

FORTY STUDIES THAT CHANGED CRIMINAL JUSTICE

*Explorations into the History of
Criminal Justice Research*



Amy B. Thistlethwaite
John D. Wooldredge

FORTY STUDIES THAT CHANGED CRIMINAL JUSTICE

EXPLORATIONS INTO THE HISTORY
OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE RESEARCH

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PREFACE

The idea for this book is credited to Roger Hock who authored *Forty Studies that Changed Psychology* (Prentice Hall). Hock created a book that provides students with thorough yet concise summaries of the major research studies that have shaped the field of psychology. We wanted to do the same for criminal justice. Like other social science disciplines, knowledge in criminal justice is based upon research. Introductory textbooks provide students with an excellent overview of this material; however, they fail to offer students more than a cursory synopsis of the significant empirical studies that established the foundation of our discipline. This book will provide students with a richer understanding of some of the important research published in each of the three areas of criminal justice: policing, courts, and corrections.

HISTORY OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE EDUCATION

Academic disciplines grew out of the shift in higher education from a generalist approach to a focus on more specialized knowledge. Criminal justice is a relatively new discipline (compared to other social science disciplines such as psychology, sociology, and political science). The origins of criminal justice education can be traced back to schools of police science.¹ In 1908, Berkeley police chief August Vollmer (a pioneer of police professionalism) helped establish the Berkeley Police School to provide formal education and training to police recruits (Morn 1995). He taught courses in evidence and investigation and implemented a curriculum that was the most advanced in the country. Vollmer believed an education was the most important asset for a police officer to have. In 1916, the program was expanded to include courses in criminology that all of his officers were encouraged to take. He took his curriculum to the University of Chicago in 1929 and put into operation a similar program in police studies (Morn 1995). He returned to Berkeley one year later and continued teaching in the newly created School of Criminology. That same year, San Jose State College advertised a two-year police curriculum that was soon expanded into a four-year degree. The idea of an educated police force caught on in other states as well. In 1935, a police studies program was established at Michigan State University. In addition to courses on policing, students took classes in science and math. In the mid-1930s, Indiana University also started a four-year degree program in police science. Twenty years later, the City College of New York followed suit and police science became a recognizable field of study (Morn 1995).

Vollmer and some of his colleagues formed an organization known as the National Association of College Police Training Officials (NACPTO) in 1941 (Morris 1975). The purpose of the organization was to create a standardized curriculum with minimum standards for all policing students. This organization was renamed the Society for the

¹ Criminology as a discipline traces its roots back to 1893 when the University of Chicago began offering sociological courses on the study of crime. Although the terms criminology and criminal justice are sometimes used interchangeably, criminology is the study of the correlates and causes of criminal behavior while criminal justice explores the operations, functions, and practices of the criminal justice system.

Advancement of Criminology in 1946 and later became the American Society of Criminology (ASC) in 1957. A second professional organization, the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences (ACJS), was established in 1963.

In the 1960s, many police science programs expanded their curriculums to include courses in courts and corrections. A major impetus for criminal justice education came from federal legislation that established the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act, which included the creation of the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA). The program designated funds to be used for tuition grants and research to explore the operation of the various agencies within criminal justice: policing, courts, and corrections. For the first time, people started thinking about the agencies within criminal justice as constituting a single criminal justice system with the goals of controlling crime and administering justice. Criminal justice programs flourished as the demand for college-educated personnel in criminal justice increased. Unlike other social science disciplines, the role of federal funding in promulgating the growth of criminal justice was unique (Morn 1995). There were 50 criminal justice programs in 1960, but by 1970 there was over 600 and by 1978, there were 1200-degree programs in criminal justice (Crank 2003). Today, there are close to 2000 with 32 universities conferring doctoral degrees (Frost and Clear 2007). Criminal justice has become an established discipline in higher education.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE RESEARCH

