Ethnografie

Auf der Suche nach der Hinterbühne.
Das Versprechen ethnografischer Forschung

Seeking Backstages. The Promise of Ethnographic Research

Thorsten Benkel

Fremdes im Schatten der eigenen Kultur.
Das Rolllichtmilleu und der Blick der Ethnografie

In the Shadow of Culture. An Ethnographic Look at a Red Light District

Maximilian Schäfer

Devianzmarkierung und Positionszuweisung. Reaktionen auf das Sanktionier-Werden in einer stationären Jugendhilfeeinrichtung

Defining Deviance and Position Assignment – Reactions to being sanctioned in an Institution of Youth Care

Norbert Schröer

Problematische Beobachtungen. Fallanalytische Betrachtungen zum Vorwurf der Lüge gegenüber türkischen Migranten in polizeilichen Beschuldigtenvernehmungen

Problematic Incriminations: A Case-Analysis Study on Accusing Turkish Immigrants of Lying in Police Interrogations

Thaddeus Müller

In praise of ethnography. Towards a rich understanding of crime and deviance

Informationen

Autorinnen und Autoren dieses Heftes

In praise of ethnography
Towards a rich understanding of crime and deviance

In this article I show how ethnography can be used to get a rich understanding of crime and deviance. I will highlight the advantages of ethnography for criminology by referring to the work of others and by using detailed examples of the “back-stage” experience of my own fieldwork among the soccer-hooligans of Ajax, Amsterdam. This means that my research experience is not rewritten to fit the ideal front-stage of the supposedly “objective” researcher; but instead that this article explicitly describes the embodied, emotional and personal experiences of doing ethnography. Here I will show that the advantages of ethnography for criminology are inherently related to several qualities of this methodological approach: 1. continuous physical access, 2. unanticipated situations, 3. thick contextual information, 4. natural triangulation and 5. the embodied research-experience.

Keywords: Ethnography, hooligans, continued physical access, unanticipated situations, thick contextual information, natural triangulation, the embodied research-experience.


Schlüsselwörter: Ethnografie, Hooligans, aufrechterhalter physikalischer Zugang, unerwartete Situationen, dichte kontextuale Informationen, natürliche Triangulation, „embodied research” Erfahrung

Introduction

In this article I show how ethnography can be used to get a rich understanding of crime and deviance. I will highlight the advantages of ethnography for criminology by referring to the work of others and by using detailed examples of the “back-stage” experience of my own fieldwork. In relation to this topic, Ferrell speaks about “true confessions” in research (Ferrell 1998: 24-25). This means that one’s research experience is not rewritten to fit the ideal front-stage of the supposedly “objective” researcher; but instead that the study explicitly describes the embodied, emotional and personal experiences of doing ethnography, and analytically engages with these experiences (see also Johnson 1975, Fine 1993, Whiteman/Müller/Johnson 2010). An exami-
do, can we ever come to see how they really view the world. Only in this way can we gain all-important sense of their reality. Only in this way can we ever be sure that we are not simply imposing our own preconceived biases about deviants onto them” (ibid: 4).

Despite this acknowledgment, ethnography is not the dominant methodological approach used in criminology. Yet the ability to gain the emic-perspectives within criminality is inherently related to the interconnected characteristics or qualities of ethnography, which I will discuss in this article in the following sections: 1. continued physical access, 2. unanticipated situations, 3. thick contextual information, 4. natural triangulation and 5. the embodied research-experience. Before I discuss these interrelated themes, I want to introduce the research from which the examples in this article are drawn.

Research Setting: Hooligans

In the second half of 1986 I conducted a participant observation in the Netherlands amongst the hooligans of Ajax Amsterdam, also known as the F-side. In the 80’s I was a regular at the Ajax games in Amsterdam and regularly watched the stand of the F-side – the Ajax “hooligans,” named after the violent male fans located in the F-side of the stadium.

The press often covered the F-side’s violence and they were depicted as criminals, beasts, irrational and immoral. However, from my vantage point inside the stadium, I observed another aspect of the F-side, which was hardly discussed in the Dutch media: their enthusiastic interaction with the game and their sheer love of Ajax. There was something more than violence going on. Studying the F-side by looking at violence was in my opinion an academic form of tunnel vision. I wanted to see the bigger picture and to understand what precisely happens at the hooligans stand. I was inspired by Turner’s (1969) work on the concept of communitas – a strong “we-feeling,” related to religious rituals especially pilgrimages.

As will be shown in the following pages, doing the fieldwork turned out to be an embodied, emotional and personal experience. At the time, I did not integrate my backstage field research experiences in my research because the tools to do so were not at hand. In those days, reflexivity was not part of the curriculum yet. Since then more space has been created for “true confessions” (Ferrell 1998), although in most conventional journals “the underside” of doing research (Fine 1993) is still seen as odd and at best irrelevant.

