

CHAPTER 2

THE PROCESS AND PROBLEMS OF SOCIAL RESEARCH



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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- ❖ Name the three characteristics of a good research question
- ❖ Discuss the role of theory in social research
- ❖ Demonstrate how to search and review the research literature
- ❖ Develop a strategy for searching the web
- ❖ Describe three key social research strategies and when they are best used
- ❖ Name and illustrate the three different longitudinal designs
- ❖ Define the standards of measurement validity, generalizability, causal validity, and authenticity

About 30% of women worldwide who have ever had an intimate partner have experienced **intimate partner violence (IPV)**, with prevalence in different global regions ranging from 23% to 38% (Garcia-Moreno et al. 2013:16-17; Yakubovich 2018). An extensive body of research (reflected in more than 16,800 articles) has identified an unplanned pregnancy and parents with less than a high school education as increasing risk and older age and being married as reducing risk, but fewer studies have evaluated the influence of criminal justice policies on IPV (Yakubovich et al. 2018). One policy that became the focus of a remarkable series of experiments is the nature of the police response to IPV.

In 1981, the Police Foundation in the United States 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 publicized widely, indicated that arrests did have a deterrent effect. Partly as a result, 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 additional research inspired by it, and the controversies arising from it provide examples for our systematic overview of the social research process. Although the original Minneapolis experiment occurred decades ago, that in itself makes an important point about social research: No single study can be considered to provide the definitive answer to a research question, and every study generates additional questions that require more research. Social research is an ongoing process of testing propositions, refining knowledge, exploring new ideas, and adapting to changes, all the while enriching our understanding of the social world.

This chapter shifts from examining *why* social research is conducted to *how* it is carried out—the focus of the rest of the book. The chapter considers how questions for social research are developed, how the existing literature about research questions can be located, and how it should be reviewed. It also looks at how research questions can be connected to social theory and then expressed as testable hypotheses (Exhibit 2.1). Finally, the chapter discusses different social research strategies and standards for social research as a prelude to subsequent chapters. Appendices A and B contain more details related to reviewing the literature.

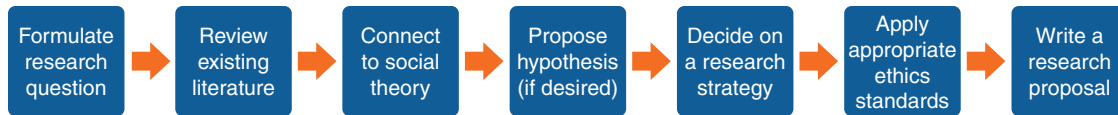
Intimate partner violence (IPV): Violence within an intimate relationship that can be physical, psychological, or sexual.

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Launching a Research Project



Social Research Questions

Social research begins with a question about the social world that a researcher 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? How has the level of social inequality changed over time? What influences the likelihood of spouse abuse?

Researchers may decide to focus on a particular **social research question** as a result of reading a research article, because of their personal experiences with the issue, or for any of several reasons. Most research projects focus on questions that arose in previous research. For example, after 30 years of efforts “to enhance policy and [criminal justice system] responses and interventions to IPV,” Canadian social researchers Betty Jo Barrett, Amy Peirone, and Chi Ho Cheung (2019) asked whether victims of spousal violence differed from others in their perceptions of and confidence in police. Limited prior research in Canada had not provided a clear answer. Other social research questions may reflect a researcher’s personal experiences—“personal troubles”—as C. Wright Mills (1959) put it. Social researchers may also want to help figure out how to lessen the harmful impact of a social problem.

Social research questions should be feasible, socially important, and scientifically relevant (King, Keohane, & Verba 1994). Any study must be possible within the time and resources available, so questions that involve long-term change, a large population, or secretive groups may not be feasible unless substantial funds or special access has been obtained. For research undertakings that are more than a class exercise, the research question should be important to other people and society. A research question meets the criterion of scientific relevance if it focuses on issues that have not been resolved by research already reported in the social science literature.

Social Research Preparation

Once they have formulated a research question, and sometimes even before that question has been settled, social researchers search the literature to find other research focused on the same or related research questions and to determine what can be learned from the methods and findings of these previous studies. Conducting a thorough search of the related research literature is also an essential foundation for evaluating the contribution made by a particular research article or research project.

Searching the Literature

The primary goal in searching the literature is to find reports of prior research investigations about the research question of interest. Focus on reports in scholarly journals—*refereed*

Social research question: A question about the social world that is answered through the collection and analysis of firsthand, verifiable, empirical data.

journals that publish *peer-reviewed articles*—because they have been screened for quality through critique by other social scientists before publication. Most often, editors of refereed journals send articles that authors submit 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 articles with major flaws and many improvements in most of the rest. You still have to make your own judgment about article quality, since journals vary in the rigor of their review standards, and, of course, different reviewers may be impressed by different types of articles.

Most articles published in academic journals 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. Since no library can afford to pay for every journal, you may still have to order some of the articles you need through interlibrary loan.

Of course, 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. Such material may be very useful in preparing, reviewing, and reporting research, but it is not a substitute for searching academic journals for relevant articles.

It can also help to locate reviews of already-published research. Some journals publish articles that review prior research about specific research questions. Such reviews are unlikely to focus on all the specific issues raised by a particular research question, but they can provide a framework for a more focused search of the literature. If you are not familiar with the major concepts, scholars, or research findings pertaining to your research question, you should also consider reading background information in one of the Annual Review volumes available for most disciplines (e.g., the *Annual Review of Sociology*) and even the relevant entries in an encyclopedia for the discipline, such as the *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology* or the *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*. These resources may be available online from your college or university library.

Newspaper and magazine articles may raise important issues or summarize social research investigations, but they are not an adequate source for understanding the research literature.

A search of the academic journal literature should include the following steps:

- 1 *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 my town?" is probably too narrow. "Is informal social control more effective than policing in reducing crime rates?" provides about the right level of specificity.



Photo 2.1 What research question would you ask about IPV?

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2. *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 National Library of Medicine database for searching the medical literature. You may 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, or EconLit, if your topic might be addressed in the economic literature. Some combined indexes like Academic Search Complete may be most useful for searches that should span multiple disciplines.

To find articles that refer to a previous publication, such as Sherman and Berk's study of the police response to domestic violence, the Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) will be helpful. SSCI has a unique "citation searching" feature that allows you to look up articles or books and find other articles that have cited these sources.

3. *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.

4. *Narrow your search.* The sheer number of references you find can be a problem. For example, searching for "social capital" in June 2019 resulted in 8,366 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 (e.g., "neighborhood social capital"). If you have not found much literature, try using more general or multiple terms (e.g., "social relations" OR "social ties"). 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. Photo 2.2 shows a computer screenshot from a search in SocINDEX to find research on "domestic violence" and "police response."

5. *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.

6. *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

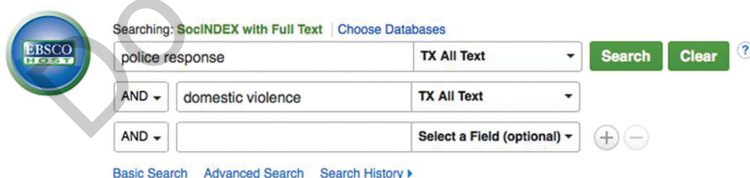


Photo 2.2 When starting a search in Sociological Abstracts, multiple key words can be used to narrow search results. Thinking back to the social problem you identified at the beginning of the chapter, what key words could you use to find more information?

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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. If an article that appears to be important for your topic isn't available from your own library or online, you may be able to request a copy online through your library site or by asking a member of the library staff. Your library may also have the print version.

Searching the Web

The World Wide Web provides access to vast amounts of information, with more than 1.7 billion websites (<http://www.internetlivestats.com/total-number-of-websites/>) in June 2019. You can search the holdings of other libraries and download the complete text of government reports, some conference papers, and newspaper articles. You can find policies of local governments, descriptions of individual social scientists and particular research projects, and postings of advocacy groups. It's also hard to avoid finding a lot of information in which you have no interest, such as political propaganda, third-grade homework assignments, or advertisements galore.

