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'There were ethical dilemmas all day long!': harrowing tales of ethnographic researchers in criminology and criminal justice

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ABSTRACT

While there have been many ethnographies published within the discipline**s** of criminology and criminal justice, very few studies have examined actual field researchers who have successfully employed this qualitative technique. In this exploratory study, we identified and conducted phone interviews with a sample of eight scholars who have used variations of the ethnographic method to study aspects of life which relate to crime, deviant behavior, and social control. Respondents revealed to us their colorful stories, as well as the risks, rewards, and ethical dilemmas they experienced while attempting to balance the delicate roles of being insiders, outsiders, researchers, and participants. They specifically discussed how they negotiated the personal and professional obstacles of being thrust into criminal worlds (as well as criminal justice worlds) and ultimately managed to thrive while conducting fieldwork in perilous places.

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Introduction

Ethnographic research draws from the Greek *ethnos*, 'people' and *graphein*, 'depict,' and is what Glaser and Strauss (1967) refer to as a 'grounded theory approach' where hypotheses are developed in the moment (Hamm & Ferrell, 1998). While ethnography has historically been the preferred research strategy of anthropologists, for the purposes of criminology and criminal justice research, its origins can be traced to the Chicago School of Sociology in the 1920s and 1930s (Anderson, 2006). During this time, Professor Robert Park encouraged his graduate students to conduct ethnographic studies rooted in the real world (Morris & Marquart, 2010). In a recorded lecture which was captured by Howard P. Becker[1] at the University of Chicago, Park emphatically said to his young protégés:

> Go and sit in the lounges of luxury hotels and on the doorsteps of flophouses; sit on the Gold Coast settees and on the slum shakedowns; sit in the Orchestra Hall and in the Star and Garter Burlesk. In short, gentlemen, go get the seat of your pants dirty in real research (McKinney, 1966, p. 71).

Given the enthusiasm Park had for ethnographic research, it is not surprising that many of the earliest and most pivotal field studies in criminology and criminal justice were conducted by several cohorts of students from the University of Chicago, and include scholars, such as,

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Nels Anderson, Frederick Thrasher, John Landesco, Howard P. Becker, William Foote Whyte, Erving Goffman, Ned Polsky, Ruth Shonle Cavan, and Howard S. Becker among others (see Adler & Adler, 1998).

In the present paper, we seek to document the experiences of eight contemporary ethnographic researchers in order to gain insights into the obstacles, risks, ethical and legal dilemmas, as well as the rewards associated with this particular methodological orientation. We conducted phone interviews with Peter Adler, Scott Decker, Jeff Ferrell, Martin Sanchez-Jankowski, Peter Manning, James Marquart, Carol Rambo, and Rik Scarce. All of the aforementioned scholars published major works in which they utilized a variation of the ethnographic method between 1975 and 2000, a period in ethnographic research which has been referred to as 'The Dark Ages,' due to the considerable amount of regulation, stigma, and red tape that some field researchers had to endure (Adler & Adler, 1998, p. xiv). In this paper, we examine how these scholars were able to negotiate the various obstacles and ethical dilemmas that often come with this particular research technique.

Literature review

While ethnographers were once free to conduct their investigations of crime, deviance, and social control with little to no interference from outsiders, this changed beginning around the mid-1970s (Adler & Adler, 1998). Shortly after the publication of Laud Humprheys' (1970) controversial *Tea Room Trade* study, the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (1971) required social science researchers who received federal grant monies to follow the same informed consent procedures as researchers in biomedical fields.[2] Not surprisingly, this discouraged many researchers from conducting ethnographies or participant observational studies, especially those which were covert in nature. Eventually, the HEW guidelines were modified, and under the Belmont Report, ethnographers who received federal funding no longer had to obtain informed consent from their subjects (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical & Behavioral Research [NCPHS], 1978). However, by this point, colleges and universities (perhaps taking cues from the federal government) began an ambitious campaign to restrict research that was deemed to be controversial or perceived to push the boundaries of acceptable social science inquiry. Local institutional review boards (IRBs) started imposing strict requirements upon ethnographers and readily disapproved research proposals, especially those which related to crime and deviance (Haggerty, 2004; Jacques & Wright, 2010). At the same time, professional organizations, such as the American Sociological Association deferred to the decisions of IRBs and viewed any research that was disapproved as being 'unethical' (see Adler & Adler, 1998).

There has been some harsh criticism directed at IRBs, most notably from Jack Katz (2006) who asserts that in most ethnographic studies there is a blurring of boundaries between a fieldworker's personal and research life, a dilemma which makes it all but impossible for ethnographers to obtain preauthorization for any observations or interviews that take place during the course of fieldwork. While Katz (2006) argues that fieldworkers should work to develop a 'culture of legality' with IRB administrators, he acknowledges the challenges in reforming IRBs and implicitly encourages fieldworkers to ignore them when necessary. Shweder (2006) contends that IRBs are only required by law in cases of federally funded studies and argues that research which is personally funded should not be subject to human subjects reviews. He writes:

> … Social scientists who grumble about the IRB and trade horror stories, appear to be totally unaware that they have no one to blame but themselves (and their own academic administrators) for the wholesome application of the DHHS regulations to the vast majority of social scientists, humanists, and legal scholars, who conduct research without a reliance on federal funds. (p. 508)

Jacques and Wright (2010) contend that IRBs discriminate on the basis of social status. For example, they argue that IRBs are more likely to disapprove proposals by researchers with lower academic ranks (e.g. doctoral students or assistant professors). In order to mitigate this problem, Jacques and Wright (2010) assert that researchers with relatively low social status should team up with higher status researchers. They also argue that IRBs should adopt a 'socially blind review process so that researchers are treated equally' (p. 55). Philip Hamburger (2005, 2007) goes a step further in criticizing IRBs and suggests that they are censorship mechanisms which suppress free speech and hinder academic freedom and should, therefore, be abolished. Of course, in the absence of a major court ruling, it is highly unlikely that this will ever happen (Adler & Adler, 2016).

