your review of the literature so that it contributes to your study in some concrete way; don’t feel compelled to discuss an article just because you have read it. Be judicious. You are conducting only one study of one issue and it will only obscure the value of your study if you try to relate it to every tangential point in related research.

Don’t think of searching the literature as a one-time-only venture—something that you leave behind as you move on to your real research. You may encounter new questions or unanticipated problems as you conduct your research or as you burrow deeper into the literature. Searching the literature again to determine what others have found in response to these questions or what steps they have taken to resolve these problems can yield substantial improvements in your own research. There is so much literature on so many topics that it often is not possible to figure out in advance every subject for which you should search the literature, or what type of search will be most beneficial.

Another reason to make searching the literature an ongoing project is that the literature is always growing. During the course of one research study, whether it takes only one semester or several years, new findings will be published and relevant questions will be debated. Staying attuned to the literature and checking it at least when you are writing up your findings may save your study from being outdated as soon as it is finished.

**Reviewing Research**

Your literature review will suggest specific research questions for further investigation and research methods with which to study those questions. Sherman and Berk (1984) learned from their literature review that there had been little empirical research about the impact of arrest policies in domestic violence cases. What prior research had been conducted did not use very rigorous research designs. There was thus potential value in conducting new research using a rigorous design. Subsequent researchers questioned whether Sherman and Berk’s results would be replicated in other cities and whether some of their methods could be improved. When the original results did not replicate, researchers designed more investigations to test explanations for the different findings. In this way, reviewing the literature identifies unanswered questions and contradictory evidence.

Effective review of the prior research is thus an essential step in building the foundation for new research. You must assess carefully the quality of each research study, consider the implications of each article for your own plans, and expand your thinking about your research question to take account of new perspectives and alternative arguments. It is through reviewing the literature and using it to extend and sharpen your own ideas and methods that you become a part of the social science community. Instead of being just one individual studying an issue that interests you, you are building on an ever-growing body of knowledge that is being constructed by the entire community of scholars.

Sometimes you’ll find that someone else has already searched the literature on your research question and discussed what they found in a special review article or book chapter. For example, Rosemary Chalk and Joel H. Garner (2001) published an excellent review of the research on arrest and domestic violence in the journal *New Directions for Evaluation*. Most of the research articles that you find will include a short literature review on the specific focus of the research. These reviews can help a lot, but they are no substitute for searching the
literature yourself, selecting the articles and other sources that are most pertinent to your research question, and then reviewing what you have found. No one but you can decide what is relevant for your research question and the research circumstances you will be facing—the setting you will study, the timing of your study, the new issues that you want to include in your study, and your specific methods. And, you can’t depend on any published research review for information on the most recent works. New research results about many questions appear continually in scholarly journals and books, in research reports from government agencies and other organizations, and on websites all over the world; you’ll need to check for new research like this yourself.

_Caveat emptor_ (buyer beware) is the watchword when you search the web, but the published scholarly journal literature can be identified in databases such as Sociological Abstracts, SocINDEX, and Psychological Abstracts. Because these literature databases follow a more standard format and use a careful process to decide what literature to include, they are the sources on which you should focus. This section concentrates on the procedures you should use for reviewing the articles you find in a search of the scholarly literature. These procedures can also be applied to reviews of research monographs—books that provide more information from a research project than that which can be contained in a journal article.

Reviewing the literature is really a two-stage process. In the first stage, you must assess each article separately. This assessment should follow a standard format such as that represented by the “Questions to Ask About a Research Article” in Appendix B. However, you should keep in mind that you can’t adequately understand a research study if you just treat it as a series of discrete steps, involving a marriage of convenience among separate techniques. Any research project is an integrated whole, so you must be concerned with how each component of the research design influenced the others—for example, how the measurement approach might have affected the causal validity of the researcher’s conclusions and how the sampling strategy might have altered the quality of measures.

The second stage of the review process is to assess the implications of the entire set of articles (and other materials) for the relevant aspects of your research question and procedures, and then to write an integrated review that highlights these implications. Although you can find literature reviews that consist simply of assessments of one published article after another—that never get beyond the first stage in the review process—your understanding of the literature and the quality of your own work will be much improved if you make the effort to write an integrated review.

In the next two sections, I show how you might answer many of the questions in Appendix A as I review a research article about domestic violence. I will then show how the review of a single article can be used within an integrated review of the body of prior research on this research question. Because at this early point in the text you won’t be familiar with all the terminology used in the article review, you might want to read through the more elaborate article review in Appendix B later in the course.

**A Single-Article Review: Formal and Informal Deterrents to Domestic Violence**

Antony Pate and Edwin Hamilton at the national Police Foundation designed one of the studies funded by the U.S. Department of Justice to replicate the Minneapolis Domestic Violence Experiment. In this section, we will examine the article that resulted from that replication, which was published in the _American Sociological Review_ (Pate & Hamilton 1992). The numbers in square brackets refer to the article review questions in Appendix A.

_The research question._ Like Sherman and Berk’s (1984) original Minneapolis study, Pate and Hamilton’s (1992) Metro-Dade spouse assault experiment sought to test the deterrent effect of arrest in domestic violence cases, but with an additional focus on the role of informal social control [1]. The purpose of the study was explanatory, because the goal was to explain variation in the propensity to commit spouse abuse [2]. Deterrence theory provided the theoretical framework for the study, but this framework was broadened to
include the proposition by Williams and Hawkins (1986) that informal sanctions such as stigma and the loss of valued relationships augment the effect of formal sanctions such as arrest [4]. Pate and Hamilton’s (1992) literature review referred, appropriately, to the original Sherman and Berk (1984) research, to the other studies that attempted to replicate the original findings, and to research on informal social control [3].

Exhibit 2.2 shows what Pate and Hamilton might have entered on their computer if they searched Sociological Abstracts to find research on “informal social control” and “police” or “arrest.”

There is no explicit discussion of ethical guidelines in the article, although reference is made to a more complete unpublished report [6]. Clearly, important ethical issues had to be considered, given the experimental intervention in the police response to serious assaults, but the adherence to standard criminal justice procedures suggests attention to the welfare of victims as well as to the rights of suspects. We will consider these issues in more detail later in this chapter.

**The research design.** Developed as a follow-up to the original Minneapolis experiment, the Metro-Dade experiment exemplifies the guidelines for scientific research that I present in Chapter 3 [5]. It was designed systematically, with careful attention to specification of terms and clarification of assumptions, and focused on the possibility of different outcomes rather than certainty about one preferred outcome. The major concepts in the study, formal and informal deterrence, were defined clearly [9] and then measured with straightforward indicators—arrest or nonarrest for formal deterrence and marital status and employment status for informal deterrence. However, the specific measurement procedures for marital and employment status were not discussed, and no attempt was made to determine whether they captured adequately the concept of informal social control [9, 10].

Three hypotheses were stated and also related to the larger theoretical framework and prior research [7]. The study design focused on the behavior of individuals [13] and collected data over time, including records indicating subsequent assault up to 6 months after the initial arrest [14]. The project’s experimental design was used appropriately to test for the causal effect of arrest on recidivism [15, 17]. The research project involved all eligible cases, rather than a sample of cases, but there were a number of eligibility criteria that narrow down the ability to generalize these results to the entire population of domestic assault cases in the Metro-Dade area or elsewhere [11]. There is a brief discussion of the 92 eligible cases that were not given the treatment to which they were assigned, but it does not clarify the reasons for the misassignment [15].

**The research findings and conclusion.** Pate and Hamilton’s (1992) analysis of the Metro-Dade experiment was motivated by concern with the effect of social context, because the replications in other cities of the original Minneapolis Domestic Violence Experiment had not had consistent results [19]. Their analysis gave strong support to the expectation that informal social control processes are important: As they had hypothesized, arrest had a deterrent effect on suspects who were employed, but not on those who were unemployed (Exhibit 2.3). However, marital status had no such effect [20]. The subsequent discussion of these findings gives no attention to the implications of the lack of support for the effect of marital status [21], but the study
represents an important improvement over earlier research that had not examined informal sanctions [22]. The need for additional research is highlighted and the importance of the findings for social policy are discussed: Pate and Hamilton suggest that their finding that arrest deters only those who have something to lose (e.g., a job) must be taken into account when policing policies are established [23].

Overall, the Pate and Hamilton (1992) study represents an important contribution to understanding how informal social control processes influence the effectiveness of formal sanctions such as arrest. Although the use of a population of actual spouse assault cases precluded the use of very sophisticated measures of informal social control, the experimental design of the study and the researchers’ ability to interpret the results in the context of several other comparable experiments distinguishes this research as exceptionally worthwhile. It is not hard to understand why these studies continue to stimulate further research and ongoing policy discussions.

