On an unremarkable Tuesday morning two university professors were preparing to deliver lectures in adjacent classrooms. It just so happened that both of them were scheduled to lecture on experimental design research to their undergraduate students.

Professor Smith walked into a quiet and nearly empty lecture hall. Had the students not spread out throughout the room it is unlikely there would have been enough of them in attendance to fill the first two rows of seats. “Good morning class” Professor Smith began. “Today we are going to discuss experimental design research methods. An experiment is a research method that allows researchers to identify and measure the effect of an independent variable on a dependent variable. I refer you to page 235 in the text…” he continued. Some of the students dutifully turned to page 235 and a few began taking notes. More than a few took out their cell phones.

Professor Jones walked into a crowded lecture hall. Nearly every seat was taken. Aside from the usual pre-class banter most of the students were ready for class. Nearly all of the students had turned to page 235. Their notebooks were already open and their pens were poised ready to take notes.

“Good morning class” Professor Jones began. “Can anybody tell me why it is mandatory in this state for a police officer to arrest a person he or she suspects is guilty of domestic violence?” he asked.

“Because if domestic abusers are arrested then they are less likely to recidivate” one student said.

“No, it is a dumb idea. The mandatory arrest law only deters victims from calling the police in the first place” argued another student.

A few other students offered opinions before Professor Jones interrupted and asked, “How do you know what you think you know?” His question was greeted with near complete silence. “Do we have any evidence that mandatory arrest laws reduce domestic violence recidivism or that they deter victims from seeking help?” he asked. Again, the room was silent.

“Would it surprise you to learn that prior to the 1990’s many American police departments expressly prohibited their officers from making arrests in domestic violence cases. Many of the departments that did not prohibit these arrests altogether required officers to get permission from a supervisor prior to taking a domestic violence suspect into custody” Professor Jones explained. He smiled as the students looked at him in disbelief.

“Then, beginning in the late 1970’s, advocacy groups and other organizations took on the domestic violence issue and raised it to a national issue” Professor Jones explained. “Then
along came two university professors who thought they’d like to do a little experiment to see if arresting domestic abuse suspects would deter them from repeat offending or, as some at the time suggested, make them even more dangerous. Let’s talk about how they did this experiment” the professor continued.

Over the next hour Professor Jones told the students the story of how Lawrence W. Sherman and Richard A. Berk conducted the Minneapolis Domestic Violence Experiment (Sherman and Berk, 1984a). In doing so he talked about independent and dependent variables, experimental and control groups, pretests and posttests, random group assignment, group equivalency and all of the other concepts that are important for a thorough understanding of the experimental design model. He even found time to discuss the controversies that surround this research and offered ideas on why some of the subsequent research in other cities has failed to produce similar results.

Professor Jones’ teaching approach is not a gimmick. Storytelling is the oldest and most effective communication tool in human civilization. For thousands of years human civilizations have relied on stories to communicate social values, religious traditions, cultural lessons, and yes, even knowledge. Storytelling even predates the development of the alphabet.

Storytelling is an effective educational tool because it engages learners at a personal level. Stories create enduring personal connections to a subject matter and, in doing so, enhance recall. Listeners are able to identify new perspectives and imagine alternative solutions to old problems. When we listen to a story we develop empathy for the characters and understand how the worlds they live in affect how they behave and influence the decisions they make.

As a teacher I learned this lesson many years ago. I noticed that my research methods students seemed more engaged when I told them stories about how actual researchers overcame challenges. They seemed to understand methodological concepts more completely when I presented them in context. I also came to the realization that I was much more motivated to teach when I moved away from merely lecturing on methodological concepts devoid of illustrative contexts.

Several years ago, I learned something else. My students had stopped reading the textbook I had adopted for the course. Some didn’t even bother to purchase it. Frankly, who could blame them? Most textbooks are not ‘page turners’ and they are very expensive. Instead they relied on the visual presentations during lectures and the stories I told them about how actual researchers applied methods to answer important questions. Their ability to critically analyze research methods improved substantially as did their performance on examinations. Eventually, I became so disenchanted with the lack of context (i.e. story) in the available research methods textbooks that I simply chose not to adopt one. I have not used one since.

So in 2009 I set about the task of producing a very different research methods textbook. Rather than merely define methodological concepts and discuss procedures I chose to tell the stories of how other researchers overcame challenges as they sought answers to important questions. While telling these stories I devote sufficient time to introduce relevant methodological concepts and procedures. This is neither a pedagogical trick nor a thinly veiled
attempt on my part to write a textbook that is ‘more appealing to the younger generation’. Instead, my objective is, unapologetically, to breathe life into research methods through storytelling.

The stories I used to illustrate methodological concepts and procedures appear throughout the text in one of two forms. First, each of the chapters in Part III (Acquiring and Analyzing Data) contain set out boxes called Developing the Method. Within this feature the steps that actual researchers followed during specific parts of the research process are analyzed. Telling the researchers’ stories achieves two important teaching objectives. It reinforces the research process that is previously introduced in Chapter Two and, more importantly, provides the students with illustrative contexts that better explains the decisions these researchers made, or were forced to make, as they sought answers to their research questions.

Second, every chapter contains numerous set out boxes called Making Research Real. This feature includes short narrowly focused vignettes that are relevant to the methodological concept or procedure that is being discussed at the time. This feature provides the students with tangible contexts of how methodological concepts and procedures are applied during the research process. It is important to note that the stories within this feature are far more than mere examples. Many of these vignettes include characters, plot, conflict and other characteristics a reader would expect to encounter while reading a story.