So caveat emptor (buyer beware) is the watchword when you search the web. After all, it is a medium in which anyone with basic skills can post almost anything. Limit your inspection of websites to the first few pages that turn up in your list (they're ranked by relevance). See what those first pages contain and then try to narrow your search by including some additional terms. Putting quotation marks around a phrase that you want to search will also help to limit your search—searching for “informal social control” on Google (on June 11, 2019) produced about 233,000 sites, compared with the roughly 208,000,000 sites retrieved when I omitted the quotation marks—so Google searched “informal” and “social” and “control.” You can also focus just on photos, videos, news sites, and so on.

Google Scholar is of special interest, since it provides a publicly accessible tool for searching the scholarly literature across disciplines—but also including technical reports, theses, books, and other types of documents. Google Scholar found 1,920 documents in a search for “police response to domestic violence” (on June 11, 2019), and since it lists articles in order of use of the search terms, frequency of citation, and other reasonable factors, the first several pages of citations provide a good way to identify potentially important omissions from your literature searches in bibliographic databases available at your library. However, in most cases, you will still need to go through your library to obtain the full text of the articles that interest you (if your library subscribes to the source journals).

Before you begin, be sure to clarify the goals of your search. Will you check on the coverage of your literature searching? Review related government programs? Find reports and statistics about the research question? Examine commentary about it? No matter what, be sure to record the URL (web address) for the useful sites you find.

Reviewing Research

A social science review of the literature describes prior research about one or more related research questions, identifies points of similarity and difference and highlights the strong and weak points in this body of research, and develops general conclusions about the implications of this research and the questions that require further research. Reviewing the literature that you have located is a two-stage process. In the first stage, you must assess each relevant article you have located separately. As a result of this review, you may decide to

discard some of the articles as not sufficiently relevant or of inadequate quality and you may identify other articles as particularly important. In the second stage of the review process, you should assess the implications of the set of articles (and other materials) you have reviewed for the relevant aspects of your research question and procedures. The result of these two stages should be an integrated review that highlights these implications.

The next two sections illustrate these stages. The first section presents a summary review of a single article found in a search of recent research on the effectiveness of the police response to domestic violence. The second section shows how a single-article review can be incorporated within an integrated review of prior research on this research question. These two sections are followed by a third section on systematic literature reviews. Systematic reviews use an explicit method of locating and comparing different studies of the same research question.

This is only an introduction to the process of reviewing the literature. In each subsequent chapter, you will learn how to evaluate more of the specific features of research projects that are discussed in research articles. By the time you finish *Understanding the Social World*, you will be able to write detailed critiques of research articles and then develop persuasive integrated reviews of the body of research about a research question. Appendix A contains a comprehensive set of questions to guide you in your article reviews, but because at this early point in the text you won't be familiar with all the terminology used in those questions, you should wait to practice reviewing articles with the questions in Appendix A until later in the course.

Single-Article Reviews

It has been four decades since the original Minneapolis experiment by Richard Berk and Larry Sherman on the police response to domestic violence. Although the prevalence of intimate partner violence appears to have declined since then in the United States, the question of how best to respond is still not resolved. One of the complicating factors is the continuation of abuse by the perpetrators after victimized women and their children have been separated from them. April M. Zeoli, Echo A. Ribera, Cris M. Sullivan, and Sheryl Kubiak (2013) from Michigan State University focused on this problem in a research project designed to explore how women respond to abuse by ex-husbands with whom they have had custody disputes.

Zeoli and her colleagues (2013) prepared to investigate this research question by reviewing the literature on intimate partner violence after separation. They found reports that many victimized women were threatened after their abusive relationship was formally ended and that court hearings often led to requirements of joint custody that created opportunities for continued abuse of both mothers and children. However, their literature search identified few studies of how women coped. They decided to contribute to filling this gap in understanding by conducting qualitative interviews with mothers who had been through custody disputes in family court. Their article describes how they made arrangements to review family court records, screened divorce cases for indications of a history of abuse, and then telephoned women to confirm their eligibility and to ask if they would consent to be interviewed. Of 174 women whose telephone numbers they obtained, only 58 (33%) could be contacted, and only 23 were ultimately determined to be eligible for the study. As we learn in this way about Zeoli and her colleagues' experience with selecting study participants, we can see that the women they interviewed might not be comparable to those who had moved or changed their phone numbers for other reasons.

▼ EXHIBIT 2.2

Fathers' Harm to Children Postdivorce and Mothers' Strategies to Protect Them (n = 10)

Fathers' harm or likely harm to children	Mothers' strategies to protect children			
	Avoid family court (n = 2)	Family court provides no support (n = 5)	Family court provides support after extreme harm (n = 2)	Family court is supportive (n = 2)
Physical harm (n = 3)		Kim, Jesy		Vanessa
Emotional abuse precipitating self-injury (n = 2)			Jennifer, Meaghan	
Neglect (n = 3)	Kathleen	Christina		Meredith
Likely future physical harm (n = 4)	Kathleen, Carole	Carole, Karen		Vanessa
Likely kidnapping (n = 2)	Carole	Carole		Vanessa

April M. Zeoli, Echo A. Ribera, Cris M. Sullivan, and Sheryl Kubiak. 2013. Post-Separation Abuse of Women and their Children: Boundary-Setting and Family Court Utilization among Victimized Mothers." *Journal of Family Violence*, 28:547–560. Reprinted by permission of Springer Nature.

Zeoli and her colleagues use quotes from the interviews to illustrate how they classified fathers' harm to children postdivorce (Exhibit 2.2). For example, "neglect" was recorded as the type of harm resulting from a father whose former wife said he "would literally go to work in the morning and come home for five minutes to see . . . that they're still alive and then leave and these children were too little to take care of themselves" (p. 552). Such careful description of procedures allows readers to consider whether they agree with the researchers' decisions and to raise questions about what might have been missed. In their conclusions, the researchers note that they didn't examine all abusive tactics used and that their reliance on mothers as informants limited their knowledge about harm suffered by the children. The research thus improves understanding of this aspect of intimate partner violence while also pointing out the limitations of the research design and thus the need for more research.

Integrated Literature Reviews

The goal of the second stage of the literature review process is to integrate the results of 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). Let's look at each of these goals in turn:

1. *Summarize prior research.* The summary of prior research should focus on the particular research question of concern, but it may also be necessary to provide some more general background. For example, in the Canadian study of victims' perceptions of police, Betty Jo Barrett and her colleagues (2019) begin their integrated literature review by citing several studies that indicate the impact of victims' perceptions of police on their help-seeking behavior. They then summarize prior research about three related issues: public perceptions of police (about 10 studies), perceptions of police by IPV victims (about 8 studies), and neighborhood context and perceptions of police. In each of these areas, Barrett et al.

Integrated literature review: A review of prior research on a particular research question that summarizes findings, critiques methods, and presents conclusions.

(2019) describe the key findings of each study and highlight similarities and differences between them. They note that “further research assessing a range of ecological variables and how these variables influence perceptions of the policy in Canada is needed to continue to illuminate the specific nature and conditions of these complexities” (Barrett et al. 2019:200). Their review focuses on articles published in academic peer-reviewed journals and written by credible authors who have been funded by reputable sources (Locke, Silverman, & Spirduso 1998:37–44).

2. *Critique prior research.* An integrated review should also discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the body of prior research. What issues seem to have been resolved by multiple studies, and what issues remain as points of contention? Barrett et al. (2019) note that “findings vary substantially” (p. 200), that “research which focuses solely on individual level determinants may yield an incomplete picture” (p. 201), and that “it cannot be assumed that research findings emerging from one geopolitical environment are necessarily reflective of diverging contexts” (p. 201). When you are ready to study the article review questions in Appendix A, you will find that they will help to ensure that you consider many more possible problems with methodological issues.
3. *Present pertinent conclusions.* Don’t leave the reader guessing about the implications of the prior research for your own research question. Present the conclusions you draw from the research you have reviewed and point out any limitations of that research (Fink 2005:190–192; Pyrczak 2005:53–56). The Barrett literature review noted the inadequacy of prior research but also identified what had been found about the differences in public perceptions of police and about the effects of victimization, of neighborhood social disorder, and of tensions between police and communities of color. These conclusions from prior research then shape the predictions they propose to test in their own research.