Criminal justice education continues to be interdisciplinary in nature drawing from the fields of sociology, psychology, and political science. As such, the knowledge base was created and continues to grow using the same principles of scientific inquiry that became the foundation of the older disciplines. At the same time criminal justice programs were prospering, crime was becoming a serious problem in communities across the United States. The institutions responsible for crime control (police, courts, and corrections) were deemed ineffective in their efforts. There appeared to be no clear consensus on how to address the problem and policy makers voiced concern about a lack of scientific knowledge on the functioning of the criminal justice system. According to the President's Commission on Crime and Administration of Justice (1967), "... revolution of scientific discovery has largely bypassed the problems of crime and crime control." One year later, Congress took action and established the National Institute of Justice to support research that would fill the void in knowledge and offer ideas to improve the police, courts, and corrections. Other agencies such as the Police Foundation and the American Correctional Association were created with similar missions. Privately funded research groups (i.e., the Rand Corporation and the Vera Institute) also started to conduct criminal justice research on the operation of the criminal justice system.

Types of Research

Applying the principles of scientific inquiry to the study of criminal justice involves the same methods and techniques utilized by other social science disciplines. Science allows us to investigate, identify, and answer questions about people, groups and institutions. Science

can be used to develop and test theories and can also be used to develop programs and policies to solve problems. Scientific or *empirical* research involves understanding through observation. Researchers utilize different modes of observation in their inquiries depending upon the topic studied and purpose of the study: exploration, description, explanation, or application. *Exploratory* research is typically conducted when researchers are unfamiliar with a topic or there is a lack of prior research. Exploration is sometimes needed to provide a framework for future research endeavors. A lot of research in criminal justice is *descriptive* in nature where the researcher describes some phenomenon of interest. Descriptive research can also be used as a foundation to develop a more sophisticated type of study. The third type of research is *explanatory*. Social scientists are often interested in explaining the “why” of something. For example, why are the elderly more fearful of crime than younger people despite their low rates of victimization? Finally, *applied* research involves evaluating the effectiveness or impact of a program or policy. Criminal justice research can also be categorized into qualitative or quantitative. *Qualitative* research involves detailed information about some social issue or problem to provide thorough understanding. *Quantitative* research is designed to formulate and utilize theories and hypotheses pertaining to our social world. Again, the choice is dictated by what the researcher is studying and how the information will be used.

Methods of Observation

Methods of observation include experiments, surveys, field research, and unobtrusive research. All of these have been used to study the criminal justice system. *Experiments* allow researchers to determine whether or not one variable produces change in another variable. Two important features of an experiment are treatment and control. A researcher introduces some type of treatment to a variable of interest while controlling for extraneous influences. Experiments are ideal for establishing cause and effect. *True* experiments (those meeting all of the requirements of experimental design) are rarely utilized in criminal justice research. *Quasi-experiments* (experiments lacking one or more of the essential components of a true experiment) are more common given the difficulty controlling the settings in which criminal justice research takes place. These difficulties will be addressed in each of the studies presented that utilizes an experimental design. The most common method of observation in criminal justice research is survey research. *Survey* research typically involves administering a standardized questionnaire to a sample of respondents. Respondents are selected through some type of sampling procedure based on characteristics reflective of a population. Responses are then numerically coded and analyzed using statistical techniques. Surveys are conducive for making generalizations from a selected sample to a population of interest. *Field* research is used to gain firsthand knowledge of a social phenomenon. Field research is also called *observational* or *ethnographic* research because the researcher gathers data by observing subjects in their naturally occurring environments. Observers may participate by becoming actively engaged with the subjects or have no direct interaction with the subjects. The last mode of observation, *unobtrusive* research, involves examining data that has already been collected by another researcher or institution. Criminal justice agencies collect an enormous amount of information as part of their daily operations, and researchers can learn more about how these agencies function by using this *archival* data.