Continued Physical Access

On many occasions the ethnographic approach is the only way to gain meaningful access to specific cultural or subcultural groups. Questionnaires are not useful because a) the format of the questionnaires does not relate to the (per-

spective of) the group which is studied, b) it is hard to formulate questions without knowledge of (the perspective of) the group, and c) written language itself might be a barrier because it is not sufficiently mastered by members of the group. Interviewing can also be problematic because its format might be seen as a form of interrogation and therefore viewed and experienced as a domineering and paternalistic mode of communication. Another reason why interviewing is problematic is related to the presentation of self: informants might want to make an impression, which fits their ideal self-image. Additionally informants from marginal groups might not be used to reflect verbally on what they do, think and feel (De Jong 2006).

These issues are less problematic for ethnographers, as I will show in the following pages. They can communicate in a more open, fluent and fleeting way that fits the situations in which they encounter the people they study. This also means that ethnographers can be approached by the researched on their own terms, meaning when it is convenient for them and in their own preferred style of communication (see also Ferrell 2006).

Others dimensions of continued physical access such as dealing with fear in relation to images of crime and gaining trust will be discussed below.

Dealing with Fear and Images of Crime/deviancy

An important dimension of continued physical access, which is not frequently discussed, is that it helps researchers to deal with and overcome anxiety, which is related to the dominant images of crime and deviancy. These images do not only direct our perspective and influence our cognitive relation with the field, but also influence our affective relation with the field and can create feelings such as fear and distrust. Researchers are, as any social being, influenced by the dominant media images and this can influence them when they interact with the field. Fear played an unexpected role in my getting access to the F-side.

I did not choose to enter the F-side formally, through the Ajax-organization or the police. I did not want to be associated with these institutions because I sensed this could damage my relations with the F-siders (see also Goffman 1989: 129). I also did not approach the F-side organization, which consisted of the older hooligans, to get permission, because I sensed that any formal way of introducing myself would lead to rejection. I decided to join the F-side in a ‘natural’ way just like any man did, by buying a ticket and entering the stand of the F-side.

Several people warned me that it might be dangerous. Based on the current media coverage this research approach could indeed be seen as risky. Who wants to join a group of hooligans well known for its violence and engagement in fights with the police and other hooligans? I did feel some apprehension about joining the F-side and when the day approached that I would
first join them, the strain became bigger but I still was confident that everything would be all right. I was slightly worried about whether they would accept me and the worst-case scenario was that I would be rejected and kicked out.

When I approached the stadium I felt a strong sense of resistance to continuing my research. I was anxious. I approached the concrete steps, which led to the stand. I asked myself what I was actually doing and why I was doing it. These questions took me by surprise as I was convinced that doing participant observation within the F-side of Ajax was the best way to do this research. Soon I was confronted with a greater surprise: the resistance and anxiety became so physical that my legs and knees became weak. My body said no. This infuriated me so much that I pushed myself and continued to walk and entered the stand of the hooligans. When I looked around, it was not as crowded as I expected and the atmosphere was relaxed. I walked up the stand and took a position next to the biggest concentration of young men and looked around. Soon somebody began talking to me about the game and the coming season.

When I reflected on the incident I understood that my fear and resistance were related to the dominant negative image of hooligans in our society. I realized how deeply rooted in fear this image is. The dominant image is related to two characteristics: a) the social organization of the hooligans as a tightly organized community and b) their violence. Being amongst the hooligans it became clear that their social organization was not a tightly organized community, but consisted of several groups of friends and acquaintances. It was in some sense similar to going to a rock concert. The F-side was in fact a near-group or quasi-group (Boissevain 1968; Yablonski 1979). Violence was also not part of my first experience and actually I had to wait some time for my first confrontation with it.

Trust

Those involved with acts of criminality and deviance have reason to distrust outsiders, which often results in a negative stance towards researchers in the first period of the fieldwork. They are seen, for instance, as police officers or journalists, or as any professional outsider who comes and goes without being committed to the people they interact with. Because of one of its basic features – face-to-face contact over a length of time – the members of the community can get used to researchers and as a result accept their presence (Agar 1978, De Jong 2006, Liebow 1967, Snow/Anderson 1993). The process of acceptance is influenced by the social and cultural similarity of the researcher and the researched. Those researchers who share similarities with the researched tend to get trusted with less effort than those who don’t. It is naive to think that one is trusted completely or has full access to the community one studies. Trust has to be negotiated over and over again. But ethnography has the potential that over time the distance between the researcher and the researched can diminish and some trust can be gained.

Because the setting of my F-side research was semi-public, access to the location in itself was not problematic. There was a social-psychological barrier – fear, which I had to overcome, but just participating with the hooligans turned out to be not so problematic. Most guys were not violent, insane or beastly, but quite approachable. My own identity as white, male, 189 cm and 23 years old – meant I could also fit in easily with most of the others. Most conversations were very similar to the conversations in the other parts of the stadium. They were about soccer and in particular about Ajax. Being a diehard Ajax-fan it was easy to join the conversation because I knew all the facts one has to know in order to get along, such as information about new players, pre-season matches and injuries. Another important topic consists of incidents with the police and other hooligans. The F-siders were willing to share these experiences with me. After some time I realized it was part of their bravado, which was repeated again and again as a confirmation of their desired hooligan identity.