**An Integrated Literature Review: When Does Arrest Matter?**

The goal of the second stage of the literature review process is to integrate the results of your separate article reviews and develop an overall assessment of the implications of prior research. The integrated literature review should accomplish three goals: (1) summarize prior research, (2) critique prior research, and (3) present pertinent conclusions (Hart 1998:186–187). I’ll discuss each of these goals in turn.

1. **Summarize prior research.** Your summary of prior research must focus on the particular research questions that you will address, but you may also need to provide some more general background. Carolyn Hoyle and Andrew Sanders (2000:14) begin their *British Journal of Criminology* research article about mandatory arrest policies in domestic violence cases with what they term a “provocative” question: What is the point of making it a crime for men to assault their female partners and ex-partners? They then review the different theories and supporting research that has justified different police policies: the “victim choice” position, the “pro-arrest” position, and the “victim empowerment” position. Finally, they review the research on the “controlling behaviors” of men that frames the specific research question on which they focus: how victims view the value of criminal justice interventions in their own cases (Hoyle & Sanders 2000:15).
Ask yourself three questions about your summary of the literature:

a. Have you been selective? If there have been more than a few prior investigations of your research question, you will need to narrow your focus to the most relevant and highest-quality studies. Don’t cite a large number of prior articles “just because they are there.”

b. Is the research up-to-date? Be sure to include the most recent research, not just the “classic” studies.

c. Have you used direct quotes sparingly? To focus your literature review, you need to express the key points from prior research in your own words. Use direct quotes only when they are essential for making an important point (Pyrczak 2005:51–59).

2. Critique prior research. Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the prior research. In addition to all the points that you develop as you answer the article review questions in Appendix A, you should also select articles for review that reflect work published in peer-reviewed journals and written by credible authors who have been funded by reputable sources. Consider the following questions as you decide how much weight to give each article:

a. How was the report reviewed prior to its publication or release? Articles published in academic journals go through a rigorous review process, usually involving careful criticism and revision. Top refereed journals may accept only 10% of the submitted articles, so they can be very selective. Dissertations go through a lengthy process of criticism and revision by a few members of the dissertation writer’s home institution. A report released directly by a research organization is likely to have had only a limited review, although some research organizations maintain a rigorous internal review process. Papers presented at professional meetings may have had little prior review. Needless to say, more confidence can be placed in research results that have been subject to a more rigorous review.

b. What is the author’s reputation? Reports by an author or team of authors who have published other work on the research question should be given somewhat greater credibility at the outset.

c. Who funded and sponsored the research? Major federal funding agencies and private foundations fund only research proposals that have been evaluated carefully and ranked highly by a panel of experts. They also often monitor closely the progress of the research. This does not guarantee that every such project report is good, but it goes a long way toward ensuring some worthwhile products. On the other hand, research that is funded by organizations that have a preference for a particular outcome should be given particularly close scrutiny (Locke, Silverman, & Spirduso 1998:37–44).

3. Present pertinent conclusions. Don’t leave the reader guessing about the implications of the prior research for your own investigation. Present the conclusions you draw from the research you have reviewed. As you do so, follow several simple guidelines:

a. Distinguish clearly your own opinion of prior research from the conclusions of the authors of the articles you have reviewed.

b. Make it clear when your own approach is based on the theoretical framework that you use and not on the results of prior research.

c. Acknowledge the potential limitations of any empirical research project. Don’t emphasize problems in prior research that you can’t avoid (Pyrczak 2005:53–56).

d. Explain how the unanswered questions raised by prior research or the limitations of methods used in prior research make it important for you to conduct your own investigation (Fink 2005:190–192).
A good example of how to conclude an integrated literature review is provided by an article based on the replication in Milwaukee of the Minneapolis Domestic Violence Experiment. For this article, Raymond Paternoster et al. (1997) sought to determine whether police officers’ use of fair procedures when arresting assault suspects would lessen the rate of subsequent domestic violence. Paternoster et al. (1997) conclude that there has been a major gap in the prior literature: “Even at the end of some seven experiments and millions of dollars, then, there is a great deal of ambiguity surrounding the question of how arrest impacts future spouse assault” (p. 164). Specifically, they note that each of the seven experiments focused on the effect of arrest itself, but ignored the possibility that “particular kinds of police procedure might inhibit the recurrence of spouse assault” (p. 165).

So, Paternoster and his colleagues (1997) ground their new analysis in additional literature on procedural justice and conclude that their new analysis will be “the first study to examine the effect of fairness judgments regarding a punitive criminal sanction (arrest) on serious criminal behavior (assaulting one’s partner)” (p. 172).

### Theoretical Perspectives for Social Research

As you review the research literature surrounding your research question, you will find that these publications often refer to one or more theories that have guided their research. Of course, you have already learned about social theories in other social science courses, but we need to give special attention to the role of social theory in social research.

Neither domestic violence nor police policies exist in a vacuum, set apart from the rest of the social world. We can understand the particular behaviors and orientations better if we consider how they reflect broader social patterns. Do abusive men keep their wives in positions of subservience? Are community members law abiding? Our answers to general questions such as these will help shape the research questions that we ask and the methods that we use. If we are responsible in our literature reviews, we will give special attention to the general orientation that researchers took to the research question they studied. If we are rigorous in our research methods, we will consider how the general orientation that we favor influences our selection of particular methods.

Although everyone has general notions about “how things work,” “what people are like,” and so on, social scientists draw on more formal sets of general ideas—social theories—to guide their research (Collins 1994). A **theory** is a logically interrelated set of propositions that helps us make sense of many interrelated phenomena and predict behavior or attitudes that are likely to occur when certain conditions are met. Theory helps social scientists decide which questions are important to ask about the social world and which are just trivial pursuits. Theory focuses a spotlight on the particular features of the social world where we should look to get answers for these questions and suggests other features that can be ignored. Building and evaluating theory is therefore one of the most important objectives of social science.

Lawrence Sherman and Richard Berk’s (1984) domestic violence experiment tested predictions derived from **rational choice theory**, which can be viewed as taking a functionalist approach to explaining crime. Rational choice theory assumes that people’s behavior is shaped by practical cost-benefit calculations.
(Coleman 1990:14). Specific deterrence theory applies rational choice theory to crime and punishment (Lempert & Sanders 1986:86–87). It states that arresting spouse abusers will lessen their likelihood of reoffending by increasing the costs of reoffending. Crime “doesn’t pay” (as much) for these people (see Exhibit 2.4).

Exhibit 2.4  Rational Choice Theory Prediction

Do these concepts interest you? Do these propositions strike you as reasonable ones? If so, you might join a long list of researchers who have attempted to test, extend, and modify various aspects of rational choice theory.

Conflict theory has its origins in the way in which Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (1961:13–16) explained the social consequences of the Industrial Revolution. They focused on social classes as the key groupings in society and believed that conflict between social classes was not only the norm but also the “engine” of social change.

Although different versions of conflict theory emphasize different bases for conflict, they focus attention on the conflicting interests of groups rather than on the individuals’ concerns with maximizing their self-interest.

Do these concepts strike a responsive chord with you? Can you think of instances when propositions of conflict theory might help explain social change?

Paternoster et al. (1997) concluded that rational choice theory—in particular, specific deterrence theory—did not provide an adequate framework for explaining how citizens respond to arrest. They turned to a type of conflict theory—procedural justice theory—for a very different prediction. Procedural justice theory predicts that people will obey the law from a sense of obligation that flows from seeing legal authorities as moral and legitimate (Tyler 1990). From this perspective, individuals who are arrested will be less likely to reoffend if they are treated fairly, irrespective of the outcome of their case, because fair treatment will enhance their view of legal authorities as moral and legitimate. Procedural justice theory expands our view of the punishment process by focusing attention on how authorities treat subjects rather than just on what decisions they make.

Some sociologists attempt to understand the social world by looking inward, at the meaning people attach to their interactions. They focus on the symbolic nature of social interaction—how social interaction conveys meaning and promotes socialization. Herbert Blumer developed these ideas into symbolic interaction theory (Turner, Beeghley, & Powers 1995:460).

Labeling theory uses a symbolic interactionist approach to explain deviance as an “offender’s” reaction to the application of rules and sanctions (Becker 1963:9; Scull 1988:678). Sherman and Berk (1984) recognized that a labeling process might influence offenders’ responses to arrest in domestic violence cases. Once the offender is labeled as a deviant by undergoing arrest, other people treat the offender as deviant, and he or she is then more likely to act in a way...
Chapter 2  The Process and Problems of Social Research

that is consistent with the label deviant. Ironically, the act of punishment stimulates more of the very behavior that it was intended to eliminate. This theory suggests that persons arrested for domestic assault are more likely to reoffend than those who are not punished, which is the reverse of the deterrence theory prediction.