Systematic Literature Reviews

Any literature review should be systematic, but the term *systematic review* designates an approach to literature review that uses “a specific and reproducible method to identify, select and appraise studies of a previously agreed level of quality” (Booth et al. 2016:11).

Systematic literature reviews are often the basis for a complete article—rather than only providing the background for an article that reports the results of research with new data—and so can be considered a distinct method of research. Published systematic reviews are now archived on searchable websites, including <http://www.cochranelibrary.com/> (health care), <https://www.campbellcollaboration.org/library.html> (social interventions), and <http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/cms/Default.aspx?tabid=56> (multiple topic areas). Helpful related tools are available at <http://systematicreviewtools.com/index.php> and <https://systematicreviewsjournal.biomedcentral.com/>.

Developing a systematic review involves all of the activities I have just described for searching and reviewing the literature, but it proceeds with more explicit plans and reports at each stage of the process. Many systematic review efforts adhere to the PRISMA guidelines (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses): <http://www.prisma-statement.org/Default.aspx>. A systematic review by Robert Davis,

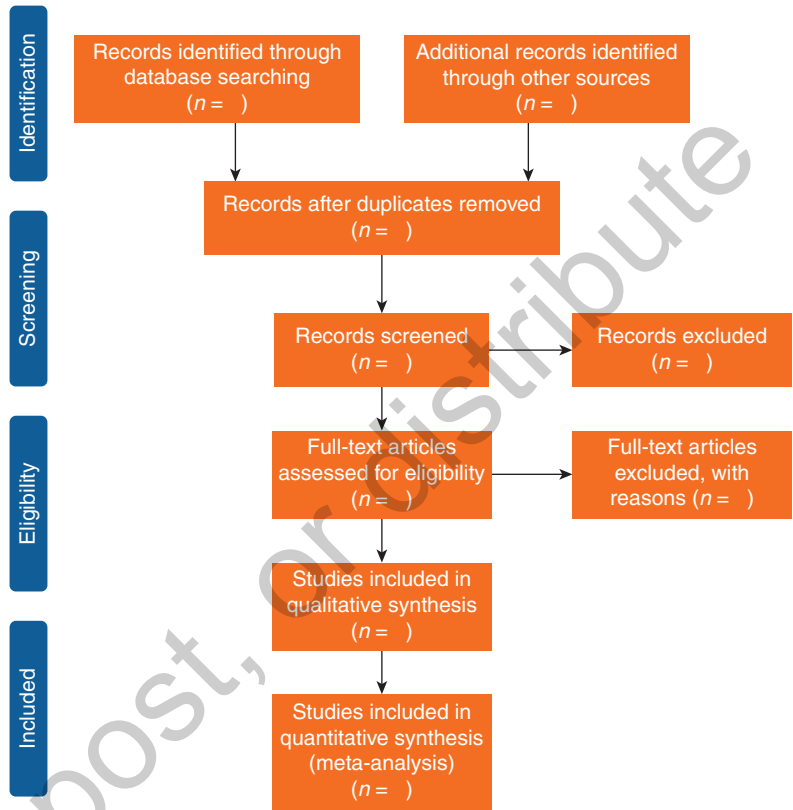
Systematic literature review: A literature review that “uses a specific and reproducible method to identify, select, and appraise studies that are relevant to a particular question” (adapted from Booth et al. 2016:11).

David Weisburd, and Bruce Taylor (2007) of research on the effects of using social workers or specially trained officers (“second responders”) to follow up on incidents of family abuse provides an example.

1. *Define a specific research question.* An example of one of the three posed by Davis, Weisburd, and Taylor was “Do second responder programs decrease or increase abuse as measured on victim surveys?”
2. *List the terms to be used in searching and the specific sources to be searched.* After a detailed description of the criteria for inclusion of studies, Davis et al. listed sources including “Criminal Justice Abstracts” and “Sociological Abstracts” and search terms including “second responder programs” and “Police OR law enforcement AND repeat domestic violence OR wife abuse OR marital violence.”

▼ EXHIBIT 2.3

PRISMA Flow Diagram



Source: Moher, D., A. Liberati, J. Tetzlaff, D. G. Altman, and the PRISMA Group. 2009. *Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses: The PRISMA Statement*. *PLoS Med* 6(7): e1000097.

3. *Report the results of the search and selection process,* often in the type of flow diagram recommended by PRISMA (see Exhibit 2.3).
4. *Code the characteristics of the selected studies.* An excerpt from the coding sheets used by Davis et al. appears in Exhibit 2.4.
5. *Summarize the results in a narrative review.* A statistical evaluation—termed a *meta-analysis*—of the outcomes of the previous studies may also be included.

▼ EXHIBIT 2.4

Second Responder Meta-Analysis Coding Sheets: Excerpt (Davis et al. 2007)

Describing the Response

18. What did home visits consist of? (Select all that apply)
 1. Assess victim’s current situation and history of abuse in relationship
 2. Develop safety plan with victim
 3. Discuss nature of abuse
 4. Assess victim needs

(Continued)

(Continued)

5. Provide information and referrals to service programs
6. Interact with abuser
7. Other

18b. Specify (Other) _____

19. Who was involved in the implementation of the response? (Select all that apply)

1. Domestic/family violence police officer
2. Police victim caseworker
3. Prosecutor victim caseworker
4. Independent victim advocate
5. Other (specify)

19b. Specify (Other) _____

20. How long after the incident was reported was the second response attempted?

1. Within 24 hours
2. Within several days of incident
3. More than several days after incident
4. Other (specify)

Source: Davis, R. C., D. Weisburd, and B. Taylor. "Effects of Second Responder Programs on Repeat Incidents of Family Abuse." *Campbell Systematic Reviews* 2008:15. © Davis et al.

Systematic reviews provide an excellent source of information about prior research in areas in which interventions have been tested and such reviews have been conducted. Be sure to read any that are available when you focus on a new research question.

Social Theories

The value of a social research project will also be increased if it is connected to social theory. Neither domestic violence nor police policies exist in a vacuum, set apart from the rest of the social world. We can understand behaviors and orientations better if we consider how they reflect broader social patterns. 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. Theory helps social scientists decide which questions are important to ask about the social world and which are just trivial pursuits. Building and evaluating theory is one of the most important objectives of social science.

Lawrence Sherman and Richard Berk’s (1984) domestic violence experiment tested predictions derived from two theories: **specific deterrence theory** and **labeling theory**. *Specific deterrence theory* predicts that arresting spouse abusers will lessen their likelihood of reoffending by increasing the costs of reoffending. Crime “doesn’t pay” (as much) if the costs of punishment are high (Exhibit 2.5; Lempert & Sanders 1986:86–87).

By contrast, *labeling theory* suggests that persons arrested for domestic assault are more likely to reoffend than are those who are not punished. The basic idea is that once an offender is labeled as a deviant by being arrested and so is treated by other people as deviant, he or she will then be more likely to act in a way that is consistent with the label *deviant* (Becker 1963:9; Scull 1988:678).

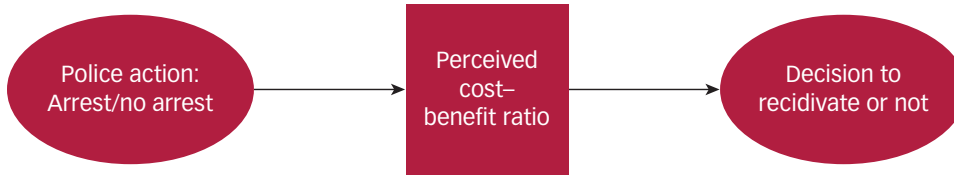
Theory: A logically interrelated set of propositions about empirical reality.