In addition to having to contend with various governmental and institutional intrusions, some ethnographers have risked damaging their reputations and careers. In the early 1980s, Mario Brajuha, a graduate student at SUNY-Stony Brook, was investigated by state and federal authorities and forced to endure a lengthy battle in court after refusing to turn over his field notes to investigators (Brajuha & Hallowell, 1986). In another well-known incident, Rik Scarce, one of the respondents in the present study, was jailed for 159 days when he refused to divulge promises made to his informants: members of radical environmental movements (Scarce, 1994, 1995). In an unrelated case, Richard Leo, a student pursuing his Ph.D. at the University of California, Berkeley, was subpoenaed to disclose confidential information he had collected during his fieldwork involving police interrogators. After much deliberation, Leo testified and divulged privileged information in order to avoid being jailed for contempt of court: a decision he came to deeply regret (Leo, 1995). This illustrates that when ethnographers choose to study agents of social control, they can still face similar pressures and ethical dilemmas as those who study the behaviors of potential lawbreakers. As demonstrated by the above examples, in the absence of state or federal shield laws, if subpoenaed, fieldworkers typically do not enjoy confidential communications with their research subjects. Today, the only U.S. Supreme Court case which provides guidance for fieldworkers is *Branzburg v. Hayes* (1972), a case where the Court ruled in a 5–4 decision that a reportorial privilege does not exist in the Press Clause of the First Amendment.

There are long held debates as to whether or not it is permissible for field researchers to become change agents or get politically involved in the very cultures they are investigating. Established ethnographic practices which are embedded within traditional symbolic interactionist epistemological assumptions tend to strongly discourage this practice (Wax, 1971). Instead, realist ethnographic traditions require fieldworkers to suspend their moral judgements and spend their energies recording and attributing meaning to the behaviors they are investigating (see Malinowski, 1967). Consider, for example, an argument espoused by Ned Polsky in his classic examination of pool hustlers and gangsters:

> Until the criminologist learns to suspend his personal distaste for the values and lifestyles of untamed savages, until he goes out in the field to the cannibals and headhunters and observes them without trying either to civilize them or turn them over to colonial officials, he will only be a veranda anthropologist. That is, he will be only a jailhouse or courthouse sociologist, unable to produce anything like a genuinely scientific picture of crime. (Polsky, 1967, p. 147)

Historically, it has not been uncommon for some fieldworkers to take deliberate measures to avoid influencing or interfering with the culture they are studying. This nonintervention is perhaps best exemplified in the work of Kenneth Good, who spent several years studying the Yanomama, an indigenous people in South America. Good (1991) describes how he essentially did nothing when he stumbled upon a gang rape in the Amazon rainforest:

> I stood there, my heart pounding. I had no doubt I could scare these kids away. They were half-afraid of me anyway, and if I picked up a stick and gave a good loud, threatening yell, they'd scatter like the wind. On the other hand, I was an anthropologist, not a policeman. I wasn't supposed to take sides and make value judgements and direct their behavior. This kind of thing went on. If a woman left her village and showed up somewhere else unattached, chances were she'd be raped. She knew it; they knew it. It was expected behavior. What was I supposed to do, I thought, try to inject my own standards of morality? I hadn't come down here to change these people or because I thought I'd love everything they did; I'd come to study them. (Good, 1991, p. 102–103)

There is certainly not universal agreement that all field studies should be characterized by an apolitical, sterile, and neutral type of detachment on the part of the researcher. In fact, Jeff Ferrell, a cultural criminologist with leanings toward feminist, existential, and post-modern perspectives, vehemently argues that 'conventional canons of objectivity and validity are not, and indeed, cannot be, followed in the everyday practice of criminological field research' (Ferrell, 1998, p. 1998). It is no secret that Ferrell was arrested, charged, and convicted of vandalism during his well-known ethnographic study of graffiti artists. Some critics may argue that Ferrell overidentified with his research subjects by drinking malt liquor with minors and running from the police. Others, however, especially those scholars who tend to be critical of traditional modes of conducting and writing ethnographies may believe that Ferrell was merely building trust with his informants.

Whether a fieldworker witnesses a brutal rape or is involved in a foot chase with the authorities, it is clear that the ethnographic method often involves a myriad of ethical and moral dilemmas that tend to be lacking or completely nonexistent in more conventional research strategies. When conducting fieldwork in both criminal and criminal justice worlds alike, there is always the possibility that an investigator may 'go native' and possibly abandon (even if only temporarily) his or her role as a researcher. This undoubtedly happened with Alice Goffman who spent seven years living in an impoverished neighborhood in Philadelphia. When one of Goffman's key informants was killed in a gang shootout, she along with others sought to violently avenge the murder. In her book, Goffman (2014) writes, 'We started out around 3:00 am, with Mike in the passenger seat, his hand on his Glock as he directed me around the area … I got into the car because, like Mike and Reggie, I wanted Chuck's killer to die' (p. 262).

In spite of the fact that Goffman could have very well been involved in a homicide and possibly have become an inmate herself, her ethnographic study, *On the Run*, has been praised by Elijah Anderson, one of the nation's leading urban ethnographers, as well as by Anderson's mentor, Howard S. Becker. *On the Run* was also included as one of the '100 Notable Books' in the New York Times Book Review (2014). With her recent success**,** Goffman has joined the ranks of other ethnographers, such as, Philip Bourgois (2009) and Sudhir Venkatesh (2008) who have achieved fame, and in some cases notoriety, for their hard-hitting, no-holds-barred accounts of life on the streets.

It would be fair to say that the ethnographic method has had an efflorescence in the twenty-first Century. There seems to be a 'growing momentum' for publishing ethnographies

as well as qualitative research in general (Copes, Tewksbury, & Sandberg, 2016, p. 123). Field researchers have started to gain acceptance among their quantitative colleagues and are beginning to fare well in award competitions and see their studies published in leading journals. Nevertheless, there are still enormous personal, professional, and legal risks as well as an abundance of bureaucratic red tape associated with this unique qualitative strategy. Given this, it would be a worthwhile exercise for more scholars to write what John Van Maanen (1995) refers to as 'confessional ethnographies' or 'ethnographies of ethnographies.' Along this same line, Nelken (1994) calls upon those who research crime and justice to engage in 'reflective criminology' and argues this this may 'help pose new questions, draw attention to unnoticed continuities between texts and contexts, and inspire different ways of carrying out and writing up research' (p. 30).