Do you find yourself thinking of some interesting research foci when you read about this labeling theory of deviance? If so, consider developing your knowledge of symbolic interaction theory and use it as a guide in your research.

As a social researcher, you may work with one of these theories, seeking to extend it, challenge it, or specify it. You may test alternative implications of the different theories against each other. If you’re feeling ambitious, you may even seek to combine some aspects of the different perspectives. Maybe you’ll come up with a different theoretical perspective altogether. Or, you may find that you lose sight of the larger picture in the midst of a research project; after all, it is easier to focus on accumulating particular findings rather than considering how those findings fit into a more general understanding of the social world. But you’ll find that in any area of research, developing an understanding of relevant theories will help you ask important questions, consider reasonable alternatives, and choose appropriate research procedures.

Social Research Strategies

With a research question formulated, a review of the pertinent literature taking shape, and a theoretical framework in mind, we are ready to consider the process of conducting our research.

When we conduct social research, we are attempting to connect theory with empirical data—the evidence we obtain from the social world. Researchers may make this connection by starting with a social theory and then testing some of its implications with data. This is the process of deductive research; it is most often the strategy used in quantitative methods. Alternatively, researchers may develop a connection between social theory and data by first collecting the data and then developing a theory that explains the patterns in the data (see Exhibit 2.5). This inductive research process is more often the strategy used in qualitative methods. As you’ll see, a research project can draw on both deductive and inductive strategies.

Research in the News

INVESTIGATING CHILD ABUSE DOESN’T REDUCE IT

Congress intended the 1974 Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act to increase documentation of and thereby reduce the prevalence of child abuse. However, a review of records of 595 high-risk children nationwide from the ages of 4 to 8 found that those children whose families were investigated were not doing any better than those whose families were not investigated—except that mothers in investigated families had more depressive symptoms than mothers in uninvestigated families. Whatever services families were offered after being investigated failed to reduce the risk of future child abuse.

Social theories do not provide the answers to the questions we pose as topics for research. Instead, social theories suggest the areas on which we should focus and the propositions that we should consider for a test. Exhibit 2.6 summarizes how the two theories that guided Sherman and Berk’s (1984) research and the theory that guided Paternoster et al.’s (1997) re-analysis relate to the question of whether or not to arrest spouse abusers. By helping us make such connections, social theory makes us much more sensitive to the possibilities, and thus helps us design better research and draw out the implications of our results. Before, during, and after a research investigation, we need to keep thinking theoretically.

Explanatory Research

The process of conducting research designed to test explanations for social phenomena involves moving from theory to data and then back to theory. This process can be characterized with a research circle (Exhibit 2.7).

Deductive Research

As Exhibit 2.7 shows, in deductive research, a specific expectation is deduced from a general theoretical premise and then tested with data that have been collected for this purpose. We call the specific expectation deduced from the more general theory a hypothesis. It is the hypothesis that researchers actually test, not the complete theory itself. A hypothesis proposes a relationship between two or more variables—characteristics or properties that can vary.

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

Hypotheses can be worded in several different ways, and identifying the independent and dependent variables is sometimes difficult. When in doubt, try to rephrase the hypothesis as an *if-then* statement: “*If* the independent variable *increases* (or decreases), *then* the dependent variable *increases* (or decreases).” Exhibit 2.8 presents several hypotheses with their independent and dependent variables and their if-then equivalents.

Exhibit 2.8 demonstrates another feature of hypotheses: **direction of association**. When researchers hypothesize that one variable increases as the other variable increases, the direction of association is positive (Hypotheses 1 and 4). When one variable decreases as the other variable decreases, the direction of association is also positive (Hypothesis 3). But when one variable increases as the other decreases, or vice versa, the direction of association is negative, or inverse (Hypothesis 2).
Hypothesis 5 is a special case, in which the independent variable is qualitative: It cannot be said to increase or decrease. In this case, the concept of direction of association does not apply, and the hypothesis simply states that one category of the independent variable is associated with higher values on the dependent variable.

Both explanatory and evaluative studies are types of deductive research. The original Minneapolis Domestic Violence Experiment was an evaluative study, because Sherman and Berk (1984) sought to explain what sort of response by the authorities might keep a spouse abuser from repeating the offense. The researchers deduced from deterrence theory the expectation that arrest would deter domestic violence. They then collected data to test this expectation.

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

**Domestic Violence and the Research Circle**

The classic Sherman and Berk (1984) study of domestic violence provides our first example of how the research circle works. In an attempt to determine ways to prevent the recurrence of spouse abuse, the researchers repeatedly linked theory and data, developing both hypotheses and empirical generalizations.

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### Variable

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

*Example of a variable:* The degree of honesty in verbal statements.

### Independent variable

A variable that is hypothesized to cause, or lead to, variation in another variable.

*Example of an independent variable:* Poverty rate.

### Dependent variable

A variable that is hypothesized to vary depending on, or under the influence of, another variable.

*Example of a dependent variable:* Percentage of community residents who are homeless.

---

### Exhibit 2.8 Examples of Hypotheses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original Hypothesis</th>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
<th>If-Then Hypothesis</th>
<th>Direction of Association</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The greater the use of the Internet, the greater the strength of distant family ties.</td>
<td>Level of Internet use</td>
<td>Strength of distant family ties</td>
<td>If Internet use is greater, then the strength of distant family ties is greater.</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The risk of property theft decreases as income increases.</td>
<td>Income</td>
<td>Risk of property theft</td>
<td>If income is higher, then the risk of property theft is less.</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. If years of education decrease, income decreases.</td>
<td>Years of education</td>
<td>Income</td>
<td>If years of education decrease, then income decreases.</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Political conservatism increases with income.</td>
<td>Income</td>
<td>Political conservatism</td>
<td>If income increases, then political conservatism increases.</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Property crime is higher in urban areas than in suburban or rural areas.</td>
<td>Type of community</td>
<td>Rate of property crime</td>
<td>If areas are urban, then property crime is higher compared to crime in suburban or rural areas.</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The first phase of Sherman and Berk’s study was designed to test a hypothesis. According to deterrence theory, punishment will reduce recidivism, or the propensity to commit further crimes. From this theory, Sherman and Berk deduced a specific hypothesis: “Arrest for spouse abuse reduces the risk of repeat offenses.” In this hypothesis, arrest is the independent variable and the risk of repeat offenses is the dependent variable (it is hypothesized to depend on arrest).

Of course, in another study, arrest might be the dependent variable in relation to some other independent variable. For example, in the hypothesis, “The greater the rate of layoffs in a community, the higher the frequency of arrest,” the dependent variable is frequency of arrest. Only within the context of a hypothesis, or a relationship between variables, does it make sense to refer to one variable as dependent and the other as independent.

Sherman and Berk tested their hypothesis by setting up an experiment in which the police responded to the complaints of spouse abuse in one of the three ways: (1) arresting the offender, (2) separating the spouses without making an arrest, or (3) simply warning the offender. When the researchers examined their data (police records for the persons in their experiment), they found that of those arrested for assaulting their spouse, only 13% repeated the offense, compared with a 26% recidivism rate for those who were separated from their spouse by the police without any arrest. This pattern in the data, or empirical generalization, was consistent with the hypothesis that the researchers deduced from deterrence theory. The theory thus received support from the experiment (see Exhibit 2.9).

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

By the time results were reported from five of the cities in the new study, a problem was apparent. In three of the cities—Omaha, Nebraska; Charlotte, North Carolina; and Milwaukee, Wisconsin—researchers were finding long-term increases in domestic violence incidents among arrestees. But in two—Colorado Springs, Colorado, and Dade County, Florida—the predicted deterrent effects seemed to be occurring (Sherman & Smith 1992). Sherman and his colleagues had now traversed the research circle twice in an attempt to answer the original research question, first in Minneapolis and then in six other cities. But rather than leading to more confidence in deterrence theory, the research results were calling it into question. Deterrence theory now seemed inadequate to explain empirical reality, at least as the researchers had measured this reality. So, the researchers began to reanalyze the...
follow-up data from several cities in an attempt to explain the discrepant results, thereby starting around the research circle once again (Berk et al. 1992; Pate & Hamilton 1992; Sherman & Smith 1992).

**Inductive Research**

In contrast to deductive research, **inductive research** begins with specific data, which are then used to develop (induce) a general explanation (a theory) to account for the data. One way to think of this process is in terms of the research circle: Rather than starting at the top of the circle with a theory, the inductive researcher starts at the bottom of the circle with data and then develops the theory. Another way to think of this process is represented in Exhibit 2.10.