Specific deterrence theory: Predicts that punishing individuals for crime deters them from further criminal acts, due to their recognition that the costs incurred outweigh the benefits.

Labeling theory: Labels applied to people can result in behaviors and attitudes consistent with the label, with a particular focus on how labeling a person or group of people as deviant can result in their engaging in deviant behavior.

▼ EXHIBIT 2.5

Specific Deterrence Theory Prediction



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 two theories against each other. If you're feeling ambitious, you may even seek to combine some aspects of the two perspectives or seek out another. Maybe you'll come up with a different theoretical perspective altogether. 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

Social research seeks 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 (Exhibit 2.6). This inductive research process is often the strategy used in qualitative methods. A research project can draw on both deductive and inductive strategies.

Exhibit 2.7 summarizes how the two theories that guided Sherman and Berk's (1984) research relate to the question of whether to arrest spouse abusers. By helping to make such connections, social theory makes us much more sensitive to the possibilities and thus helps draw out the implications of the findings.

Explanatory Research

Research designed to evaluate cause-effect relations is explanatory: The goal is to determine why things happen or what the consequences are of some event or characteristic or other action. 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 is also termed **deductive research**, because a specific expectation is deduced from a general theoretical premise and then tested with data that have been collected for this purpose.

The deductive process can be characterized with a **research circle** (Exhibit 2.8). 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.

In deductive research, variation in one variable is proposed to predict, influence, or cause variation in the other. The proposed influence is the **independent variable**;

Deductive research:

The type of research in which a specific expectation is deduced from a general premise and is then tested.

Research circle:

A diagram of the elements of the research process, including theories, hypotheses, data collection, and data analysis.

Hypothesis:

A tentative statement about empirical reality, involving a relationship between two or more variables.

Variable:

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

Independent variable:

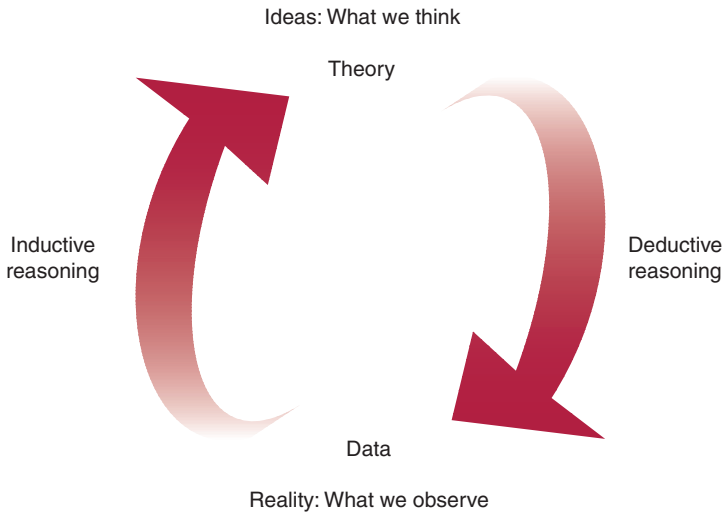
A variable that is hypothesized to cause, or lead to, variation in another variable.

Example of an independent variable:

Poverty rate.

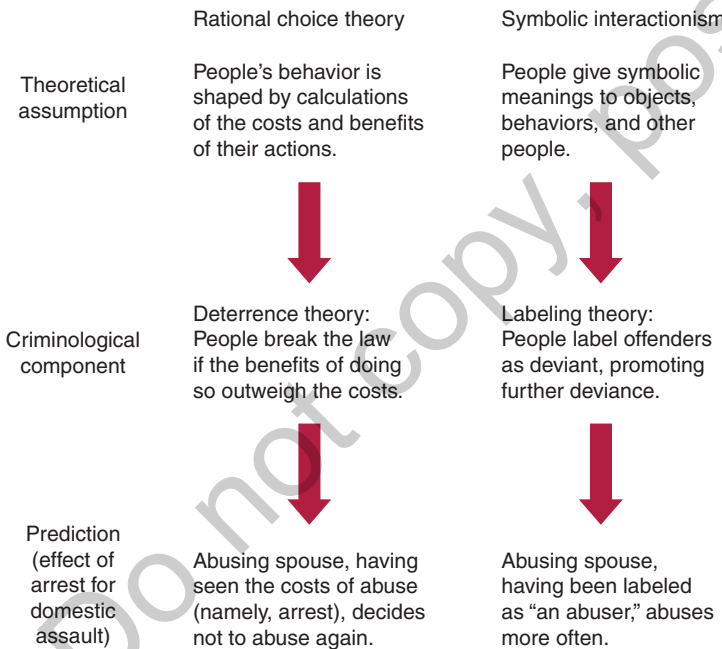
▼ EXHIBIT 2.6

The Links Between Theory and Data



▼ EXHIBIT 2.7

Two Social Theories and Their Predictions About the Effect of Arrest for Domestic Assault



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 2.9 presents several hypotheses with their independent and dependent variables and their if-then equivalents.

Exhibit 2.9 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.

Explanatory studies and many evaluative studies involve deductive research. In deductive research, the initial 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 test of whether the hypothesized associations exist in 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. Sherman and Berk deduced a specific hypothesis from deterrence theory: “Arrest for spouse abuse reduces the risk of repeat offenses.” In this hypothesis, police sanction (arrest, separation, or warning) is the independent variable and the risk of repeat offenses is the dependent variable (it is hypothesized to depend on the police sanction).

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 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 (Exhibit 2.10).

This was not the end of the story, however. 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 changes. Results turned out to be inconsistent—arrest often did not reduce the rate of recidivism—so the initial results were not generalizable to all cities (Sherman & Smith 1992).

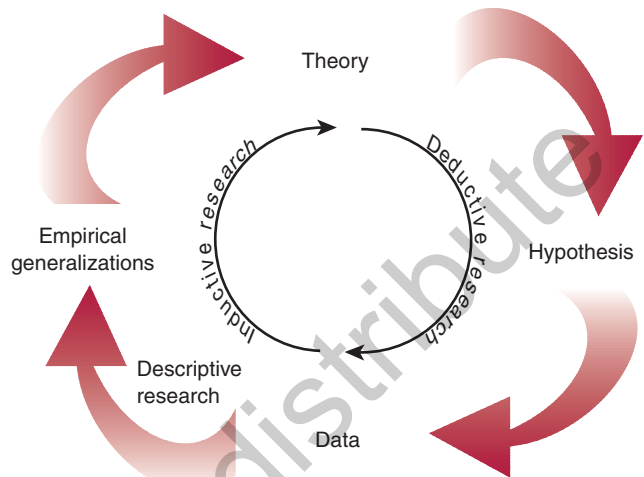
Exploratory Research

Research designed to determine how people make sense of their circumstances or to learn how people interact or express themselves is exploratory research. Qualitative research is often exploratory and, hence, inductive. In contrast to deductive research, **inductive research** begins with specific observations or other data, which are then analyzed 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 2.11. In deductive research, reasoning from specific premises results in a conclusion that a theory is supported, but in inductive research, the identification of similar empirical patterns results in a generalization about some social process.

Qualitative researchers with an exploratory research design often ask questions such as “What is going on here?” “How do people interpret these experiences?” or “Why do

▼ EXHIBIT 2.8

The Research Circle



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.

Direction of association: A pattern in a relationship between two variables—the values of variables tend to change consistently in relation to change on the other variable; can be either positive or negative.

Empirical generalization: A statement that describes patterns found in data.

Replications: Repetitions of a study using the same research methods to answer the same research question.

Inductive research: The type of research in which general conclusions are drawn from specific data.