Until recently, a field researcher's 'personal experiences, anxieties, and fears [have been] marginalized, written about in introductions, appendices, memoirs, and 'reflections' sections of qualitative journals' (Richardson, 2000, p. 18). We contend that as the ethnographic method continues to evolve and remain relevant within the social sciences, field researchers must make a conscientious effort to look not only outward but also inward and treat their own subjective feelings and actions as relevant (see Worley, in press). This, is indeed, part of the *verstehen* approach of subjective interpretation that is most often attributed to Weber (1949) who calls upon ethnographic researchers to 'develop sympathetic understandings' and 'share, in part, the situated meanings and experiences of those under scrutiny' (Ferrell, 1998, p. 27). In the present study, we seek to examine the experiences and 'confessions' of field workers in both criminal and criminal justice worlds in order to provide guidance to burgeoning scholars who may wish to consider employing ethnographic research strategies.

Methodology

The data for this study are derived from open-ended interviews conducted with eight scholars, all of whom are well-known for successfully employing ethnographic research strategies. Initially, we used a purposive sampling strategy to identify ten scholars who had published field studies related to crime, deviance, and social control between 1975 and 2000. We sought to recruit scholars who had conducted fieldwork during the above time period for two reasons. First, since 1975 to 2000 is believed by many scholars to have presented enormous obstacles for ethnographic researchers, we wanted to see how our respondents negotiated these challenges during the course of their research (Adler & Adler, 1998). Also, we made the deliberate decision to focus on senior scholars who were well established in their careers; as a result of being veteran researchers, most of these respondents had published their most seminal ethnographies throughout the 1980s and 1990s. We assumed that senior scholars, those who held at least the rank of Associate Professor with tenure, would be more forthright in their responses, as well as more comfortable answering our questions than junior scholars, who might perceive that their candid responses could potentially have a negative impact on tenure and promotion decisions. Some critics might assert that we should have offered our respondents confidentiality, as this might have prevented self-serving bias, the fundamental error of attribution, and selective memory. While this strategy has worked for other scholars (for example, see Sandberg & Copes, 2013), it would have invariably limited the types of questions we could have asked our respondents and resulted in a far less evocative and relevant final product.

Table 1. Interview questions.

1.	Of all the various studies you have conducted over the years, which would you say is the clearest example where you employed the ethnographic method?
2.	What personal costs did you have to endure while doing this study?
3.	Did you consider yourself to be an insider or an outsider while conducting your study? Elaborate.
4.	Were you adverse to any of their tactics/behaviors of the people you studied? Elaborate
5.	Did you over-identify with the subjects you were studying? Why or why not?
6.	Was it difficult for you to maintain your objectivity? Elaborate.
7.	What ethical issues did you encounter during this study? How did you overcome these?
8.	Are there any fond memories, interesting stories, or anecdotes that you have never written about?
9.	Were you ever worried about the possibility of being subpoenaed? If you were subpoenaed how would you have handled this?
10.	Was it difficult to get your project approved by the IRB? Elaborate

E-mail invitations were sent out to ten scholars, and eight agreed to participate in an interview; thus, this resulted in a response rate of 80%. Rather than recruiting two additional respondents, we opted to base the research on the eight individuals who replied positively to our request. Table 1 provides an overview of the basic questions that each respondent was asked but is in no way comprehensive. Respondents were also asked follow-up questions which pertained to their specific research agenda.

The sample

While numerous scholars have conducted ethnographies related to crime, deviance, and social control from 1975 to 2000, we opted to select a small convenience sample in this exploratory study. Marquart (1986a, 1986b), one of our research subjects, employed a *complete participant* approach by working for nineteen months as a correctional officer in a Southern penitentiary. Because of his status as a trusted insider, Marquart was able to build rapport with his research subjects to such an extent that he was promoted to the rank of a sergeant before eventually resigning his post to begin an academic career. Jeff Ferrell, another respondent, also joined in the activities of his subjects. Ferrell has researched hip hop graffiti artists (Ferrell, 1996), militant bicycle activists, skateboarders, and high-risk 'BASE jump' parachutists (Ferrell, 2001), as well as dumpster divers (Ferrell, 2006). As a result of participating in the above activities, many of which are illegal, Ferrell has been arrested, ticketed, and even spent a year on court-ordered probation.

Peter Adler, our next subject, conducted a six-year ethnographic investigation of upper-echelon drug dealers with his wife Patricia, around the area of San Diego, California. Both researchers, who were recreational drug users themselves, forged a bond with 'Dave,' an individual who sold them small amounts of marijuana and often treated them to cocaine, a luxury they could not afford as graduate students (Adler & Adler, 1982, 1983a, 1983b). Adler conducted hours of in-depth taped interviews with major players in the underground drug economy and occasionally allowed respondents to conduct illegal drug transactions in his home. Martin Sanchez-Jankowski, another of our respondents, conducted an ethnographic analysis of thirty-seven gangs in Los Angeles, New York, and Boston. During this eleven-year study, Sanchez-Jankowski (1991) participated in a variety of activities with gang members across a wide array of ethnicities ranging from African American to Chicano to Irish. In some cases, he even fought side by side with some of his informants in combating members of rival gangs.

Scott Decker, our fifth respondent, has conducted fieldwork with active burglars (Wright & Decker, 1994), armed robbers (Wright & Decker, 1997), and gang members (Decker & van Winkle, 1996). Decker employed in-depth field interviews with criminals who would take him to the homes of victims they had recently burglarized as well as various other hotspots where they had committed armed robberies or engaged in gang-related activities. He engaged in a unique aspect of fieldwork; though Decker was not present during any actual crimes, he nevertheless gained invaluable insights from the offender point-of-view since active offenders retraced offenses they had recently committed. Our sixth subject, Carol Rambo, utilized a *complete participant* approach and became an exotic dancer to examine the subculture of stripping (see Ronai & Ellis, 1989). In addition to conducting fieldwork, Rambo also reconstructed a retrospective account where she reflected upon her experiences as a dancer.