In deductive research, reasoning from specific premises results in a conclusion that a theory is supported, while in inductive research, the identification of similar empirical patterns results in a generalization about some social process.

Inductive reasoning enters into deductive research when we find unexpected patterns in the data we have collected for testing a hypothesis. We may call these patterns **serendipitous findings** or **anomalous findings**. Whether we begin by doing inductive research or add an inductive element later, the result of the inductive process can be new insights and provocative questions. However, the adequacy of an explanation formulated after the fact is necessarily less certain than an explanation presented prior to the collection of data. Every phenomenon can always be explained in some way. Inductive explanations are thus more trustworthy if they are tested subsequently with deductive research.

**An inductive approach to explaining domestic violence.** The domestic violence research took an inductive turn when Sherman and the other researchers began trying to make sense of the differing patterns in the data collected in the different cities. Could systematic differences in the samples or in the implementation of arrest policies explain the differing outcomes? Or was the problem an inadequacy in the theoretical basis of their research? Was deterrence theory really the best way to explain the patterns in the data they were collecting?

As you learned in my review of the Pate and Hamilton (1992) study, the researchers had found that individuals who were married and employed were deterred from repeat offenses by arrest, but individuals who were unmarried and unemployed were actually more likely to commit repeat offenses if they were arrested. What could explain this empirical pattern? The researchers turned to control theory, which predicts that having a "stake in conformity" (resulting from inclusion in social networks at work or in the community) decreases a person's likelihood of committing crimes (Toby 1957). The implication is that people who are employed and married are more likely to be deterred by the threat of arrest than those without such stakes in conformity. And this is indeed what the data revealed.

Now, the researchers had traversed the research circle almost three times, a process perhaps better described as a spiral (see Exhibit 2.11). The first two times, the researchers had traversed the research circle in a deductive, hypothesis-testing way. They started with theory and then deduced and tested hypotheses. The third time, they were more inductive: They started with empirical generalizations from the data they
had already obtained and then turned to a new theory to account for the unexpected patterns in the data. At this point, they believed that deterrence theory made correct predictions, given certain conditions, and that another theory, control theory, might specify what these conditions were.

This last inductive step in their research made for a more complex, but also conceptually richer, picture of the impact of arrest on domestic violence. The researchers seemed to have come closer to understanding how to inhibit domestic violence. But they cautioned us that their initial question—the research problem—was still not completely answered. Employment status and marital status do not solely measure the strength of social attachments; they are also related to how much people earn and the social standing of victims in court. So, maybe social ties are not really what make arrest an effective deterrent to domestic violence. The real deterrent may be cost-benefit calculations (“If I have a higher income, jail is more costly for me”) or perceptions about the actions of authorities (“If I am a married woman, judges will treat my complaint more seriously”). Additional research was needed (Berk et al. 1992).

**Exploratory Research**

Qualitative research is often exploratory and, hence, inductive: The researchers begin by observing social interaction or interviewing social actors in depth and then developing an explanation for what has been found. The researchers often ask questions such as “What is going on here?” “How do people interpret these experiences?” or “Why do people do what they do?” Rather than testing a hypothesis, the researchers are trying to make sense of some social phenomenon. They may even put off formulating a research question until after they begin to collect data—the idea is to let the question emerge from the situation itself (Brewer & Hunter 1989:54–58).
Victim Responses to Police Intervention

Lauren Bennett, Lisa Goodman, and Mary Ann Dutton (1999) used an exploratory research approach to investigate one of the problems that emerge when police arrest domestic batterers: The victims often decide not to press charges. Bennett et al. (1999) did not set out to test hypotheses with qualitative interviews (there was another, hypothesis-testing component in their research), but sought, inductively, to “add the voice of the victim to the discussion” and present “themes that emerged from [the] interviews” (p. 762).

Research assistants interviewed 49 victims of domestic violence in one court; Bennett also worked in the same court as a victim advocate. The researchers were able to cull from their qualitative data four reasons why victims became reluctant to press charges. Some were confused by the court procedures, others were frustrated by the delay, some were paralyzed by fear of retribution, and others did not want to send the batterer to jail. One victim Bennett interviewed felt that she “was doing time instead of the defendant”; another expressed her fear by saying that she would like “to keep him out of jail if that’s what it takes to keep my kids safe” (Bennett et al. 1999:768–769).

Battered Women’s Help Seeking

Angela Moe (2007) also used exploratory research methods in her study of women’s decisions to seek help after abuse experiences. Rather than interviewing women in court, Moe interviewed 19 women in a domestic violence shelter. In interviews lasting about one hour each, the women were able to discuss, in their own words, what they had experienced and how they had responded. She then reviewed the interview transcripts carefully and identified major themes that emerged in the comments.

The following quote is from a woman who had decided not to call the police to report her experience of abuse (Moe 2007:686). We can use this type of information to identify some of the factors behind the underreporting of domestic violence incidents. Angela Moe or other researchers might then design a survey of a larger sample to determine how frequently each basis for underreporting occurs.

I tried the last time to call the police and he ripped both the phones out of the walls . . . .
That time he sat on my upper body and had his thumbs in my eyes and he was just squeezing.
He was going, “I’ll gouge your eyes out. I’ll break every bone in your body. Even if they do find you alive, you won’t know to tell them who did it to you because you’ll be in intensive care for so long you’ll forget.” (Terri)

Both the Moe (2007) and Bennett et al. (1999) examples illustrate how the research questions that serve as starting points for qualitative data analyses do not simply emerge from the setting studied, but are shaped by the investigator. As Harry Wolcott (1995) explains,

[The research question] is not embedded within the lives of those whom we study, demurely waiting to be discovered. Quite the opposite: We instigate the problems we investigate. There is no point in simply sitting by, passively waiting to see what a setting is going to “tell” us or hoping a problem will “emerge.” (p. 156)

My focus on the importance of the research question as a tool for guiding qualitative data analyses should not obscure the iterative nature of the analytic process. The research question can change, narrow, expand, or multiply throughout the processes of data collection and analysis.

Explanations developed inductively from qualitative research can feel authentic because we have heard what people have to say in their own words, and we have tried to see the social world as they see it. Explanations derived from qualitative research will be richer and more finely textured than they often are in quantitative research, but they are likely to be based on fewer cases from a limited area. We cannot assume that the people studied in this setting are like others, or that other researchers will develop explanations similar to ours to
make sense of what was observed or heard. Because we do not initially set up a test of a hypothesis according to some specific rules, another researcher cannot come along and conduct the same test.

**Descriptive Research**

You learned in Chapter 1 that some social research is purely descriptive. Such research does not involve connecting theory and data, but it is still a part of the research circle—it begins with data and proceeds only to the stage of making empirical generalizations based on those data (refer to Exhibit 2.7).

Valid description is important in its own right—in fact, it is a necessary component of all investigations. Before they began an investigation of differences in arrests for domestic violence in states with and without mandatory arrest laws, David Hirschel, Eve Buzawa, April Pattavina, and Don Faggiani (2008) carefully described the characteristics of incidents reported to the police (see Exhibit 2.12). Describing the prevalence of intimate partner violence is an important first step for societies that seek to respond to this problem (refer to Exhibit 2.1). Government agencies and nonprofit organizations frequently sponsor research that is primarily descriptive: How many poor people live in this community? Is the health of the elderly improving? How frequently do convicted criminals return to crime? Simply put, good description of data is the cornerstone of the scientific research process and an essential component for understanding the social world.

Good descriptive research can also stimulate more ambitious deductive and inductive research. The Minneapolis Domestic Violence Experiment was motivated, in part, by a growing body of descriptive research indicating that spouse abuse is very common: 572,000 cases of women victimized by a violent partner each year; 1.5 million women (and 500,000 men) requiring medical attention each year due to a domestic assault (Buzawa & Buzawa 1996:1–3).
Social Research Goals

Social science research can improve our understanding of empirical reality—the reality we encounter firsthand. We have achieved the goal of validity when our conclusions about this empirical reality are correct. I look out my window and observe that it is raining—a valid observation, if my eyes and ears are to be trusted. I pick up the newspaper and read that the rate of violence may be climbing after several years of decline. I am less certain of the validity of this statement, based as it is on an interpretation of some trends in crime indicators obtained through some process that isn’t explained. As you learned in this chapter, many social scientists who have studied the police response to domestic violence came to the conclusion that arrest deters violence—that there is a valid connection between this prediction of rational choice theory and the data obtained in research about these processes.