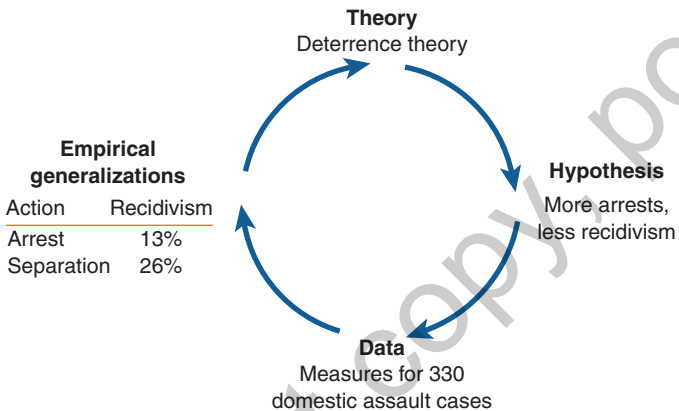
▼ EXHIBIT 2.9

Examples of Hypotheses

Original Hypothesis	Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	If-Then Hypothesis	Direction of Association
1. The greater the use of the internet, the greater the strength of distant family ties.	Level of internet use	Strength of distant family ties	If internet use is greater, then the strength of distant family ties is greater.	+
2. The risk of property theft decreases as income increases.	Income	Risk of property theft	If income is higher, then the risk of property theft is less.	-
3. If years of education decrease, income decreases.	Years of education	Income	If years of education decrease, then income decreases.	+
4. Political conservatism increases with income.	Income	Political conservatism	If income increases, then political conservatism increases.	+
5. Property crime is higher in urban areas than in suburban or rural areas.	Type of community	Rate of property crime	If areas are urban, then property crime is higher compared with crime in suburban or rural areas.	NA

▼ EXHIBIT 2.10

The Research Circle: Minneapolis Domestic Violence Experiment



Source: Data from Sherman and Berk (1984:267).

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).

Young Adolescents’ Coping During Adult IPV

Amy Chanmugam (2015) used exploratory research methods in her study of young adolescents’ coping responses during adult intimate partner violence. Chanmugam recruited 14 young adolescents (ages 12–14) and their mothers in four domestic violence shelters in Texas. With the teens’ agreement and their mothers’ signed consent, interviews with youth and their mothers were taped and then transcribed. She then reviewed the interview transcripts carefully and identified major themes that emerged in the comments to the many open-ended questions.

The most common coping responses to adult IPV among the adolescents were leaving home, going somewhere else inside the home, and trying to stay safe with another family member. The following quote is from a teen whose father tried to prevent her from leaving with her mother (Chanmugam 2015:109).

It seemed like he could care less if my mom left, but he wanted to keep me. So he was running after us and my mom got in the car. My dad was telling me not to get in the car and my mom was telling me to get in the car. ... I finally got in the car and he jumped on top of the car and she drove off.



THE PROBLEM WITH MOST MEDIA COVERAGE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Can celebrities get away with violence against their intimate partners? Joanna Rae Pepin's analysis of 330 news articles about 66 male celebrities charged with domestic violence found that the answer depends in part on the celebrities' race. News stories about black celebrities are three times more likely to include mention of criminal issues compared to news stories about white celebrities, while white celebrities' violent actions were 2.5 more times to be excused and justified in news stories than comparable actions of black celebrities.

Pepin's analysis led her to conclude that "there was a pattern of minimizing the violence and impact to the victim by the reporter's use of language." As an example of how she measured this pattern, she found that "Male celebrities' domestic violence was routinely labeled as something other than IPV [intimate partner violence], as writers opted for softer language, such as *argument*, *dispute*, *altercation*, or *incident*. A range of qualifiers were attached to these labels, such as *bad*, *escalated*,

elevated, and *heated*. . . . Although the tone and verbiage used conjured up images of 'bad arguments' that are relatable to most couples, the actions at issue were characteristically different than common couple disagreements."

For Further Thought?

1. How well do you think that Pepin's measurement approach captures the meaning of domestic violence?
2. What would you like to know about the research before evaluating its generalizability and its causal conclusions? Does the research seem to achieve the goal of authenticity based on your own observations in the social world?

Pacific Standard Staff. 2017. "The Problem With Most Media Coverage Of Domestic Violence." *Pacific Standard Magazine*, June 14. Retrieved from <https://psmag.com/news/the-problem-with-most-media-coverage-of-domestic-violence>.

What does this suggest to you about how to understand youth responses to interpersonal violence among their parents?

Explanations developed inductively from qualitative research can feel authentic because they reflect what people said in their own words and provide a sense of how they see the social world. Explanations derived from qualitative research are often richer and more finely textured than they 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 similar explanations to make sense of what was observed or heard.

Deductive research can lead to an inductive reasoning process when unexpected patterns are found in the data. Such patterns are called **anomalous findings**. When these anomalous findings lead to new explanations, insights, or theoretical approaches, they are called **serendipitous findings**.

The deductive domestic violence research took an inductive turn when researchers began trying to make sense of the differing patterns in the data collected in the different cities. In a replication study of the police response to domestic violence in Florida's Metro-Dade County, Pate and Hamilton (1992) discovered 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

Anomalous findings: Unexpected patterns in data.

Serendipitous findings: Unexpected patterns in data that stimulate new explanations, insights, or theoretical approaches.



Photo 2.3 The deterrent effect that arrest, or threat of arrest, has on individuals varies greatly. What are some ways scientists can study how arrest prevents some individuals from committing crimes?

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a planned way. Every phenomenon can always be explained in *some* way. Our confidence in the “stake in conformity” interpretation of Pate and Hamilton’s results would be strengthened if it were next presented as a hypothesis and then tested with a deductive approach.

Descriptive Research

Research is descriptive when its goal is to provide a picture of people, organizations, or other entities; of change over time; or of speech or other texts. Descriptions can be

quantitative—such as the distribution of incomes in a population—or qualitative—such as a record of customer–worker interactions in a service agency—but it is intended to represent what, rather than why. Descriptive 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 2.8).

Valid description is important in its own right—and it is a necessary component of all investigations. In their investigation of the use of out-of-court resolutions in policing domestic violence in the United Kingdom, Nicole Westmarland, Kelly Johnson, and Clare McGlynn (2018) carefully described the different types of out-of-court resolutions and identified how frequently each was used (Exhibit 2.13). Such careful description is an important first step for researchers

who want to understand this practice and for policy makers who may seek to reduce the prevalence of such “under the radar” responses to IPV.

▼ EXHIBIT 2.11

Deductive and Inductive Reasoning

Deductive

Premise 1: *All unemployed spouse abusers recidivate.*

Premise 2: *Joe is an unemployed spouse abuser.*

Conclusion: **Joe will recidivate.**

Inductive

Evidence 1: *Joe, an unemployed spouse abuser, recidivated.*

Evidence 2: *Harold, an unemployed spouse abuser, recidivated.*

Evidence 3: *George, an employed spouse abuser, didn’t recidivate.*

Conclusion: **All unemployed spouse abusers recidivate.**

Cross-sectional research design: A study in which data are collected at only one point in time.

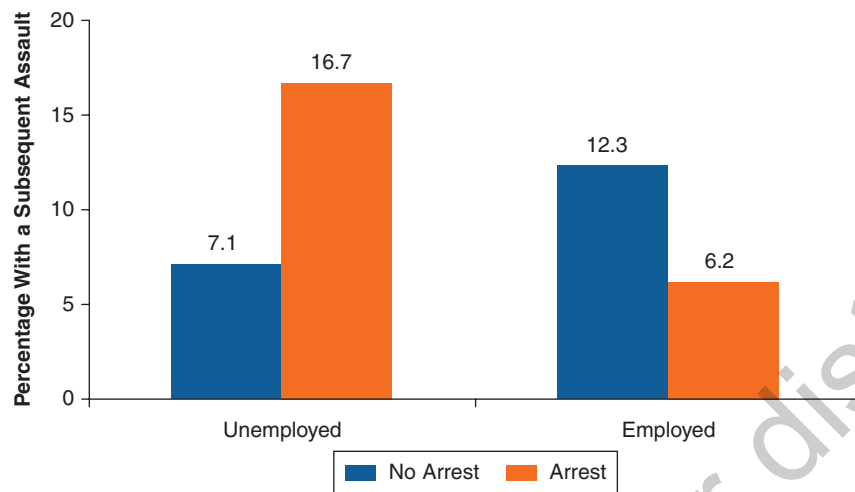
Longitudinal research design: A study in which data are collected that can be ordered in time; also defined as research in which data are collected at two or more points in time.