Peter Manning, another subject who was interviewed, has written a number of field studies which pertain to the nature of police work. In his book, *Police Work*, Manning (1977) conducted an ethnographic study of a group of policemen in a subdivision of the London Metropolitan Police. Three years later, Manning (1980) examined the subculture of drug law enforcement officers in his book, *The Narcs' Game*, a work which is one of the most cited field studies in the policing literature today. Like many of the subjects in the present study, Manning has also published a number of methodological articles which examine ethnographic research strategies as well as qualitative research in general (see Manning, 1987a, 1987b). Finally, we interviewed Scarce (1990), a fieldworker who conducted in-depth interviews with members of radical environmentalist groups, such as Earth First!, Animal Liberation Front, and the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society. Scarce has the dubious distinction of being one of only a handful of social science researchers who was subpoenaed and subsequently jailed (for 159 days) for contempt of court after refusing to violate confidentiality agreements made with his informants (see Scarce, 1995). Table 2 provides a list of each of the participants, as well as a brief biography.

All interviews were conducted over the phone and recorded, and most lasted between forty-five minutes to one hour. While some scholars may contend that it would have been more advantageous to conduct face-to-face interviews, there is literature which suggests that telephonic interviews may be an advantageous strategy of collecting information from 'elite' subjects, such as, college professors (Holt, 2010; Stephens, 2007). All of the recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim. We chose to analyze the data manually rather than relying upon qualitative analysis software. We coded the data by adhering to principles of analytic induction throughout multiple readings (Charmaz, 1983, 2006). Once the initial manuscript was written, it was sent to the respondents to ensure that the findings were both accurate and valid. All of the quotes presented in this paper are attributed to the respondents with their permission.

Findings

We asked all eight respondents a series of open-ended questions and quickly discovered that each was quite ready to talk and had much to say. With the benefit of hindsight, this comes as no surprise, as each of these scholars is quite well-known within the discipline**s** of criminology and criminal justice for mastering the ethnographic research method and is accustomed to speaking about their qualitative research agenda. It should be noted that

Table 2. Research respondents and background.

Subject	Background information
Peter Adler	• Professor Emeritus retired from the Department of Sociology and Criminology at the University of Denver • Earned his Ph.D. in Sociology from the University of California, San Diego. • Co-Recipient of the George Herbert Mead Award for Lifetime Achievement, Society for the Study of Symbolic Interaction, 2010 • Examined upper-echelon drug dealers and users (see Adler & Adler, 1982, 1983a, 1983b)
Scott Decker	• Foundation Professor in the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Arizona State University • Earned his Ph.D. in Criminology from Florida State University • Recipient of the 2011 Bruce Smith, Sr. Award, Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences. • 2012 Fellow of the American Society of Criminology • Examined burglars, stick-up artists, and gang members (see Decker & van Winkle, 1996; Wright & Decker, 1994, 1997)
Jeff Ferrell	• Professor of Sociology at Texas Christian University • Visiting Professor of Criminology, University of Kent, Canterbury, UK • Earned his Ph.D. in Sociology from University of Texas at Austin • Recipient of the 2009 Distinguished Book Award from the Division of International Criminology, American Society of Criminology • Examined hip hop graffiti artists, militant bicycle activists, skateboarders, high-risk 'BASE jump' parachutists, and dumpster divers (see Ferrell, 1996, 2001, 2006)
Martin Sanchez-Jankowski	• Professor of Sociology and Director the Institute for the Study of Societal Issues and the Center for Urban Ethnography at the University of California at Berkeley • Received his Ph.D. in Political Science from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology • Examined 37 street gangs in Los Angeles, New York, and Boston (see Jankowski, 1991)
Peter K. Manning	• Elmer V.H. and Eileen M. Brooks Chair in Policing an Northeastern University • Received his Ph.D. in Sociology from Duke University • Recipient of the 1993 Bruce Smith, Sr. Award, Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences • Examined the occupation of policing in London and drug enforcement officers in the United States and has written numerous qualitative methodological works (see Manning, 1977, 1980)
James Marquart	• Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs at Lamar University • Received Ph.D. in Sociology from Texas A&M University • Recipient of the 2005 Bruce Smith, Sr. Award, Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences • Examined prison culture and the use of force by prison guards (see Marquart, 1986a,b)
Carol Rambo	• Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Memphis • Received her Ph.D. in Sociology from the University of South Florida • Recipient of the Norman K. Denzin Qualitative Research Award • Past Editor of *Symbolic Interaction* • Examined the cultu re of stripping and exotic dancing (see Ronai & Ellis, 1989)
Rik Scarce	• Professor in the Department of Sociology at Skidmore College. • Received Ph.D. in Sociology from Washington State University. • Spent 159 days in jail for refusing to divulge confidential information when subpoenaed (see Scarce, 1994). • Examined three groups of radical environmentalists (see Scarce, 1990)

our small size of eight proved to be a formidable strength, as we quickly discovered that it would have simply not been possible to have devoted the time and energy to gathering and presenting such rich qualitative data with a larger sample. All eight of the respondents spoke candidly about issues related to: (1) the personal costs of their ethnographic research study; (2) the insider-outsider dilemma; and (3) ethical issues and subpoenas.

Personal costs

All of the respondents in the present study reported that their ethnographic research studies came at a great personal cost, be it time away from family, the long waiting periods before any substantial data could be gathered, perceived damage to their reputations, or even getting into legal wrangles for the sake of research. During the course of his study on

environmental activists, Rik Scarce went to jail for 159 days but refused to reveal his source. Scarce expressed himself in the following way:

> Going to jail was a pretty big cost … Some of those preceded going to jail, others were during it, and others were after, and perhaps even remain to this day … I should have gotten counseling.