If validity sounds desirable to you, you’re a good candidate for becoming a social scientist. If you recognize that validity is often a difficult goal to achieve, you may be tough enough for social research. In any case, the goal of social science is not to come up with conclusions that people will like or conclusions that suit our own personal preferences. The goal is to figure out how and why the social world—some aspect of it—operates as it does. In Investigating the Social World, we are concerned with three aspects of validity: (1) measurement validity, (2) generalizability, and (3) causal validity (also known as internal validity) (Hammersley 2008:43). We will learn that invalid measures, invalid generalizations, or invalid causal inferences will result in invalid conclusions. We will also focus on the goal of authenticity, a concern with reflecting fairly the perspectives of participants in a setting that we study.

Measurement Validity

Measurement validity is our first concern in establishing the validity of research results, because without having measured what we think we measured, we really don’t know what we’re talking about. Measurement validity is the focus of Chapter 4.

The first step in achieving measurement validity is to specify clearly what it is we intend to measure. Tjaden and Thoennes (2000) identified this as one of the problems with research on domestic violence: “definitions of the term vary widely from study to study, making comparisons difficult” (p. 5). In order to avoid this problem, Tjaden and Thoennes (2000) presented a clear definition of what they meant by intimate partner violence:

- rape, physical assault, and stalking perpetrated by current and former dates, spouses, and cohabiting partners, with cohabiting meaning living together at least some of the time as a couple. (p. 5)

They also provided a measure of each type of violence. For example, “‘physical assault’ is defined as behaviors that threaten, attempt, or actually inflict physical harm” (Tjaden & Thoennes 2000:5).

With this definition in mind, Tjaden and Thoennes (2000:6) then specified the set of questions they would use to measure intimate partner violence (the questions pertaining to physical assault):

Not counting any incidents you have already mentioned, after you became an adult, did any other adult, male or female, ever:
—Throw something at you that could hurt?
—Push, grab, or shove you?
—Pull your hair?
—Slap or hit you?
—Kick or bite you?
—Choke or attempt to drown you?
—Hit you with some object?
—Beat you up?
—Threaten you with a gun?
—Threaten you with a knife or other weapon?
—Use a gun on you?
—Use a knife or other weapon on you?

Do you believe that answers to these questions provide a valid measure of having been physical assaulted? Do you worry that some survey respondents might not report all the assaults they have experienced? Might some respondents make up some incidents? Issues like these must be considered when we evaluate measurement validity. Suffice it to say that we must be very careful in designing our measures and in subsequently evaluating how well they have performed. Chapter 4 introduces several different ways to test measurement validity. We cannot just assume that measures are valid.

**Generalizability**

The generalizability of a study is the extent to which it can be used to inform us about persons, places, or events that were not studied. Generalizability is the focus of Chapter 5.

You have already learned in this chapter that Sherman and Berk’s findings in Minneapolis about the police response to domestic violence simply did not hold up in several other cities: The initial results could not be generalized. As you know, this led to additional research to figure out what accounted for the different patterns in different cities.

If every person or community we study were like every other one, generalizations based on observations of a small number would be valid. But that’s not the case. We are on solid ground if we question the generalizability of statements about research based on the results of a restricted sample of the population or in just one community or other social context.

Generalizability has two aspects. **Sample generalizability** refers to the ability to generalize from a sample, or subset, of a larger population to that population itself. This is the most common meaning of generalizability. **Cross-population generalizability** (external validity) refers to the ability to generalize from findings about one group, population, or setting to other groups, populations, or settings (see Exhibit 2.13). Cross-population generalizability can also be referred to as **external validity**. (Some social scientists equate the term external validity to generalizability, but in this book I restrict its use to the more limited notion of cross-population generalizability.)

Sample generalizability is a key concern in survey research. Political pollsters may study a sample of likely voters, for example, and then generalize their findings to the entire population of likely voters. No one would be interested in the results of political polls if they represented only the relatively tiny sample that actually was surveyed rather than the entire population. The procedures for the National Violence Against Women Survey that Tjaden and Thoennes (2000) relied on were designed to maximize sample generalizability.
Cross-population generalizability occurs to the extent that the results of a study hold true for multiple populations; these populations may not all have been sampled, or they may be represented as subgroups within the sample studied. This was the problem with Sherman and Berk’s (1984) results: persons in Minneapolis who were arrested for domestic violence did not respond in the same way as persons arrested for the same crime in several other cities. The conclusions from Sherman and Berk’s (1984) initial research in Minneapolis were not “externally valid.”

Generalizability is a key concern in research design. We rarely have the resources to study the entire population that is of interest to us, so we have to select cases to study that will allow our findings to be generalized to the population of interest. Chapter 5 reviews alternative approaches to selecting cases so that findings can be generalized to the population from which the cases were selected. Nonetheless, because we can never be sure that our findings will hold under all conditions, we should be cautious in generalizing to populations or periods that we did not actually sample.
Causal Validity

Causal validity, also known as internal validity, refers to the truthfulness of an assertion that A causes B. It is the focus of Chapter 6.

Most research seeks to determine what causes what, so social scientists frequently must be concerned with causal validity. Sherman and Berk (1984) were concerned with the effect of arrest on the likelihood of recidivism by people accused of domestic violence. To test their causal hypothesis, they designed their experiment so that some accused persons were arrested and others were not. Of course, it may seem heavy-handed for social scientists to influence police actions for the purpose of a research project, but this step reflects just how difficult it can be to establish causally valid understandings about the social world. It was only because police officials did not know whether arrest caused spouse abusers to reduce their level of abuse that they were willing to allow an experiment to test the effect of different policies. David Hirschel and his collaborators (2008) used a different approach to investigate the effect of mandatory arrest laws on police decisions to arrest: They compared the rate of arrest for domestic violence incidents in jurisdictions with and without mandatory arrest laws.

Which of these two research designs gives you more confidence in the causal validity of the conclusions? Chapter 6 will give you much more understanding of how some features of a research design can help us evaluate causal propositions. However, you will also learn that the solutions are neither easy nor perfect: We always have to consider critically the validity of causal statements that we hear or read.

Authenticity

The goal of authenticity is stressed by researchers who focus attention on the subjective dimension of the social world. An authentic understanding of a social process or social setting is one that reflects fairly the various perspectives of participants in that setting (Gubrium & Holstein 1997). Authenticity is one of several different standards proposed by some as uniquely suited to qualitative research; it reflects a belief that those who study the social world should focus first and foremost on how participants view that social world, not on developing a unique social scientists’ interpretation of that world. Rather than expecting social scientists to be able to provide a valid mirror of reality, this perspective emphasizes the need for recognizing that what is understood by participants as reality is a linguistic and social construction of reality (Kvale 2002:306).

Angela Moe (2007) explained her basis for considering the responses of women she interviewed in the domestic violence shelter to be authentic:

members of marginalized groups are better positioned than members of socially dominant groups to describe the ways in which the world is organized according to the oppressions they experience. (p. 682)

Moe’s (2007) assumption was that “battered women serve as experts of their own lives” (p. 682). Adding to her assessment of authenticity, Moe (2007) found that the women “exhibited a great deal of comfort through their honesty and candor” as they produced “a richly detailed and descriptive set of narratives” (p. 683). You will learn more about how authenticity can be achieved in qualitative methods in Chapter 9.

Social Research Proposals

Be grateful to those people or groups who require you to write a formal research proposal (as hard as that seems), and be even more grateful to those who give you constructive feedback. Whether your proposal is written for a professor, a thesis committee, an organization seeking practical advice, or a government agency
that funds basic research, the proposal will force you to set out a problem statement and a research plan. So, even in circumstances when a proposal is not required, you should prepare one and present it to others for feedback. Just writing down your ideas will help you see how they can be improved, and almost any feedback will help you refine your plans.

Each chapter in this book includes a section, “Developing a Research Proposal,” with exercises that guide you through the process of proposal writing. This section introduces the process of proposal writing as well as these special end-of-chapter exercises. It also provides a schematic overview of the entire research process. You will want to return to this section frequently in order to remember “where you are” in the research process as you learn about particular methods in the remaining chapters.

Every research proposal should have at least five sections (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman 2000:8–34):

- An introductory statement of the research problem, in which you clarify what it is that you are interested in studying
- A literature review, in which you explain how your problems and plans build on what has already been reported in the literature on this topic
- A methodological plan, detailing just how you will respond to the particular mix of opportunities and constraints you face
- An ethics statement, identifying human subjects’ issues in the research and how you will respond to them in an ethical fashion
- A statement of limitations, reviewing the potential weaknesses of the proposed research design and presenting plans for minimizing their consequences

You will also need to include a budget and project timeline, unless you are working within the framework of a class project.