Cross-Sectional and Longitudinal Designs

In addition to deciding on the appropriate research strategy—whether descriptive, explanatory, exploratory, or evaluative, researchers must decide whether to collect data at just one or two or more points in time. In **cross-sectional research designs**, all data are collected at one point in time. In **longitudinal research designs**, data are collected at two or more points in time. The research question determines whether cross-sectional or longitudinal data are needed. If the research question concerns only the here and now, there is no need for longitudinal data. Are women paid less than men for comparable work?

▼ EXHIBIT 2.12

Percentage of Suspects With a Subsequent Assault by Employment Status and Arrest Status



Pate, Antony M, and Edwin E. Hamilton 1992.

Cross-sectional data can give us the answer. However, if the research question focuses on change over time or concerns a hypothesis about one change leading to another, then longitudinal data are necessary. How has church membership changed over time? Is implementation of standardized high-stakes testing followed by better student performance? Researchers need data collected over time to answer questions like these.

Cross-Sectional Designs

Barbara Warner (2014) used an ambitious cross-sectional design to improve understanding of informal social control processes in neighborhoods. Drawing on collective efficacy theory, Warner (2014:421) defined the concept of informal social control as the behaviors engaged in by residents to control inappropriate public behaviors, including criminal acts. Her review of the literature on informal social control revealed that factors that increase residents' use of informal social control have been identified (such as social ties), but little research has investigated how people react to these informal social control efforts. Are other residents less likely to commit crimes because of their neighbors? Warner's study involved a survey of residents in 66 neighborhoods in two southern cities that was funded by the National Institute of Justice. Respondents were asked how they would respond to a hypothetical complaint by a neighbor about their behavior (such as playing loud music). Other questions asked about social ties, trust in others, faith in the police, and other behaviors and characteristics.

As indicated in Exhibit 2.14, respondents who had lived in the neighborhood for a longer period of time and had more faith in the police were more likely to say that they would "give in" after a neighbor's complaint than were those who were more mobile and less distrusting of police. Neighborhood economic advantage had little apparent effect by itself. These and other findings help us to understand who is more likely to respond positively to efforts at informal social control.

▼ EXHIBIT 2.13

Nature of Out-of-Court Resolution (n = 414 types relating to 346 cases)

Type and Frequency	Examples
Apology: 177 cases (43%)	Verbal apology, written apology, apology to officer.
Reparation: 113 (27%)	Damage paid for/compensated or replaced, return of property.
Advice: 31 (7%)	Advice given, words of advice given, advised not to contact victim otherwise harassment prosecution.
Agreement: 31 (7%)	Agreement made/conditions, agreed to deal with childcare case formally, agreed to attend counseling, agreed to comply with vehicle insurance procedures, agreed a period of/not to have any further contact with victim, note signed to say that offender will behave.
Mediation or restorative justice	Restorative justice meeting between parties, mediation, mediating with PC. participation in victim/offender mediation, to attend couples counseling.
Meeting: 23 (6%)	
Offender/both parties to seek help: 17 (4%)	Seek guidance behavior from support team, visit CI [general practitioner] for medication, seek help for addiction, seek CBT therapy, seek CAB advice, seek marriage guidance, seek counselling, attend anger management, engage with social services, attend Pathfinder diversion scheme, seek substance abuse support, seek education, training and employment support.
Other: 14 (3%)	Victim taken into specialist care, received police consequences session, separated, no formal complaint made, no action because victim wanted no further contact. PIN [Police Information Notice] harassment, banning order, offender moved.
Youth intervention: 8 (2%)	Youth Triage Programme, relationship intervention work, conferencing through Youth Offending Team, referred to intervention team via youth services.

Westmarland et al. (2015).

Longitudinal Designs

In longitudinal research, data are collected at two or more points in time. By measuring the value of cases on an independent variable and a dependent variable at different times, the researcher can determine whether variation in the independent variable precedes variation in the dependent variable. It is more difficult to collect data at two or more points in time than at one time; often it is not even feasible. Nonetheless, the value of longitudinal data is so great that every effort should be made to develop longitudinal research designs when they are appropriate for the research question asked. The following discussion of the three major types of longitudinal designs will give you a sense of the possibilities (Exhibit 2.15).

Repeated cross-sectional design (trend study):

A type of longitudinal study in which data are collected at two or more points in time from different samples of the same population.

Repeated Cross-Sectional Designs (Trend Studies)

Studies that use a **repeated cross-sectional design**, also known as trend studies, have become fixtures of the political arena around election time. Particularly in presidential election years, we have all become accustomed to reading weekly, even daily reports on the percentage of the population that supports each candidate. Similar polls are conducted to track sentiment on many other social issues.

Repeated cross-sectional surveys are conducted as follows:

1. A sample is drawn from a population at Time 1, and data are collected from the sample.
2. As time passes, some people leave the population and others enter it.
3. At Time 2, a different sample is drawn from this population.

Fixed-Sample Panel Designs (Panel Studies)

Panel designs allow us to identify changes in individuals, groups, or whatever we are studying. This is the process for conducting **fixed-sample panel designs**:

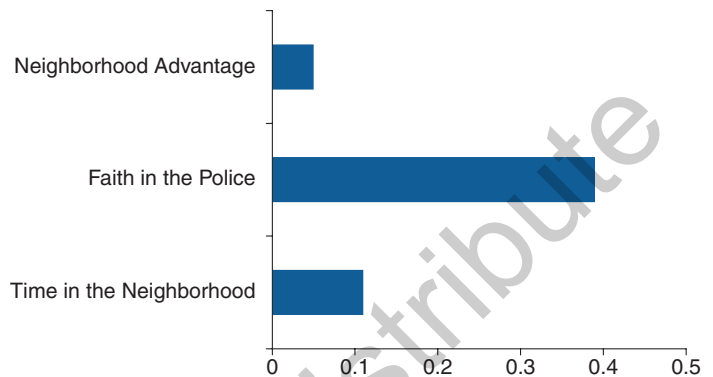
1. A sample (called a panel) is drawn from a population at Time 1, and data are collected from the sample.
2. As time passes, some panel members become unavailable for follow-up, and the population changes.
3. At Time 2, data are collected from the same people as at Time 1 (the panel)—except for those people who cannot be located.

Because a panel design follows the same individuals, it is better than a repeated cross-sectional design for testing causal hypotheses. For example, Lee Hulbert-Williams at the University of Wolverhampton and other British social scientists revisited research on the relation between exposure to life events and psychological problems in adults with intellectual disabilities (Hulbert-Williams et al. 2014). Their literature review revealed that this association had frequently been found in cross-sectional research but that longitudinal research was needed to determine whether the life events preceded an increase in psychological problems. Their study used a fixed-sample (panel) design in which they surveyed 93 people living at a residence for persons with intellectual disabilities and then about 4 years later surveyed the 68 participants from Time 1 who were still available. As they had hypothesized, they found that negative life events preceded greater risk for psychological problems.

Despite their value in establishing time order of effects, panel studies are a challenge to implement successfully. It can be difficult, and very expensive, to keep track of individuals over a long period, and inevitably the proportion of panel members who can be located for follow-up will decline over time. Panel studies often lose more than one-quarter of their members through attrition (Miller 1991:170), and those who are lost are often not necessarily like those who remain in the panel. Also, **subject fatigue** becomes a problem if panel members become so used to answering standard survey questions that they start giving stock answers rather than actually thinking about their current feelings or actions—although this does not often occur (Campbell 1992).