Even as a well-published newly minted Ph.D., it was difficult for Scarce to get interviews for jobs, something he attributes to his stigma as one who went to jail for principle. And when he was hired, Scare stated, 'My first department chairperson introduced me to the dean as 'the jailbird.' I chuckled at it and everything like that. I put on a good face but was deeply offended.' Carol Rambo was also labeled due to her ethnographic study as an exotic dancer. For example:

> I was shortlisted for a job at a very prestigious university. The committee put the shortlist in front of the Dean, and the Dean said, 'You are not seriously considering hiring a stripper are you?' And so they had to take me off their shortlist, and I got a call from the chair of that committee who said, 'You need to know that this happened, and this could be happening to you elsewhere.' So, I think women researchers who research deviance, kind of suffer. We tend to get sort of stuck with the stigmas of topics.

Peter Manning's personal life also suffered due to the heavy travel obligations and time away from home that were associated with his upcoming book, *The Narc's Game*. In fact, the pressures associated with collecting the data, competing for federal funding, and preparing the final manuscript proved to be so daunting that Manning's marriage collapsed; and sadly, he was divorced by the time his work was published. Scott Decker, when asked to describe the obstacles of interviewing active offenders, reported that he felt a sense of personal loss each time he learned about the death of one his research subjects. He stated:

> There is a certain level of human tragedy that is involved in the lifestyle of gang members. We interviewed ninety-nine subjects for the core sample of *Life in the Gang*, and twenty-six of them were dead within three years of the study being concluded.

In the clinical psychology literature, the above phenomenon is referred to as *compassion fatigue*, a condition where care providers, or in this case field researchers, experience stress as a result of over empathizing with their clients (Worley & Worley, 2016).

Peter Adler, who studied cocaine and marijuana users and dealers, also experienced stress due to the dangerous nature of his ethnographic research which was only exacerbated after the birth of his child. Not surprisingly, Martin Sanchez-Jankowski reported that his eleven-year study of gangs proved to be extremely stressful and physically taxing. For example:

> I would go from New York, fly out to Boston, and then from Boston, I would fly to L.A. I only ended up getting a couple weeks off a year doing this…Their lifestyle is not terribly healthy: the types of food you eat, when you eat the food, what kind of sleep you get, and the consumption of drugs.

Jankowski's study was also fraught with dangers, considering the inherent lifestyle of gang members. He often placed himself in precarious situations and was hurt several times.

> I was stabbed in the wrist in a fight in Los Angeles which required 50 stitches inside and out of my wrist. I was also shot twice in the leg in drive-by shootings. Once was in Los Angeles and the other was a confrontation in New York City. I was lucky, but it could have been really bad.

James Marquart as a guard-researcher also faced real physical danger but within the confines of a maximum-security correctional facility. He also witnessed guards impose unofficial forms of physical coercion against inmates. Marquart told us that he was assaulted by an inmate during the course of his fieldwork but described this as 'no big deal' and stated:

'Getting struck by an inmate never stopped my curiosity about prison organizations.' He even reported that getting assaulted actually earned him credibility with his fellow guards. Finally, Jeff Ferrell asserted that over the years he has had innumerable encounters with police officers and security guards while conducting ethnographic research. Ferrell told us:

> I've been ticketed, fined, and found 'guilty.' With the graffiti research, I was arrested for destruction of private property while out painting a mural. I went to court and served a year of probation for that. And, when I was doing fieldwork with an urban bicycling movement, we were all ticketed and given a summons to court and were convicted of obstructing traffic. What's funny with the dumpster diving research, which I've really been doing now for years, is that I don't recall ever being arrested. But, I have been given a criminal trespass warning and banned from the medical campus here in town.

Interestingly, Ferrell suggested that being routinely hassled by law enforcement officers helped him take a *verstehen* approach which sensitized him to the lifestyles of his research subjects. He expressed himself in the following way:

> It's easy for us as academics to think about inequality or discriminatory policing or political injustice in our offices or with our students, but I found it extremely powerful and a very different thing to experience that out in the streets, you know, to sort of feel what it's like to be treated like a homeless man or to be harassed because you're out with some graffiti writers. So, I guess that's a cost you pay, but I would argue it's a useful aspect of the research, if you're a criminologist, to see how policing justice and injustice work at the level of everyday life.

The insider-outsider dilemma

When respondents were asked whether they considered themselves to be insiders or outsiders, Jeff Ferrell emphatically stated that he considered himself to be an insider. When asked to elaborate, Ferrell reported that he has been arrested, spent a year on probation, threatened with legal action, and been to court a number of times due to his research projects. Throughout his career, Ferrell has adopted a 'relatively anarchistic, go-for-broke approach, deciding that he will not hide behind the cloak of a researcher or scholar, but rather participate as fully as possible in these risky social processes' (Hamm & Ferrell, 1998, p. 257). When interviewed, Jankowski, although very concerned with maintaining his objectivity and not losing sight of his purpose, reported that he occasionally found himself in situations where he had no choice but to actively participate in gang fights like an insider. He stated:

> There were times when I couldn't avoid being in conflict. I never took on the role of a gang member and executed any of their pre-arranged attacks on another gang or another person or group of people. What always occurred when I was in a fight was that I was given no choice but to fight.

Unsure whether he was planted by the police, gang members also periodically 'tested' Jankowski in an attempt to ascertain his loyalty to the group. For example:

> Almost every gang member would do something illegal in front of me then wait to see if the police were told about this. The second thing that the gang members did was to start a fight with me. It was o.k. if I fought and lost. But, it was not o.k. if I didn't fight.

Carol Rambo, although an exotic dancer herself, also had to prove her loyalty to her research subjects and expressed herself in the following way.

> At one particular moment when the dressing room doors get shut, a very big girl puts her body against the door and puts her foot up against the door jam. She grabs a tampon paper, and she rolls a joint and says, 'You are going to smoke this.' So, I took the damn joint! I smoked it, and I

> bogarted the thing and kept smoking and smoking and they kept saying you got to share that and yep I was stoned the rest of the night and useless, but at least got over that little issue.

Occasionally, some ethnographic researchers *go native* or become so immersed in the research that they transform into full-fledged members of the subculture they are investigating. James Marquart, in fact, suggested that over-identifying with subjects during ethnographic research studies is 'inevitable.' He stated:

> There's a kind of acculturation that occurs because of the subculture, like a moth to a flame. The further you go into a subculture, the more the reactivity lessens.