When you develop a research proposal, it will help to ask yourself a series of questions such as those in Exhibit 2.14 (see also Herek 1995). It is easy to omit important details and to avoid being self-critical while rushing to put a proposal together. However, it is even more painful to have a proposal rejected (or to receive a low grade). It is better to make sure the proposal covers what it should and confronts the tough issues that reviewers (or your professor) will be sure to spot.

The series of questions in Exhibit 2.14 can serve as a map to subsequent chapters in this book and as a checklist of decisions that must be made throughout any research project. The questions are organized in five sections, each concluding with a checkpoint at which you should consider whether to proceed with the research as planned, modify the plans, or stop the project altogether. The sequential ordering of these questions obscures a bit the way in which they should be answered: not as single questions, one at a time, but as a unit—first as five separate stages and then as a whole. Feel free to change your answers to earlier questions on the basis of your answers to later questions.

We will learn how to apply the decision checklist with an example from a proposal focused on treatment for substance abuse. At this early point in your study of research methods, you may not recognize all the terms in this checklist. Don’t let that bother you now, since my goal is just to give you a quick overview of the decision-making process. Your knowledge of these terms and your understanding of the decisions will increase as you complete each chapter. Your decision-making skills will also improve if you complete the “Developing a Research Proposal” exercises at the end of each chapter.

### Case Study: Treating Substance Abuse

Exhibit 2.15 lists the primary required sections of the “Research Plan” for proposals to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), together with excerpts from a proposal that I submitted in this format to the National Institutes of Health.
### Exhibit 2.14 Decisions in Research

#### Problem Formulation (Chapters 1–3)

1. Developing a research question
2. Assessing researchability of the problem
3. Consulting prior research
4. Relating to social theory
5. Choosing an approach: Deductive? Inductive? Descriptive?
6. Reviewing research guidelines and ethical standards

**Checkpoint 1**

Alternatives:
- Continue as planned.
- Modify the plan.
- Stop. Abandon the plan.

#### Research Validity (Chapters 4–6)

7. Establishing measurement validity:
   - How are concepts defined?
   - Choose a measurement strategy.
   - Assess available measures or develop new measures.
   - What evidence of reliability and validity is available or can be collected?
8. Establishing generalizability:
   - Was a representative sample used?
   - Are the findings applicable to particular subgroups?
   - Does the population sampled correspond to the population of interest?
9. Establishing causality:
   - What is the possibility of experimental or statistical controls?
   - How to assess the causal mechanism?
   - Consider the causal context.
10. Data required: Longitudinal or cross-sectional?
11. Units of analysis: Individuals or groups?
12. What are major possible sources of causal invalidity?

**Checkpoint 2**

Alternatives:
- Continue as planned.
- Modify the plan.
- Stop. Abandon the plan.

#### Research Design (Chapters 7–9, 11–13)

14. Specifying the research plan: Type of surveys, observations, etc.
15. Secondary analysis? Availability of suitable data sets?
16. Causal approach: Idiographic or nomothetic?
17. Assessing human subjects protections

(Continued)
Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) with colleagues from the University of Massachusetts Medical School. The Research Plan is limited by NIH guidelines to 25 pages. It must be preceded by an abstract (which I have excerpted), a proposed budget, biographical sketches of project personnel, and a discussion of the available resources for the project. Appendixes may include research instruments, prior publications by the authors, and findings from related work.

As you can see from the excerpts, our proposal (Schutt et al. 1992b) was to study the efficacy of a particular treatment approach for homeless mentally ill persons who abuse substances. The proposal included a procedure for recruiting subjects in two cities, randomly assigning half the subjects to a recently developed treatment program and measuring a range of outcomes. The NIMH review committee (composed of social scientists with expertise in substance abuse treatment programs and related methodological areas) approved the project for funding but did not rate it highly enough so that it actually was awarded funds (it often takes several resubmissions before even a worthwhile proposal is funded). The committee members recognized the proposal’s strengths but also identified several problems that they believed had to be overcome before the proposal could
Exhibit 2.15 A Grant Proposal to the National Institute of Mental Health

Relapse Prevention for Homeless Dually Diagnosed

Abstract

This project will test the efficacy of shelter-based treatment that integrates Psychosocial Rehabilitation with Relapse Prevention techniques adapted for homeless mentally ill persons who abuse substances. Two hundred and fifty homeless persons, meeting...criteria for substance abuse and severe and persistent mental disorder, will be recruited from two shelters and then randomly assigned to either an experimental treatment condition...or to a control condition.

For one year, at the rate of three two-hour sessions per week, the treatment group (n = 125) will participate for the first six months in “enhanced” Psychosocial Rehabilitation..., followed by six months of Relapse Prevention training.... The control group will participate in a Standard Treatment condition (currently comprised of a twelve-step peer-help program along with counseling offered at all shelters).... Outcome measures include substance abuse, housing placement and residential stability, social support, service utilization, level of distress.... The integrity of the experimental design will be monitored through a process analysis. Tests for the hypothesized treatment effects...will be supplemented with analyses to evaluate the direct and indirect effects of subject characteristics and to identify interactions between subject characteristics and treatment condition....

Research Plan

1. Specific Aims

The research demonstration project will determine whether an integrated clinical shelter-based treatment intervention can improve health and well-being among homeless persons who abuse alcohol and/or drugs and who are seriously and persistently ill—the so-called “dually diagnosed.”... We aim to identify the specific attitudes and behaviors that are most affected by the integrated psychosocial rehabilitation/relapse prevention treatment, and thus to help guide future service interventions.

2. Background and Significance

Relapse is the most common outcome in treating the chronically mentally ill, including the homeless.... Reviews of the clinical and empirical literature published to date indicate that treatment interventions based on social learning experiences are associated with more favorable outcomes than treatment interventions based on more traditional forms of psychotherapy and/or chemotherapy.... However, few tests of the efficacy of such interventions have been reported for homeless samples.

3. Progress Report/Preliminary Studies

Four areas of Dr. Schutt’s research help to lay the foundation for the research demonstration project here proposed.... The 1990 survey in Boston shelters measured substance abuse with selected ASI [Addiction Severity Index] questions.... About half of the respondents evidenced a substance abuse problem.

Just over one-quarter of respondents had ever been treated for a mental health problem.... At least three-quarters were interested in help with each of the problems mentioned other than substance abuse. Since help with benefits, housing, and AIDS prevention will each be provided to all study participants in the proposed research demonstration project, we project that this should increase the rate of participation and retention in the study.... Results [from co-investigator Dr. Walter Penk’s research]... indicate that trainers were more successful in engaging the dually diagnosed in Relapse Prevention techniques....

4. Research Design and Methods

Study Sample.

Recruitment. The study will recruit 350 clients beginning in month 4 of the study and running through month 28 for study entry. The span of treatment is 12 months and is followed by 12 months of follow-up....

(Continued)
Exhibit 2.15 (Continued)

Study Criteria.
Those volunteering to participate will be screened and declared eligible for the study based upon the following characteristics:

1. Determination that subject is homeless using criteria operationally defined by one of the accepted definitions summarized by . . .

Attrition.
Subject enrollment, treatment engagement, and subject retention each represent potentially significant challenges to study integrity and have been given special attention in all phases of the project. Techniques have been developed to address engagement and retention and are described in detail below . . .

Research Procedures.
All clients referred to the participating shelters will be screened for basic study criteria . . . Once assessment is completed, subjects who volunteer are then randomly assigned to one of two treatment conditions—RPST or Standard Treatment . . .

Research Variables and Measures.
Measures for this study . . . are of three kinds: subject selection measures, process measures, and outcome measures . . .

5. Human Subjects
Potential risks to subjects are minor . . . Acute problems identified . . . can be quickly referred to appropriate interventions. Participation in the project is voluntary, and all subjects retain the option to withdraw . . . at any time, without any impact on their access to shelter care or services regularly offered by the shelters. Confidentiality of subjects is guaranteed . . . [They have] . . . an opportunity to learn new ways of dealing with symptoms of substance abuse and mental illness.

be funded. The problems were primarily methodological, stemming from the difficulties associated with providing services to, and conducting research on, this particular segment of the homeless population.