Research Design

Research design is an important part of research. It is a plan for how a research study will be carried out. The steps involved in the research process are presented below:

- **Step 1 Select Topic**

What is the research question you would like to answer? Topic must be specific and stated in such a way that concepts (variables) can be measured.

- **Step 2 Review Prior Research**

How have others studied your topic? What did they find? How will your study improve upon prior research?

- **Step 3 Observation**

Which mode of observation will you use to collect data on your topic: experiment, survey, field or an unobtrusive design? What type of study are you conducting and how will the research be used?

- **Step 4 Analyze Data**

What statistical techniques will you use to make sense out of your data? Will you be describing your data or making inferences from a sample to population?

- **Step 5 Report Findings**

What are the results of your study? How do these results fit into the existing body of knowledge on your topic?

Steps in the Research Process

Ethical Considerations

Some of the research discussed in this book has been criticized for ethical violations. Regardless of the type of research or mode of observation, researchers must follow certain ethical principles when conducting research. Every academic discipline has a standard of ethics that members are expected to adhere to. The most common ethical considerations include avoiding harm to subjects and being truthful in reporting. Research involving human subjects falls under the greatest scrutiny. Universities and other sponsoring agencies have institutional review boards that oversee these projects to make sure there is no potential for physical, psychological, or legal harm. Researchers must not deceive their subjects, and they should obtain informed consent. All promises of anonymity and confidentiality must be kept. Researchers must also be truthful in reporting how their research was conducted, and they have a responsibility to report the agency that is sponsoring their research. Results must be thoroughly and accurately reported.

Selecting the Research

Choosing 40 studies for inclusion in this book was an easy task. Thousands of studies have been published in each of the three areas of criminal justice: police, courts, and corrections. Choosing *which* 40 studies was more difficult. We believe the studies that are included in this book represent some of the most significant published research in criminal justice and provide students with examples of a variety of research designs used in criminal justice research.² We consider the studies significant for various reasons. First, we include several “pioneering” works. These are

² Only studies that included a thorough description of the research methodology were considered for inclusion.

studies that were the first of their kind and changed the way we think about criminal justice topics. Second, we include studies that have generated a considerable amount of other research. Third, we include studies that have had a major influence on the operation of the criminal justice system. Fourth, some of the studies are notable because of the controversy surrounding the research design and/or the findings. Most of the studies selected are considered “classics” in the field as evidenced by their inclusion in most textbooks and reading lists in criminal justice courses. Many of the studies have also been listed in various studies reporting on the frequency of the most cited research in criminal justice.³

Organization of the Research

The studies selected for the book will include a complete citation for where the original study can be located as well as the following information:

- an introduction that includes background information to provide a context in which the study was conducted;
- a thorough description of how the study was designed and carried out, including the type of research undertaken and any problems the researchers may have encountered;
- a detailed summary of the results and how the authors interpreted the results;
- a discussion of any follow up research, criticisms and/or ethical issues raised with the research; and
- summaries of a selection of more recent studies conducted on the same topic, including references and suggestions for additional reading.

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³ For example, Wright, R. and J. Miller (1998). “The Most-Cited Scholars and Works in Police Studies.” *Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies & Management* 21:240–254 and Wright, R. and J. Miller (1999). “The Most-Cited Scholars and Works in Corrections.” *The Prison Journal* 79:5–22.

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John Wooldredge is a professor in the Division of Criminal Justice at the University of Cincinnati. He received his Ph.D. in Sociology in 1986 from the University of Illinois. His research and publications focus on institutional corrections (crowding, inmate violence, inmate adaptation), and criminal case processing (sentencing and recidivism, extra-legal disparities in case processing and outcomes). He is currently involved in research on inter-judge variability in sentencing, victim-based disparities in case processing, and official responses to prison inmate rule violations. Related work has recently appeared or is forthcoming in *Criminology*, *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, *Justice Quarterly*, *Crime and Delinquency*, and *Journal of Criminal Justice*.

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