The above statement was similar to an observation made by Rik Scarce who told us that successful fieldworkers may often become insiders as they strive to understand a particular subculture for the sake of research, even if it may be personally disturbing. He expressed himself in the following manner:

> I think we have to investigate that which is disgusting to us if it's relevant to the study. In the case of *Eco-Warriors*, no one had ever written a book with treatment of this movement, and the subtitle, *Understanding the Radical Environmental Movement*, meant a whole lot to me. Let's try to understand these folks from their perspective, and that is exactly what ethnographers aspire to do. I don't think many of us ever truly pull that off unless we really are insiders and very long-term insiders in a given social group.

Along with over-identification is the issue of objectivity in ethnographic research. Scarce is of the opinion that it is difficult for anybody conducting such research to be completely objective. For example:

> We're going to come with baggage. It might be I'm male, I'm originally from the South, an English speaker, or any number of usually quite subtle biases, but biases, nonetheless, are going to be present when we engage with others in our ethnographic work. So, I reject the possibility of objectivity in a rigorous sense.

Carol Rambo's view of objectivity was similar to Scarce's, though she went a step further and reported that she did not believe objectivity was even remotely possible for social scientists, who derive their 'oxygen' from social life. Rambo stated:

> We are inside social life. We are fish swimming along, and social life runs over our gills, and that's where we get our oxygen from, and so, when we formulate our research interests, we do so inside of the culture.

Rambo's statement is not altogether surprising, given that in addition to her fieldwork as an exotic dancer, she has also published several autoethnographies, a qualitative research strategy which assumes that social science research can be neither neutral nor objective (Bochner, 2002; Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). Jeff Ferrell also reported that the ethnographic method of conducting research rather demands a suspension of objectivity. He told us:

> If your model of the world comes out of Weber and other approaches to methodology where you are trying to understand the situated logical emotion**,** then that kind of identification instead of being a failure or a risk is almost not only a success but an initial part of doing your research well.

James Marquart reported that he struggled to remain objective during the course of his nineteen-month field study as a correctional officer and attributed this loss of objectivity primarily to the socialization process that occurred within the prison organization.

> As soon as you're wearing the uniform, you're being pulled into the subculture. And, you know, there is no vaccine against that. I think as a person you can see how malleable you really are to the forces of a particular organization and the values of a particular subculture.

While half of the respondents in our sample were not overly concerned with remaining objective, it is important to note that Peter Manning, Scott Decker, Martin Sanchez-Jankowski, and to a lesser extent, Peter Adler, all told us that they managed to remain unbiased and neutral throughout their research project. For example, Manning who spent a considerable amount of time immersed in the police culture, doing ride-alongs, accompanying off-duty police officers at the bars, and sharing in the grueling demands of police work reported that he did not over-identify with his subjects and even told us there were certain aspects of the occupation that offended his sensibilities. When asked to elaborate, he stated:

> The cruelties and incivilities that I saw in drug policing, not so much in excess of violence, but in civility. Leaving children sitting for hours and hours before social services would come. Or, not allowing men or women to urinate, so they're sitting there uncomfortable for hours. The name-calling and humiliation of people over the course of a raid. All of those things struck me more at that time in my life, which was around the time of the divorce. I was struck by the unkindness and incivility, rather than violence. It was more the evil of the everyday that was going on and the gratuitous character of it.

Manning also told us on one occasion, when police officers were using racial epithets, he intervened and told officers he did not approve. Decker clearly did not identify with his subjects, most of whom were active offenders. He found their violent lifestyle so foreign to his own that it was hard for him to even relate to them. For example:

> A good deal of mistreatment of women, casual unprotected sex among girls affiliated with the gang, and lack of responsibility for pregnancies, women who were abused. Selling of drugs, hard drugs, in particular, to people who were down and out. All things I don't approve of, given my personal values on the one hand and on the other hand, those go in the drawer when you're conducting these interviews.

Adler, too, did not find it difficult to remain objective despite the fact that he often consumed large amounts of illicit substances with his subjects. He explained in the interview that during the late 1970s when he conducted his study as a graduate student, he and his wife, Patti [Patricia Adler], were very career-oriented and looked forward to bright futures in academia. In contrast, Adler reported that many of his research subjects had no sense of the future and often lived from day to day and were quite irresponsible. When asked to elaborate, he stated, 'Culturally, we felt very different from them, but we felt it was our responsibility to understand their world and not to try to change it or to ameliorate the issues.' Martin Sanchez- Jankowski also asserted that it was not difficult to maintain his objectivity while conducting fieldwork. Despite the fact that his fieldwork spanned between 1978 and 1989, Jankowski claimed to have never lost sight of his purpose and focused mainly on gathering information, recording what he saw, and making sense of why and how things worked in that atmosphere. Sanchez-Jankowski expressed himself in the following way:

> If I have done my job well, people who are politically on the right and people who are politically on the left and people who are politically in the middle can use the work any way they want.

Manning conveyed a similar view and argued that he has always focused on remaining objective throughout his police fieldwork. He stated:

> My whole approach has been to understand the problematic contingencies that face the police and how they resolve them, what the logic is and ways in which they take apart what they see as problematic. I was always at a distance from whatever was being said. I think a lot of ethnographers… risk the possibility of taking sides on the millions of issues of how to make things better, how to improve things. I truly have no interest in that. My interest is in the analytic questions and trying to bring out the contradictions.

Ethical issues, subpoenas, and IRBs

Of the eight scholars in our sample, all of the respondents with the exception of Scott Decker and Peter Manning indicated they had real concerns about the possibility of having their field notes subpoenaed during the course of their research. For Rik Scarce and Martin Sanchez- Jankowski, this fear actually came to fruition; both scholars were subpoenaed and jailed for refusing to disclose confidential information. However, Scott Decker and his colleagues were not faced with this ethical dilemma because their research was federally funded which provided them with protection through shield laws. When asked if there were any limitations on this confidentiality agreement, Decker indicated that there were some restrictions. For example, he stated:

> There were two hard and fast rules that we were obliged to follow with the federal certificate at the time. One was, we couldn't have any information about homicides. So right up front we would tell subjects not to talk about homicides. The second thing was, we were prohibited from having foreknowledge of crimes…That was the only place we could break the IRB confidentiality. And, despite telling them [the research subjects] these things, there were occasions when they would begin to say, 'Well, yeah, I know about this homicide,' and we would have to stop them.