Very early in my scholarly career I observed that most of the undergraduate students in my research methods classrooms had no interest in becoming researchers. It is an open secret that some students’ motivation for enrolling in a research methods class is based primarily on the fact that it is required for the Bachelor’s degree. Given the choice they would likely prefer to take another elective. These students have no scholarly appreciation the nuances of a well written question on a survey or for the importance of equivalency between experimental and control groups. For the most part they want to be criminal justice practitioners. I understand their motivation; however, I do not accept the notion that research methods are irrelevant to them. In fact, having been a criminal justice practitioner prior to becoming a scholar, I know just the opposite to be true.

The students graduating with Bachelor’s degrees in criminal justice today are entering an industry that is far different than the one I became a part of more than three decades ago. The knowledge base is much larger and information is more readily available to them. When I started we were encouraged to accept the ways of our predecessors. In fact, we were often told not to question why we did the things we did. It is much different now. Innovation and change are more than buzzwords. They are a way of life for contemporary criminal justice practitioners. We approached the job in ways that ‘made sense’ to us. Contemporary criminal justice practitioners must approach the job in ways that are justified by the results of well planned and executed research. This requires a solid understanding of research methods and an ability to use that knowledge as a consumer of research. Those of us who teach research methods to undergraduate criminal justice students are more relevant than ever. Crime and Justice Research makes the case to these students that learning research methods is important to their success as a
Another important pedagogical feature in *Crime and Justice Research* is called *Getting to the Point*. This feature contains short summaries of the information the student should ‘take away’ from each section or subsection. These set out boxes appear at the end of nearly every section or subsection throughout the book. This allows the students to find and review the critical lessons contained within each chapter. The information in this feature is repeated in the chapter summaries.

Like many other textbooks each chapter in *Crime and Justice Research* includes review questions and exercises. These materials are organized into three main categories. First, each chapter contains a series of review questions that provide the students with an opportunity to test their knowledge of the material contained in the chapter. Students who are able to respond correctly to these questions are reasonably assured of their familiarity with the material contained in the chapter. Second, each chapter refers to two or more research application exercises. These exercises require the students to read peer refereed articles from the scholarly literature (accessed for free through the textbook’s website) and answer specific application questions. These articles and application questions are relevant to the subject matter in their corresponding chapters. Finally, each chapter contains research project exercises that are designed to guide students through the development of an actual research project. The process by which these exercises achieve this is discussed at the end of this preface.

The instructor’s manual and test bank for *Crime and Justice Research* (available online) contains the features one would expect to find in a resource of this type – lecture outlines, test questions, visual presentation aids, etc. More importantly the teaching materials are arranged independently so as to allow professors maximum pacing options during a semester or quarter. For example, some professors may prefer to lecture on variables and the levels of measurement prior to lecturing on hypotheses and the structure of research, or vice versa. Rather than being forced to pace subject matter in the way they happen to be arranged in the textbook, lecture materials and their corresponding student reading assignments are organized by concept or procedure rather than by chapter.

The student workbook, titled *Practicing Crime and Justice Research* (available online) also contains the features one would expect to find in a resource of this type – learning objectives, key points, practice test questions, learning checkpoints, etc. There is an additional
feature that is unique to *Crime and Justice Research* – a structured method by which students can actually practice research methods without requiring a professor to devote an inordinate amount of time to assessment.

Many professors assign students to write semester research papers. In most cases these are not much more than literature reviews, but they can be far more. Imagine a system that would enable students to create a research question, conduct a literature review and then design a research method that would provide the data necessary to answer the research question. Assigning students such an ambitious project requires an inordinate amount of time for assessment, particularly at the end of a semester when time is a limited resource, and likely focuses too much on the product (i.e. the final paper) rather than the process of research.

Through a series of structured exercises called *The Researcher’s Notebook* (available online in the student workbook) the students will:

- Develop a research question
- Write the introductory section of a research report
- Develop an outline for the literature review
- Access the available literature
- Learn how to recognize the most authoritative literature available on a subject
- Annotate their literature review outlines with information from the literature
- Learn how to know when they have accessed ‘enough’ literature
- Write a literature review, and
- Develop a research plan that, if implemented, would produce the data necessary to answer the research question.

Each of these assignments in *The Researcher’s Notebook* has a clear learning objective and an objective grading standard. In other words everybody knows what is expected of them. In addition, evaluating the students’ work in this format distributes assessment throughout the semester or quarter and reduces the amount of time that a professor must devote to assessment overall. Completing a semester long research project in this way allows professors multiple opportunities to evaluate the research process rather than wait until the end and ‘hope’ the students figure it out. It also reduces the opportunity for plagiarism and deters students from producing a semester long assignment the night before it is due. I have personally used this system for more than a decade in several teaching contexts and I am convinced that by the end of the semester my students have a greater understanding of research methods and, in turn, are more informed consumers of the research. I also go less frequently to the office supply store to buy more red pens!

*Crime and Justice Research* tells the story of research, and in doing so, provides the students with a deeper understanding of how research gets done. Students who learn about research methods within the contexts of actual research projects are more likely to remember the concepts, use them when they are asked to conduct research and appreciate them when they evaluate the research of others. *Crime and Justice Research* makes the case to undergraduate
students that a solid understanding of research methods is essential for their success as criminal justice practitioners. As criminal justice practitioners these students will be asked to conduct research. Sometime, maybe several sometimes, during their careers they will be asked to conduct a survey, evaluate the effectiveness of a criminal justice strategy or conduct some type of data gathering project. The results of these ‘research projects’ will, in all likelihood, influence decision making at the policy level. Their professional success will depend on their ability to apply generally acceptable research methodologies to solve real world problems. Finally, through The Researcher’s Notebook feature, Crime and Justice Research provides students with an opportunity to apply what they learn to a research project of their choosing. While it is not likely that the students will have enough time to actually complete the research project they develop, the mere process of planning a research project that will produce the data necessary to answer a research question is highly instructive.

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