▼ EXHIBIT 2.14

Relation of Residential Mobility and Faith in Police to Probability of “Giving In”



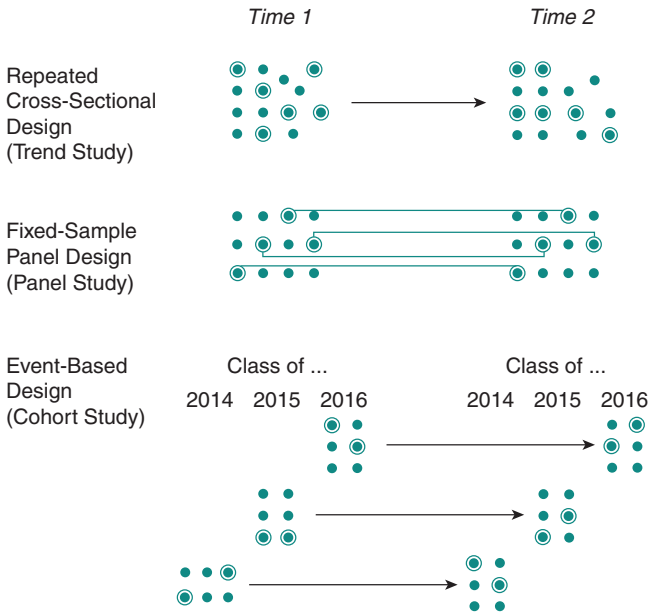
Source: Warner, Barbara D. 2014. "Neighborhood Factors Related to the Likelihood of Successful Informal Control." *Journal of Criminal Justice* 42:421-430.

Fixed-sample panel design (panel study): A type of longitudinal study in which data are collected from the same individuals—the panel—at two or more points in time. In another type of panel design, panel members who leave are replaced with new members.

Subject fatigue: Problems caused by panel members growing weary of repeated interviews and dropping out of a study or becoming so used to answering the standard questions in the survey that they start giving stock or thoughtless answers.

▼ EXHIBIT 2.15

Three Types of Longitudinal Design



design, separate samples are drawn from the same cohort at two or more different times. In an event-based panel design, the same individuals from the same cohort are studied at two or more different times. Comparing findings between different cohorts can help reveal the importance of the social or cultural context that the different cohorts experienced (Elliott, Holland, & Thomson 2008:230).



Photo 2.4 The deterrent effect arrest, or threat of arrest, has on individuals varies greatly. What are some ways scientists can study the effect arrest has on preventing individuals from committing crimes?
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how and why the social world—some aspect of it—operates as it does. In *Understanding the Social World*, we are concerned with three standards for validity: (1) **measurement validity**, (2) **generalizability**, and (3) **causal validity** (also known as **internal validity**; Hammersley 2008:43). Invalid measures, invalid generalizations, and invalid causal inferences will each lead to invalid conclusions. We also focus here on the standard of **authenticity**, a concern with reflecting fairly the perspectives of participants in a setting.

Event-Based Designs (Cohort Studies)

In an **event-based design**, often called a cohort study, the follow-up samples (at one or more times) are selected from the same **cohort**—people who all have experienced a similar event or a common starting point. Examples include the following:

- *Birth cohorts*—those who share a common period of birth (those born in the 1940s, 1950s, 1960s, etc.)
- *Seniority cohorts*—those who have worked at the same place for about 5 years, about 10 years, and so on
- *School cohorts*—freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors

An event-based design can be a type of repeated cross-sectional design or a type of panel design. In an event-based repeated cross-sectional

Social Research Standards

As research takes us around the research circle, we have to be concerned about whether the connections being made are on target. Do the data obtained really support the theory we think they do? Is the research designed so that it provides a meaningful test of the hypothesis? We have achieved the goal of **validity** when our conclusions about empirical reality are correct. 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

Measurement Validity

A measure is valid when it measures what we think it measures. In other words, a valid procedure for measuring domestic violence is a prerequisite to describing the frequency of domestic violence in families. Measurement validity is our first concern in evaluating 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. Whether measures involve asking people questions, observing people's actions, or reviewing records in a government archive, care must be used in designing or selecting measures and in subsequently evaluating how well they performed. Chapter 4 introduces several different ways to test measurement validity. Researchers cannot just *assume* (or expect us to believe) that measures are valid without any evidence of measurement validity.

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. 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.

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** refers to the ability to generalize from findings about one group, population, or setting to other groups, populations, or settings (Exhibit 2.16). Cross-population generalizability can also be referred to as **external validity**. (Some social scientists equate the term *external validity* to *generalizability*, but this book restricts 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 was surveyed rather than the entire population.

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."

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. Since much research seeks to determine what causes what, social scientists frequently must be concerned with causal validity. Sherman and Berk (1984) were concerned with the causal effect of arrest on the likelihood of recidivism by people accused of domestic violence, so they designed their experiment so that some accused persons were arrested and others were not and then compared their rates of recidivism.

Event-based design (cohort study): A type of longitudinal study in which data are collected at two or more points in time from individuals in a cohort.

Cohort: Individuals or groups with a common starting point. Examples include a college's class of 1997, people who graduated from high school in the 1980s, General Motors employees who started work between the years 1990 and 2000, and people who were born in the late 1940s or the 1950s (the baby boom generation).

Validity: When statements or conclusions about empirical reality are correct.

Measurement validity: When a measure measures what we think it measures.

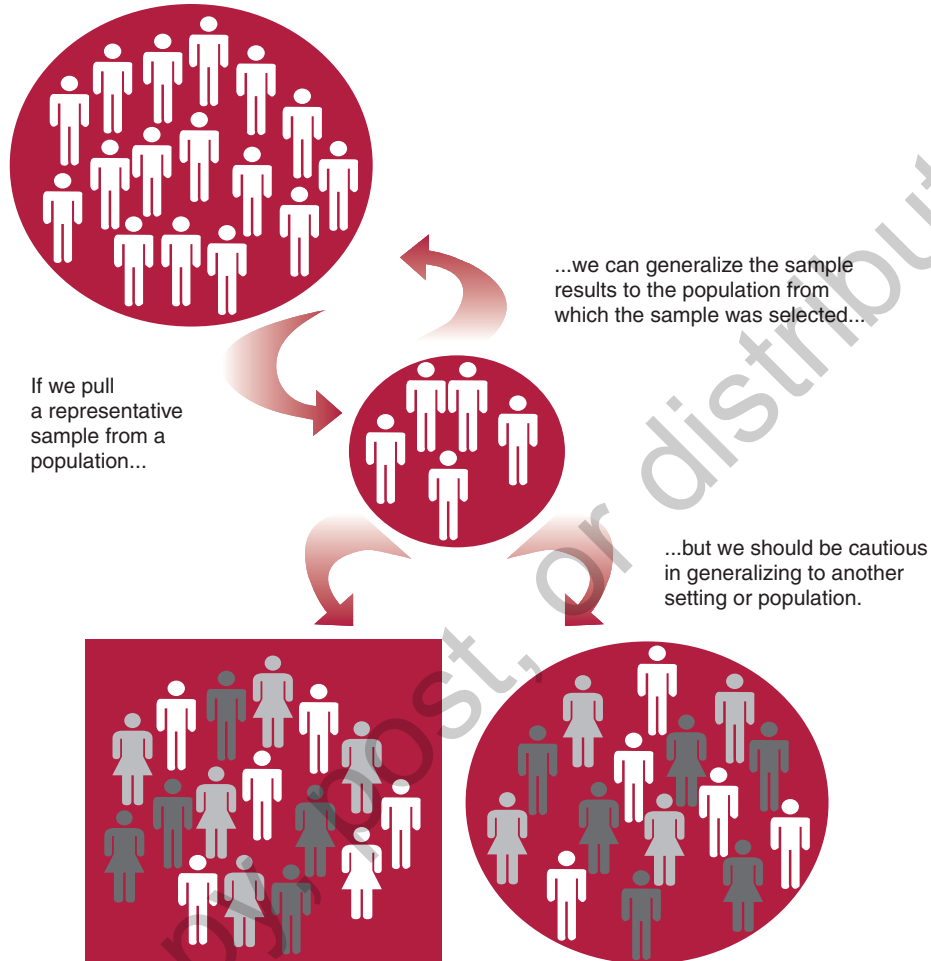
Generalizability: When a conclusion holds true for the population, group, setting, or event that we say it does, given the conditions that we specify.