The proposal has many strengths, including the specially tailored intervention derived from psychiatric rehabilitation technology developed by Liberman and his associates and relapse prevention methods adapted from Marlatt. This fully documented treatment . . . greatly facilitates the generalizability and transportability of study findings. . . . The investigative team is excellent . . . also attuned to the difficulties entailed in studying this target group. . . . While these strengths recommend the proposal . . . eligibility criteria for inclusion of subjects in the study are somewhat ambiguous. . . . This volunteer procedure could substantially underrepresent important components of the shelter population. . . . The projected time frame for recruiting subjects . . . also seems unrealistic for a three-year effort. . . . Several factors in the research design seem to mitigate against maximum participation and retention. (Services Research Review Committee 1992:3–4)

If you get the impression that researchers cannot afford to leave any stone unturned in working through the procedures in an NIMH proposal, you are right. It is very difficult to convince a government agency that a research project is worth spending a lot of money on (we requested about $2 million). And that is as it should be: Your tax dollars should be used only for research that has a high likelihood of yielding findings that are valid and useful. But even when you are proposing a smaller project to a more generous funding source—or just presenting a proposal to your professor—you should scrutinize the proposal carefully
before submission and ask others to comment on it. Other people will often think of issues you neglected to consider, and you should allow yourself time to think about these issues and to reread and redraft the proposal. Also, you will get no credit for having thrown together a proposal as best you could in the face of an impossible submission deadline.

Let’s review the issues identified in Exhibit 2.14 as they relate to the NIMH relapse prevention proposal. The research question concerned the effectiveness of a particular type of substance abuse treatment in a shelter for homeless persons—an evaluation research question [Question 1]. This problem certainly was suitable for social research, and it was one that could have been handled for the money we requested [2]. Prior research demonstrated clearly that our proposed treatment had potential and also that it had not previously been tried with homeless persons [3]. The treatment approach was connected to psychosocial rehabilitation theory [4] and, given prior work in this area, a deductive, hypothesis-testing stance was called for [5]. Our review of research guidelines continued up to the point of submission, and we felt that our proposal took each into account [6]. So it seemed reasonable to continue to develop the proposal (Checkpoint 1).

Measures were to include direct questions, observations by field researchers, and laboratory tests (of substance abuse) [7]. The proposal’s primary weakness was in the area of generalizability [8]. We proposed to sample persons in only two homeless shelters in two cities, and we could offer only weak incentives to encourage potential participants to start and stay in the study. The review committee believed that these procedures might result in an unrepresentative group of initial volunteers beginning the treatment and perhaps an even less representative group continuing through the entire program. The problem was well suited to an experimental design [9] and was best addressed with longitudinal data [10], involving individuals [11]. Our design controlled for many sources of invalidity, but several sources of causal invalidity remained [12]. Clearly, we should have modified the proposal with some additional recruitment and retention strategies—although it may be that the research could not actually be carried out without some major modification of the research question (Checkpoint 2).

A randomized experimental design was preferable because this was to be a treatment-outcome study, but we did include a field research component so that we could evaluate treatment implementation [13, 14]. Because the effectiveness of our proposed treatment strategy had not been studied before among homeless persons, we could not propose doing a secondary data analysis or meta-analysis [15]. We sought only to investigate causation from a nomothetic perspective, without attempting to show how the particular experiences of each participant may have led to their outcome [6]. Because participation in the study was to be voluntary and everyone received something for participation, the research design seemed ethical—and it was approved by the University of Massachusetts Medical School’s Institutional review board (IRB) and by the state mental health agency’s human subjects committee [17]. We planned several statistical tests, but the review committee remarked that we should have been more specific on this point [18]. Our goal was to use our research as the basis for several academic articles, and we expected that the funding agency would also require us to prepare a report for general distribution [19, 20]. We had reviewed the research literature carefully [21], but as is typical in most research proposals, we did not develop our research reporting plans any further [22, 23].

If your research proposal will be reviewed competitively, it must present a compelling rationale for funding. It is not possible to overstate the importance of the research problem that you propose to study (see the first section of this chapter). If you propose to test a hypothesis, be sure that it is one for which there are plausible alternatives. You want to avoid focusing on a “boring hypothesis”—one that has no credible alternatives, even though it is likely to be correct (Dawes 1995:93).

A research proposal also can be strengthened considerably by presenting results from a pilot study of the research question. This might have involved administering the proposed questionnaire to a small sample,
conducting a preliminary version of the proposed experiment with a group of students, or making observations over a limited period of time in a setting like that proposed for a qualitative study. Careful presentation of the methods used in the pilot study and the problems that were encountered will impress anyone who reviews the proposal.

Don’t neglect the procedures for the protection of human subjects. Even before you begin to develop your proposal, you should find out what procedure your university’s IRB requires for the review of student research proposals. Follow these procedures carefully, even if they require that you submit your proposal for an IRB review. No matter what your university’s specific requirements are, if your research involves human subjects, you will need to include in your proposal a detailed statement that describes how you will adhere to these requirements. I discuss the key issues in the next chapter.

You have learned in this chapter how to formulate a research question, review relevant literature, consider social theory, and identify some possible limitations, so you are now ready to begin proposing new research. If you plan to do so, you can use the proposal exercises at the end of each of the subsequent chapters to incorporate more systematically the research elements discussed in those chapters. By the book’s end, in Chapter 15, you will have attained a much firmer grasp of the various research decisions outlined in Exhibit 2.14.

Conclusions

Selecting a worthy research question does not guarantee a worthwhile research project. The simplicity of the research circle presented in this chapter belies the complexity of the social research process. In the following chapters, I focus on particular aspects of the research process. Chapter 4 examines the interrelated processes of conceptualization and measurement, arguably the most important part of research. Measurement validity is the foundation for the other two aspects of validity. Chapter 5 reviews the meaning of generalizability and the sampling strategies that help us achieve this goal. Chapter 6 introduces causal validity and illustrates different methods for achieving it. Most of the remaining chapters then introduce different approaches to data collection—experiments, surveys, participant observation and intensive interviewing, evaluation research, comparative historical research, secondary data analysis, and content analysis—that help us, in different ways, achieve results that are valid.

Of course, our answers to research questions will never be complete or entirely certain. We always need to ground our research plans and results in the literature about related research. Our approach should be guided by explicit consideration of a larger theoretical framework. When we complete a research project, we should evaluate the confidence that can be placed in our conclusions, point out how the research could be extended, and consider the implications for social theory. Recall how the elaboration of knowledge about deterrence of domestic violence required sensitivity to research difficulties, careful weighing of the evidence, identification of unanswered questions, and consideration of alternative theories.

Owning a large social science toolkit is no guarantee for making the right decisions about which tools to use and how to use them in the investigation of particular research problems, but you are now forewarned about, and thus hopefully forearmed against, some of the problems that social scientists face in their work. I hope that you will return often to this chapter as you read the subsequent chapters, when you criticize the research literature and when you design your own research projects. To be conscientious, thoughtful, and responsible—this is the mandate of every social scientist. If you formulate a feasible research problem, ask the right questions in advance, try to adhere to the research guidelines, and steer clear of the most common difficulties, you will be well along the road to fulfilling this mandate.
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Key Terms

- Anomalous findings  44
- Authenticity  48
- Causal validity (internal validity)  48
- Conflict theory  38
- Cross-population generalizability (external validity)  49
- Deductive research  40
- Dependent variable  41
- Direction of association  41
- Empirical generalization  43
- External validity (cross-population generalizability)  49
- Generalizability  48
- Hypothesis  40
- Independent variable  40
- Inductive research  44
- Institutional Review Board (IRB)  57
- Internal validity (causal validity)  48
- Measurement validity  48
- Rational choice theory  37
- Replications  43
- Research circle  40
- Sample generalizability  49
- Serendipitous findings  44
- Social research question  27
- Symbolic interaction theory  38
- Theory  37
- Validity  48
- Variable  40

Highlights

- Research questions should be feasible (within the time and resources available), socially important, and scientifically relevant.
- Building social theory is a major objective of social science research. Relevant theories should be investigated before starting social research projects, drawing out the theoretical implications of research findings.
- Rational choice theory focuses attention on the rational bases for social exchange and explains most social phenomena in terms of these motives.
- Conflict theory focuses attention on the bases of conflict between social groups and uses these conflicts to explain most social phenomena.
- Symbolic interaction theory focuses attention on the meanings that people attach to and gain from social interaction and explains most social phenomena in terms of these meanings.
- The type of reasoning in most research can be described as primarily deductive or inductive. Research based on deductive reasoning proceeds from general ideas, deduces specific expectations from these ideas, and then tests the ideas with empirical data. Research based on inductive reasoning begins with specific data and then develops general ideas or theories to explain patterns in the data.
- It may be possible to explain unanticipated research findings after the fact, but such explanations have less credibility than those that have been tested with data collected for the purpose of the study.
- The scientific process can be represented as circular, with a path from theory to hypotheses, to data, and then to empirical generalizations. Research investigations may begin at different points along the research circle and traverse different portions of it. Deductive research begins at the point of theory, inductive research begins with data but ends with theory, and descriptive research begins with data and ends with empirical generalizations.
- Replications of a study are essential to establishing its generalizability in other situations. An ongoing line of research stemming from a particular research question should include a series of studies that, collectively, traverse the research circle multiple times.
- Writing a research proposal is an important part of preparing for research. Key decisions can be viewed as checkpoints that will shape subsequent stages.

