An aerial photograph of a large crowd of people on a sandy beach. The sun is low in the sky, creating long, dark shadows that stretch across the sand. The people are scattered throughout the frame, some standing, some sitting, and some walking. The overall scene is a high-angle, wide shot of a public gathering.

ESSENTIAL CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND CRIMINOLOGY RESEARCH METHODS

Peter B. Kraska | W. Lawrence Neuman

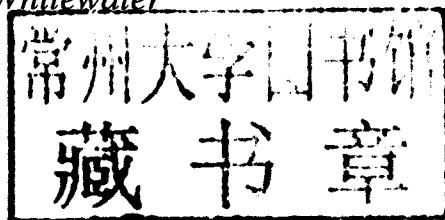
ESSENTIAL CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND CRIMINOLOGY RESEARCH METHODS

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PREFACE

Our goal for this “Essentials” text is to maintain the structure and unique features of our *Criminal Justice and Criminology Research Methods* text while reducing its size (and cost) significantly. The result is a valuable new resource for those courses that do not need to be as comprehensive or in which a professor would like to add more of her or his own materials.

Reducing its volume, however, has not meant a reduction in our commitment to providing crime and justice instructors an engaging, practical, and balanced methods text. We have crafted a unique learning tool designed to maximize the chances for a semester of successful learning. The text facilitates student engagement through:

- Frequent reference to grounded and interesting research examples,
- An accessible style without sacrificing rigor,
- Cutting-edge coverage of a wide array of research developments in our field,
- A pedagogically friendly presentation of the material,
- A consistent demonstration of how research methods are directly relevant to our discipline, the practicing criminal justice system, crime and crime control, and society as a whole,
- A commitment to putting the knowledge gained into practice through thought-provoking highlights and a comprehensive collection of attention-grabbing research exercises.

This is a book that both professors and students will appreciate: professors for its comprehensive, balanced, and engaging coverage of the material; students for its portrayal of research methods as interesting, exciting, and most important, relevant. We strived to create a book that covers the fundamentals in depth but that also captures the exciting changes occurring in our relatively young field of study. As criminal justice/criminology has grown and matured, there has been a rising interest in, and acceptance of, qualitative research, mixed methods research, and philosophy of science issues. Existing methods textbooks have not kept pace with these developments: Qualitative research is covered superficially, quantitative and qualitative methods are viewed as mutually exclusive, and philosophy of science issues are hardly addressed. We adopt a more inclusive and up-to-date approach—capturing and embracing our field’s expanding methodological diversity. (However, this inclusive stance should not be interpreted as a lack of commitment to our traditional methods. Our coverage of traditional quantitative methods is as comprehensive, if not more so, than the other texts in our field.)

Our balanced approach lends itself well to many different types of methods courses. Some instructors spend more time with philosophy and ethics concerns, others with quantitative methods, and still others with qualitative approaches. A few examples of how this book might accommodate this diversity include the following.

If an instructor prefers to emphasize quantitative methods, the quantitative chapters are certainly thorough enough to accommodate this approach. And even if an instructor only required the ethnographic field research chapter, students would still be exposed to a much more in-depth coverage of qualitative methods than is the norm with existing texts. The quantitative analysis chapter could easily be used along with a SPSS learning module as a way to further pursue a quantitative focus.

Of course, there are also instructors who want their students to learn as much about qualitative methods as they do quantitative. This book’s balanced coverage would be ideal. Finally, a smaller percentage of instructors want their students to get the basics of quantitative research, but they tend to focus more on qualitative methods overall. Previous to this text, their only option was to require supplemental books on qualitative methods.

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We greatly appreciate all the help and guidance provided by Tim Peyton. His support, encouragement, and refined professionalism have kept us motivated and inspired. He also works with a top-notch team—and we'd like to specifically thank Rex Davidson for his keen eye, patience, and upbeat attitude.

Credit also has to be given to my research assistant and friend John Brent (now a doctoral student at the University of Delaware). John taught me a lot about research methods I didn't know while observing him conduct a mixed methods study on underground fighting competitions. His intense work ethic and raw research talent has helped to maintain my passion for teaching research methods.

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PART

1

Disciplinary, Theoretical, and Philosophical Foundations

The first three chapters answer some basic questions about knowledge, its construction, and its use within crime and justice studies. The discussion revolves around three central questions: What do we study and why? How do we know what we know? What are the best ways to generate valid, reliable, and legitimate knowledge?

Aside from Chapter 4 on ethics, we believe that these first three chapters are the most important. The rest focus on how we research—techniques of the research process. These later chapters are somewhat technical and centered on how to conduct and assess research. Although this information is vital, we must first construct the big picture or road map—one that includes information and ideas about our discipline (what we study and who conducts research), theory (what theory is and why it is essential to research), and philosophy (the underlying assumptions of crime and justice knowledge and the various approaches to its production). The aim is to help you more competently, and with a greater level of critical awareness, navigate your way through either producing or consuming crime and justice research. In short, a solid theoretical and philosophical foundation is crucial for developing the necessary skills to critically assess research studies and claims to legitimate knowledge.

The first three chapters, then, outline the larger context of crime and criminal justice research. Our goal is to help educate you *about* research methods in crime and justice studies, as well as how to research and how to apply it properly. Chapter 1 discusses what we research and identifies who the researchers are. It also provides an overview in abbreviated form of how research is conducted. It concludes with the various reasons we conduct research as well as an outline of how the study of

research methods is tangibly beneficial to you, the student. Chapter 2 examines the nature of crime and justice research. It details those sources of everyday knowledge that most of us rely on and some of their shortcomings, and then describes the history, standards, and process of social science research. It includes important sections on the dimension of “time” and the connection between politics and research. Finally, Chapter 3 first presents three philosophical approaches available to us for conducting crime and justice research:

1. positivist social science;
2. interpretive social science; and
3. critical social science.

The differences and similarities of each are presented. The second part of Chapter 3 provides a detailed examination of theory, its role in conducting quality research, and its various types.

We hope this foundational roadmap serves you well for the remainder of the book.