PART I

METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES IN CRIME RESEARCH

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Several methodological issues have come to the foreground in crime and deviance as new and more dynamic data have become available. Traditional data sources continue to be important in addressing issues at the individual, temporal, and spatial levels. However, the distinctions between these levels of measurement have become blurred as new nontraditional data have become available. For example, longitudinal data on individuals collected over their life course can blend individual, temporal, and spatial data. Similarly, the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) provides much more potent data than the traditional Uniform Crime Reports (UCR). These data sets provide opportunities for much more dynamic analyses that answer more rigorous and detailed research questions.

As is the case in chapters that follow, we have only addressed a few of the more recent methodological issues. We chose issues with which we are most familiar and that have fundamentally changed the way data analysis is conducted in our field. To include all of the important issues would easily fill several volumes. The contributors to these chapters are well known for their contributions to the topics covered. They include both young and more seasoned scholars.

International terrorist activities and the global illegal drug trade are reminders of the practical importance of comparative cross-national research in criminology. However, as Janet Stamatel demonstrates, the value of cross-national research in criminology goes beyond international crime networks. She establishes the scope of cross-national research, discusses its contributions to the larger field of criminology, and points to future challenges.

Very little has changed in the way the FBI reports data from the UCR since the 1930s. This seriously limits the types of analyses that could be conducted using these data. The NIBRS has and will continue to change all of that. As Lynn Addington demonstrates, NIBRS moves us

from a static to a more dynamic data set allowing much more detailed and sophisticated research questions to be addressed.

Twenty-five or so years ago, there were serious questions about the value of collecting and analyzing longitudinal data over long periods of the life course. Cross-sectional surveys seemed to have done the trick all along and were far less costly. Of course the longitudinal studies were funded and we have the data. Alan Lizotte and David McDowall have been actively involved in longitudinal research for a long time. Much of this work involves illegal gun ownership and use. They join with Nicole Schmidt to analyze data from the Rochester Youth Development Study both longitudinally and as a flat cross section. They show how longitudinal data accurately and informatively can address a variety of different research questions that are clouded when the data are used as a cross section.

Finally, Daniel Nagin has pioneered sophisticated methodological techniques in the discipline. His work on group-based statistical methodology for analyzing developmental trajectories of longitudinal data has been revolutionary. In this chapter, he clearly and concisely walks the uninitiated reader through logic and uses of this creative and dynamic way of thinking about and analyzing longitudinal data.