Causal validity (internal validity): When a conclusion that A leads to or results in B is correct.

Internal validity (causal validity): When a conclusion that A leads to or results in B is correct.

Authenticity: When the understanding of a social process or social setting is one that reflects fairly the various perspectives of participants in that setting.

Sample and Cross-Population Generalizability



Sample generalizability: When a conclusion based on a sample, or subset, of a larger population holds true for that population.

Cross-population generalizability (external validity): When findings about one group, population, or setting hold true for other groups, populations, or settings.

External validity (cross-population generalizability): When findings about one group, population, or setting hold true for other groups, populations, or settings.

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). Rather than expecting social scientists to be able to provide a valid mirror of reality, those who emphasize the goal of authenticity recognize that what is understood by participants as reality is actually a linguistic and social construction of reality (Kvale 2002:306). For example, Moe (2007) found that battered women she interviewed in a shelter “exhibited a great deal of comfort through

KRISTIN M. CURTIS, M.A., SENIOR RESEARCH PROGRAM COORDINATOR, THE SENATOR WALTER RAND INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS AT RUTGERS UNIVERSITY—CAMDEN



Kristin Curtis graduated with a master's degree in criminal justice from Rutgers University—Camden in 2010. Her work on a nationwide socio-legal research project examining policymaker and practitioner perspectives on sex offender laws proved that pursuing a career in research was

the best fit for her interests and talents. Thus, she secured a position at the Walter Rand Institute (WRI) as a graduate project assistant and worked on state-wide prisoner re-entry studies. Curtis quickly moved up the ranks at the WRI and in the process has worked on a myriad of criminal justice-related projects. Her research assignments require varied methodological approaches such as the use of interviews, focus groups, surveys, network analysis, regression models, and geographic information systems (GIS).

However, one feature of working at WRI that Curtis truly values is the fact that she can participate in other areas of study outside the criminal justice realm. For instance, recently, Curtis completed two Community

Health Needs Assessment (CHNAs) for various hospital systems in South Jersey. These projects employed both qualitative and quantitative research methods designed to secure the voice of the community to define health, health needs, and potential solutions. Curtis is also working with colleagues to evaluate the outcomes of two new reentry programs at a local correctional institution. Curtis has been at WRI for 10 years and still enjoys her position, because each day presents new challenges and different tasks from data collection and analysis, finalizing reports, writing grant proposals for potential new projects, and supervising graduate students.

Curtis has advice for students interested in careers involving doing research or using research results:

Locate faculty who engages in research in your areas of interest(s). Even if you are unsure what your primary research areas are, working on a research project allows you to gain exposure to different research methodologies and techniques (i.e., quantitative and qualitative). You might find you enjoy research and pick up conference presentations and academic publications along the way. Remember, college is an opportunity to explore the different career choices in the world, so take advantage of this.

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 Chapters 8 and 11.

Conclusions

Selecting a worthy research question does not guarantee a worthwhile research project. The next three chapters focus on how particular aspects of the research process help to achieve a worthwhile result. Chapter 4 examines the interrelated processes of conceptualization and measurement, Chapter 5 reviews the sampling strategies that help achieve the goal of generalizability, and Chapter 6 clarifies the meaning of causality and illustrates different methods for achieving causal validity. Most of the



Photo 2.6 The cohort shown here are freshmen in high school. Why would researchers be interested in studying students in a specific year?

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large social science toolkit is no guarantee that researchers made the right decisions about which tools to use and how to use them in the investigation of a particular research problem, but you are already learning what to look for in order to evaluate those decisions.

remaining chapters then review different approaches to data collection—surveys, participant observation and intensive interviewing, evaluation research, unobtrusive methods—that help, in different ways, to achieve results that are valid.

Of course, social scientists’ answers to research questions will never be complete or entirely certain. Interpretations of research results must always take into account the body of related literature and consider a larger theoretical framework. Simply using a

KEY TERMS

Anomalous findings	33	Fixed-sample panel design (panel study)	37	Replications	31
Authenticity	38	Generalizability	38	Research circle	29
Causal validity (internal validity)	38	Hypothesis	29	Sample generalizability	39
Cohort	38	Independent variable	29	Serendipitous findings	33
Cross-population generalizability (external validity)	39	Inductive research	31	Social research question	20
Cross-sectional research design	34	Integrated literature review	25	Specific deterrence theory	28
Deductive research	29	Internal validity (causal validity)	28	Subject fatigue	37
Dependent variable	30	Intimate partner violence (IPV)	19	Systematic literature review	26
Direction of association	30	Labeling theory	28	Theory	28
Empirical generalization	31	Longitudinal research design	34	Validity	38
Event-based design (cohort study)	38	Measurement validity	38	Variable	29
External validity (cross-population generalizability)	39	Repeated cross-sectional design (trend study)	36		

HIGHLIGHTS

- Research questions should be feasible (within the time and resources available), socially important, and scientifically relevant.
- 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.
- Building social theory is a major objective of social research. Relevant theories should be investigated before starting social research projects, and they should be used to focus attention on particular research questions and to draw out the implications of research findings.
- Specific deterrence theory predicts that punishing individuals for crime deters them from further criminal acts, due to their recognition that the costs incurred outweigh the benefits.
- Labeling theory predicts that labels applied to people can result in behaviors and attitudes consistent with the label, with a particular focus on how labeling a person or group of people as deviant can result in their engaging in deviant behavior.
- Reviewing peer-reviewed journal articles that report prior research is an essential step in designing new research.
- 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. Longitudinal designs are preferable to cross-sectional designs for establishing the time order of effects.
- The goal of social science research is to achieve valid conclusions that accurately reflect the reality studied. The three dimensions of validity are measurement validity, generalizability, and causal (internal) validity. Qualitative researchers often focus on the goal of authenticity, or reflecting fairly the perspectives of participants in a setting.

CHAPTER 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. 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.
3. Sherman and Berk's (1984) study of the police response to domestic violence tested predictions derived from specific deterrence and labeling theories. Propose additional hypotheses about the response to domestic violence that are consistent with one or both of these theories. Which theory seems to you to provide the best framework for understanding domestic violence and how to respond to it? What are the independent and dependent variables in each hypothesis?
4. Researchers often try to figure out how people have changed over time by conducting a cross-sectional survey of people of different ages. The idea is that if people who are in their 60s tend to be happier than people who are in their 20s, it is because people tend to "become happier" as they age. But maybe people who are in their 60s now were just as happy when they were in their 20s, and people in their 20s now will be just as unhappy when they are in their 60s. (That's called a cohort effect.) We can't be sure unless we conduct a panel or cohort study (survey the same people at different ages). What, in your experience, are the major differences between the generations today in social attitudes and behaviors? Which would you attribute to changes as people age, and which to differences between cohorts in what they have experienced (such as common orientations among baby boomers)? Explain your reasoning.

PRACTICE EXERCISES

1. Pair up with one other student and select one of the research articles available for this chapter on the book's study site, at edge.sagepub.com/schuttusw. One of you should evaluate the research article in terms of its research strategy. Be generally negative but not unreasonable in your criticisms. The other student 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 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 sets of "Variables and Hypotheses" exercises from the opening menu. About 10 hypotheses are presented in the lesson. After reading each hypothesis, name the dependent and independent variables and state the direction (positive or negative) of the relationship between them. In some of these Interactive Exercises, 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. Return to the article you chose for #1, above. Diagram the process of research that it reports, using the research circle approach in Exhibit 2.6. How well does the process of research in this study seem to match the process symbolized in Exhibit 2.6? How much information is provided about each step in that process?

STUDENT RESOURCES



The student resource site, available at edge.sagepub.com/schuttusw2e offers useful study materials, such as eFlashcards, eQuizzes, and curated research articles.

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