While Decker was able to minimize the risks of having to protect the confidentiality of his subjects, the other seven respondents in our sample were not protected by shield laws. Carol Rambo, Peter Adler, James Marquart, Peter K. Manning, and Jeff Ferrell reported that they took specific preventive actions to safeguard the information they collected. For example, Ferrell stated:

> In the graffiti research I was right in the middle of some pretty heavy conflict between the police and the Mayor on one hand and myself and other graffiti writers on the other hand. I had my field notes stashed away. I destroyed the tapes and stashed the transcripts in a locked box in a bank and tried to create a bureaucratic barrier between what I knew and the ability of the authorities to force me to tell them.

Marquart opined that honoring commitments, even being willing to go to jail for research subjects, is one of the many dilemmas inherent in ethnographic research and expressed himself in the following manner:

> There were ethical dilemmas all day long. You're seeing violence and a lot of things that go against the grain of normalcy. So, there are questions that come up. Do you blow the whistle on people or do you maintain your silence? You're just gonna see stuff. That's the result of the reactivity breaking down. But, I was there with the sole purpose of examining a culture and relative social control in the penitentiary system. No matter what happened, I was going to maintain the code of the researcher: collect the data, and at all costs, maintain silence.

Marquart conducted his examination of informal social control by correctional officers during the early 1980s when the Texas Department of Corrections was ordered by a federal judge to abolish the infamous building tender system, a practice within Southern prisons where correctional officers selected certain inmates to discipline unruly prisoners. Marquart explained that he was even contacted by the special monitor's office to possibly testify against his subjects, in this case, his fellow correctional officers. As a safeguard, Marquart told us that he redacted all his records and removed any personal identifiers to protect the confidentiality of his research subjects.

As noted, Rik Scarce and Martin Sanchez-Jankowski were subpoenaed and both actually went to jail rather than surrender their research notes. While this incident had the potential to derail Scarce's academic career, he has come to be highly respected within the social

sciences for the courageous actions he took to honor promises made to his informants. When asked if he would have taken the 'Rik Scarce route' and gone to jail rather than reveal confidential information, Peter Adler gave the following response:

> Rik is a really good friend of ours, and we were big supporters and helped him with his legal defense fund. But, I don't know that I could have been as brave as Rik. I would like to think so, but I don't want to lie and say that for sure. I would have hired lawyers and would have done everything possible, as Mario [Brajuha] and Rik did, to try to protect our field notes and the knowledge we had gained. But would I have gone to jail? I don't know.

During his interview, Scarce discussed how the American Sociological Association (ASA) revised its codes of ethics and actually limited guarantees of confidentiality between subjects and researchers shortly after his case was resolved. He stated:

> I think that the ASA was anxious about the old code after my experience, and they worried about being seen as radicals on Capitol Hill, as they go up and plead for more NSF funding… I was absolutely disgusted and deeply disturbed by the Revised Code. It fundamentally says, 'You have to take on the task of being an attorney. You have to decide what the ethical guidelines are that you will follow.' And, I imagine that approach is far more defensible in court, and certainly far more defensible on Capitol Hill, if the ASA were ever called to task…It is a tragedy that the ASA went from having the best code of ethics that was out there, better than the Psychology Association's code, better than the AAA's code in Anthropology…to just this namby, pamby version.

In addition to asking respondents questions about honoring the confidentiality of informants, we also asked them general questions about the IRB. Interestingly enough, half of our respondents admitted they have not submitted their ethnographic research proposals through a human subjects review on at least one occasion. For example, Jeff Ferrell told us:

> I have never submitted any of my research to an IRB. I have not done so and will not do so as a matter of conscience, both personal and professional…I conduct my own ethnographic projects without outside funding, and as they emerge out of my own life amidst various outsiders and illicit groups. In my life, then, there is no clear boundary between living and researching, and no clear time line when a research project begins and ends. Therefore, I refuse to submit my life for IRB approval!

Rik Scarce informed us that he did not obtain IRB approval for his book, *Eco-Warriors*, because this was a journalistic treatment of the radical environmental movement and he was not affiliated with a college or university. Scarce reported that when he was later a doctoral student at Washington State University he did not submit his ethnographic research proposal for IRB approval because he was unfamiliar with the IRB process. Furthermore, Scarce told us that when he began his Ph.D. program, he did not know about IRB requirements – incredibly, they were not mentioned in his department's or university's graduate student handbooks. Scarce also informed us that none of his advisors or other faculty members pointed out the need to obtain IRB approval. As a result of this, Scarce's initial Ph.D. research never received IRB vetting.

Neither Peter Adler nor Peter Manning submitted IRB proposals for their early ethnographic research studies. Adler told us that at the time he and his wife Patricia conducted their fieldwork of upper-echelon drug dealers, this was at the infancy of the IRB and submitting a research proposal for a human subjects review was 'optional.' The Adlers opted not to participate, and therefore, no IRB approval was needed. Similarly, Peter Manning did not have to obtain approval for his fieldwork in *Narc's Game* because he, too, was conducting his fieldwork between 1974 and 1975, a time period when IRB approval had not yet become

mandatory at his university. Martin Sanchez-Jankowski told us it was fairly easy for him to obtain IRB approval from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology for his fieldwork on gangs. He reasoned that the IRB committee at MIT was mainly interested in regulating medical research and not overly concerned with social sciences research. Sanchez-Jankowski did tell us, however, that his present institution, the University of California at Berkeley, where he has been for over thirty years, has an IRB committee that is much tougher on ethnographic research.