STUDENT STUDY SITE

To assist in completing the web exercises, please access the study site at www.sagepub.com/schuttisw7e, where you will find the web exercises with accompanying links. You’ll find other useful study materials such as self-quizzes and e-flashcards for each chapter, along with a group of carefully selected articles from research journals that illustrate the major concepts and techniques presented in the book.
Discussion Questions

1. Pick a social issue about which you think research is needed. Draft three research questions about this issue. Refine one of the questions and evaluate it in terms of the three criteria for good research questions.

2. Identify variables that are relevant to your three research questions. Now formulate three related hypotheses. Which are the independent and which the dependent variables in these hypotheses?

3. If you were to design research about domestic violence, would you prefer an inductive approach or a deductive approach? Explain your preference. What would be the advantages and disadvantages of each approach? Consider in your answer the role of social theory, the value of searching the literature, and the goals of your research.

4. Sherman and Berk’s (1984) study of the police response to domestic violence tested a prediction derived from rational choice theory. Propose hypotheses about the response to domestic violence that are consistent with conflict and symbolic interactionist theories. Which theory seems to you to provide the best framework for understanding domestic violence and how to respond to it?

5. Review my description of the research projects in the section “Types of Social Research” in Chapter 1. Can you identify the stages of each project corresponding to the points on the research circle? Did each project include each of the four stages? Which theory (or theories) seem applicable to each of these projects?

6. The research on victim responses to police intervention and the study of conflicts among high school students used an exploratory research approach. Why do you think the researchers adopted this approach in these studies? Do you agree with their decision? Propose a research project that would address issues in one of these studies with a deductive approach.

7. Critique the Sherman and Berk (1984) research on the police response to domestic violence from the standpoint of measurement validity, generalizability, and causal validity. What else would you like to know about this research in order to strengthen your critique? What does consideration of the goal of authenticity add to your critique?

Practice Exercises

1. Pair up with one other student and select one of the research articles available on the book’s study site, at www.sagepub.com/schuttisw7e. Evaluate the research article in terms of its research strategy. Be generally negative but not unreasonable in your criticisms. The student with whom you are working should critique the article in the same way but from a generally positive standpoint, defending its quality. Together, write a summary of the study’s strong and weak points, or conduct a debate in the class.

2. Research problems posed for explanatory studies must specify variables and hypotheses, which need to be stated properly and need to correctly imply any hypothesized causal relationship. The “Variables and Hypotheses” lessons, found in the Interactive Exercises on the study site, will help you learn how to do this.

3. To use these lessons, choose one of the four sets of “Variables and Hypotheses” exercises from the opening menu. About 10 hypotheses are presented in the lesson. After reading each hypothesis, you must name the dependent and independent variables and state the direction (positive or negative) of the relationship between them. In this Interactive Exercise, you must write in your own answer, so type carefully. The program will evaluate your answers. If an answer is correct, the program will present its version of the correct answer and go on to the next question. If you have made an error, the program will explain the error to you and give you another chance to respond. If your answer is unrecognizable, the program will instruct you to check your spelling and try again.

4. Now choose another article from the Learning From Journal Articles option on the study site. Read one article based on empirical research and diagram the process of research that it reports. Your diagram should have the structure of the research circle in Exhibit 2.7. How well does the process of research in this study seem to match the process symbolized in Exhibit 2.7? How much information is provided about each step in that process?

5. Review the section in this chapter on literature searching. Now choose a topic for investigation and search the social science literature for prior research on this topic. You will
need to know how to use a database such as Sociological Abstracts at your own library as well as how to retrieve articles you locate (those that are available through your library). Try to narrow your search so that most of the articles you find are relevant to your topic (or broaden your search, if you don’t find many relevant articles). Report on your search terms and the results of your search with each term or combination of terms.

**Ethics Questions**

1. Sherman and Berk (1984) and those who replicated their research on the police response to domestic violence assigned persons accused of domestic violence by chance (randomly) to be arrested or not. Their goal was to ensure that the people who were arrested were similar to those who were not arrested. Based on what you now know, do you feel that this random assignment procedure was ethical? Why or why not?

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

**Web Exercises**

1. You can brush up on a range of social theorists at www.sociologyprofessor.com. Pick a theorist and read some of what you find. What social phenomena does this theorist focus on? What hypotheses seem consistent with his or her theorizing? Describe a hypothetical research project to test one of these hypotheses.

2. You’ve been assigned to write a paper on domestic violence and the law. To start, you can review relevant research on the American Bar Association’s website at [www.americanbar.org/groups/domestic_violence/resources/statistics.html](http://www.americanbar.org/groups/domestic_violence/resources/statistics.html). What does the research summarized at this site suggest about the prevalence of domestic violence, its distribution among social groups, and its causes and effects? Write your answers in a one- to two-page report.

**SPSS Exercises**

1. Formulate four research questions about support for capital punishment—one question per research purpose: (1) exploratory, (2) descriptive, (3) explanatory, and (4) evaluative. You should be able to answer two of these questions with the GSS2010x data. Highlight these two.

2. Now, to develop some foundation from the literature, check the bibliography of this book for the following articles that drew on the GSS: Aguirre and Baker (1993); Barkan and Cohn (1994); Borg (1997, 1998); Warr (1995); and Young (1992). How have social scientists used social theory to explain support for capital punishment? What potential influences on capital punishment have been tested? What influences could you test again with the 2010 GSS?

3. State four hypotheses in which support for capital punishment (CAPPUN) is the dependent variable and another variable in the GSS2010x is the independent variable. Justify each hypothesis in a sentence or two.

4. Test at least one hypothesis. Marian Borg (1997) suggests that region might be expected to influence support for the death
penalty. Test this as follows (after opening the GSS2010x file, as explained in Chapter 1, SPSS Exercise 3):

a. Click on Analyze/Descriptive Statistics/Crosstabs.

b. Highlight CAPPUN and click on the arrow so that it moves into the Rows box; highlight REGION and click on the arrow to move it into the Columns box.

c. Click on Cells, click off Counts-Observed, and click on Percentages-Column.

d. Click Continue and then OK. Inspect the table.

5. Does support for capital punishment vary by region? Scroll down to the percentage table (in which regions appear across the top) and compare the percentages in the Favor row for each region. Describe what you have found.

6. Now you can go on to test your other hypotheses in the same way, if you have the time. Due to space constraints, I can't give you more guidance, but I will warn you that there could be some problems at this point (e.g., if your independent variable has lots of values). Proceed with caution!

Developing a Research Proposal

Now it’s time to start writing the proposal. The following exercises pertain to the very critical first steps identified in Exhibit 2.14:

1. State a problem for research (Exhibit 2.14, #1, #2). If you have not already identified a problem for study, or if you need to evaluate whether your research problem is doable, a few suggestions should help get the ball rolling and keep it on course.

   a. Jot down questions that have puzzled you in some area having to do with people and social relations, perhaps questions that have come to mind while reading textbooks or research articles or even while hearing news stories. Don’t hesitate to jot down many questions, and don’t bore yourself—try to identify questions that really interest you.

   b. Now take stock of your interests, your opportunities, and the work of others. Which of your research questions no longer seem feasible or interesting? What additional research questions come to mind? Pick out a question that is of interest and seems feasible and that your other coursework suggests has been the focus of some prior research or theorizing.

   c. Write out your research question in one sentence, and elaborate on it in one paragraph. List at least three reasons why it is a good research question for you to investigate. Then present your proposal to your classmates and instructor for discussion and feedback.

2. Search the literature (and the web) on the research question you identified (Exhibit 2.14, #3). Refer to the section on searching the literature for more guidance on conducting the search. Copy down at least 10 citations to articles (with abstracts from Sociological Abstracts or Psychological Abstracts) and five websites reporting research that seems highly relevant to your research question; then look up at least five of these articles and three of the sites. Inspect the article bibliographies and the links on the website, and identify at least one more relevant article and website from each source.

   Write a brief description of each article and website you consulted, and evaluate its relevance to your research question. What additions or changes to your thoughts about the research question do the sources suggest?

3. Which general theoretical perspective do you believe is most appropriate to guide your proposed research (Exhibit 2.14, #4)? Write two paragraphs in which you (1) summarize the major tenets of the theoretical perspective you choose and (2) explain the relevance of this perspective to your research problem.

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