It seemed evident that many of the respondents in our sample had negative perceptions of the manner by which IRBs are currently being conducted today across college campuses. For example, Peter Manning told us that he served for two years on the IRB Committee at Northeastern University and felt 'most of those involved had no idea about social research and were beholden to some kind of medical model.' Also, Carol Rambo described a gut-wrenching incident where she was forced by her Department Chair to submit an autoethnographic study for IRB approval (which was ultimately denied) after her manuscript was accepted by Craig Forsyth, Editor of *Deviant Behavior* (see Rambo, 2007). Of all the respondents, James Marquart and Scott Decker were the least critical of IRBs. Marquart, who is presently a Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs at Lamar University, appreciates that IRBs mitigate risks – not only for research subjects but also for research institutions which can potentially be sued. Scott Decker told us about a positive experience he recently had with his IRB at Arizona State University:

> I just had a PhD student finish an ethnography of large scale illegal marijuana growers in four states. We roughed out an IRB application and went to the office to meet with the IRB section head (faculty) and the corresponding staff person. They appreciated our due diligence and gave us several good ideas about what can be approved. The IRB head said it was the most complex application she had received.

The above quote illustrates that not all IRB committees are necessarily averse to ethnographic research proposals related to criminology and criminal justice. On the contrary, some IRBs may have members who are willing to be educated about different research issues and open to helping scholars understand how they might identify and resolve unforeseen dangers to participants.

Conclusion

In this exploratory study, we discovered that, on some level, the stigma and labelling that comes from doing fieldwork has the potential to manifest itself in professional suicide. It is disconcerting that Carol Rambo, the only female in our sample, appeared to experience the highest level of stigma, and the stigmatization ironically occurred in the academic workplace, an arena which one would intuitively expect to be a place of refuge rather than a bully pulpit. Indeed, Rambo's ordeal is very similar to Christine Mattley's (1998) experience of being ostracized by her male and female colleagues alike (even by those females who purported to be feminists) during her nine-month field study as a phone sex operator. As Mattley laments, 'I had voluntarily used my energy to satisfy impersonal male lust and, therefore, I was accorded a whore identity' (p. 155). Both Rambo and Mattley's experiences illustrate the sad reality that female ethnographers may not wield a sufficient amount of power within a historically male-dominated discipline to study taboo topics and avoid being objectified.

All of the respondents in the present study experienced some type of significant trauma whether it was professional stigma, legal harm, physical danger, or *compassion fatigue* from over empathizing with their research subjects. While the odds of actually being subpoenaed are fairly rare, this does not necessarily mitigate the fears that field workers will have during the course of their research. Anyone who wishes to conduct fieldwork should be prepared to spend many sleepless nights agonizing about whether or not they will be pressured to reveal their sources. Situations like these in ethnographic research definitely call for counseling in order to help fieldworkers keep a sense of balance. Ethnographic research is stressful, and can lead to high levels of anxiety, depression, and perhaps even paranoia. If left unchecked, these psychological symptoms can have devastating effects on a field worker's psyche as well as his or her personal relationships.

When dealing with dangerous populations, researchers should also be prepared for the real possibility of being physically harmed even if they are participating strictly as researchers. Martin Sanchez-Jankowski was the victim of severe violence on multiple occasions, and James Marquart was physically assaulted by an aggressive inmate. Being the clever qualitative researchers that they are, both Sanchez-Jankowski and Marquart managed to use these attacks to their advantage. Fieldworkers must be aware of the inherent risks of conducting ethnographic research in perilous places; nevertheless, if, in the unfortunate event, a fieldworker is harmed, he or she should make every effort to use this as a currency to gain acceptance within the subcultures they are studying.

We also contend that it is extremely difficult for ethnographic researchers to maintain a strong semblance of objectivity. While scholars like Carol Rambo, James Marquart, Jeff Ferrell, and Rik Scarce indicated it was impossible and even unwarranted for a fieldworker to be objective, other respondents like Martin Sanchez-Jankowski, Scott Decker, and Peter Manning considered themselves to have been very objective during the course of their research. Peter Adler was somewhere in the middle of these two positions. Adler told us that ethnographers should strive to achieve 'value neutrality,' yet he also acknowledged that subjectivity on the part of the researcher is often inevitable. Weber's (1949) notion of examining social behaviors through a *verstehen* approach, where the researcher makes every effort to understand a given phenomenon from the point-of-view of the actors he or she is studying, is undoubtedly interpretive and subjective. Given this, it is of considerable interest that three of the eight participants in this study purported to be objective and unbiased. The question, then becomes, is objectivity required in an ethnographic study? While our instincts and intuition emphatically tell us that the answer is 'no,' perhaps it is a question that is best left for the individual researcher to decide.[3]

As of lately, some ethnographers, such as self-described 'rogue sociologist,' Sudhir Venkatesh and more recently, Alice Goffman, have endured attacks within academic circles (for example, see Campos, 2015). Given the backlash and criticism both scholars have recently been subjected to, it is understandable that doctoral students and newly minted Ph.D.s may opt to employ qualitative techniques which are considered to be less risky than fieldwork or even avoid qualitative strategies altogether. Nevertheless, the twenty-first Century is an exciting time for researchers to conduct ethnographic research in criminal justice. We strongly encourage burgeoning young scholars to conduct field studies and experience first-hand that ethnographic research has officially emerged from the Dark Ages and now has the potential, perhaps more so than ever, to be both liberating and empowering as well as highly influential within the discipline of criminology and criminal justice.

Notes

1. The middle initial is not a typo. In his book, John C. McKinney (1966) writes that as a graduate student 'Howard Becker,' recorded Park's famous statement during the 1920s. This statement is factually correct; however, McKinney was referring to Howard Paul Becker, a sociology professor at the University of Wisconsin – Madison rather than Howard Saul Becker, the symbolic interactionist sociologist, jazz musician, and author of *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance* (H. S. Becker, personal communication 6/19/2016).
2. We are not suggesting that the HEW Guidelines were a reaction to Humphreys (1970) book, but the timing is interesting nevertheless.
3. Of course, it goes without saying, that if ethnographic researchers are perceived by their quantitative brethren as gleefully abandoning well-established traditions of objectivity and scientific detachment, this could further widen the quantitative-qualitative divide within criminology and criminal justice (Buckler, 2008). Many quantitative scholars who prefer precision, systemization, and predictability are already leery of qualitative methodologies, and especially the ethnographic method, for which there is no universal way to collect, analyze, and present data (Jacques, 2014).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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