During most encounters I would not tell the other young men that I was researching them. I behaved as most of them did and joined their conversations. I did not ask them any questions, which could be conceived of as odd or not fitting the situation (see also Ferrell 2006). On some occasions, especially when I wanted to do semi-structured interviewing, I did explain I was researching the F-side for my schooling. I did not say I was studying cultural anthropology, because I had already experienced difficulties explaining this to some of my friends and family. I decided to introduce myself as a student of the "sociale academie" (social work academy), which made sense to most of the F-siders (see also Fine 1993: 275).

I decided not to be violent myself or to take part in violent actions. In a group, which varied from between 500 to 2000 people, there were many guys like me, who for some reason joined the F-side and were not interested in acting in a violent way. I did not throw stones at other hooligans or try to challenge police officers. On several occasions I ended up being part of a scene where violence took place. In these situations I acted like most other hooligans, which was to look for a safe place. Only some of them did actively participate in violent actions. I soon realized that if I did not choose to be actively involved, taking care to move out of the way when violence erupted, the chances were very small that something harmful would happen to me. However paying attention to what happened around me was crucial.

Distrust played an important role in my relationship with the older members of the F-side. After a while I knew them, their reputation, who they were and where they were standing. It was not difficult to talk to them in a fleeting casual way. But I wanted to talk to them in a semi-structured way. I decided to talk to one of the most approachable of the older men in the airplane from Amsterdam to Athens, where Ajax had to play a game for the UEFA cup. The older man was friendly and said he was willing to be interviewed. But he warned me not to approach the other members, because they were not eager to talk to outsiders, such as journalists and researchers.
In the literature on participant observation, different forms of involvement and roles are categorized (Loftland et al. 2006, Adler/Adler 1987). In general ethnographers start from the outside and slowly become established and accepted, with the exception of those who study their own social world (Loftland et al. 2006). Because the F-side was a quasi-group my position varied from peripheral to active depending on the subgroup. For instance, in relation to the older men my position was peripheral. My position varied also per situation. Flying to Athens for the European Competition, I was less peripheral in relation to the older men. In general I was an active member in the sense that I participated as many other men did. My preference was to be peripheral in violent acts, but sometimes I had no choice and the field made me become, if only momentarily, completely involved in the mayhem of the hooligan experience.

Because the F-side had the structure of a near-group, trust had to be gained in each interaction and was part of an ongoing process. In most situations where my status as an F-sider was similar to others, trust was gained fairly easy although I had to stay on my guard. I had to be more strategic when I tried to approach men who had a higher status, because they had a reputation for being violent or because they were involved much longer with the F-side, and had to wait until the situation made me less peripheral.

Unanticipated events: The field talks back

Ethnography offers the possibility of entering new and unexpected regions of activities and meanings. Ethnographers are submerged in the social world they study and through interactions they are confronted with unexpected situations, which force them to reflect on their understanding of the field (see also Goffman 1989: 130; Tewkebury 2009). Where in the quantitative approach control is crucial and reduction of social reality is necessary to exclude factors that might interfere, in ethnography this kind of control is impossible and also not desirable: the full/unreduced experience of social life is an extremely valid source of events which ethnographers use to get a rich understanding of crime and deviance.

Most of these events are related to face-to-face interactions with persons in the field. The events, as a collective experience, “do something” to researchers. In that sense, the field talks back and influences the perspective of ethnographers in the field (see also Hobbs 2006, Whitman/Müller/Johnson 2010). In this ongoing process of interacting with the field, constant critical reflection on how new information relates to one’s previous perception of the field is essential to refine one’s developing conceptualization of the field.

When I did my ethnographic fieldwork among the Ajax-hooligans one of the questions I asked myself was how it is possible that these young men take so many risks in engaging in violent encounters with hooligans and the police.

During my time with the hooligans I learnt several important unforeseen aspects of being a hooligan, just by being with them. One of these aspects was how they relate to their body.

One of the young men I met regularly while travelling to the games and being in the stadium was some years younger than me and went to school to become a welder. He had a nasty wound below his thumb. I asked him what happened to him. Casually he explained in a matter of fact way that he had hurt his hand during practice class. He lost his focus for a moment and a soldering iron burned his hand. I asked him whether it was painful, but he just shrugged and said that it was okay. In the following weeks I would encounter him several times and I saw that his wound was getting worse, that its colors showed inflammation and that they changed over time. He seemed to be careless about his wound and the consequences for his body. I asked whether he should not see a GP. When he said that this was not necessary, I asked him why and he said that it would go away by itself, which actually happened. After a while the crust started to fall off and showed a small scar.

Starting my research I did not anticipate this experience of the body and I had not read about it in studies on hooligans. My encounter with the man with the wound on his hand made me think about how these men relate to their bodies and triggered many questions. How do they manage pain? Do they want to show that they are manly by being careless? The idea dawned upon me that they learned to deal with pain while doing physical labor in which (small) injuries are normal and become part of their gender-identity. I decided I had to pay more attention to how they deal with their bodies, because this was crucial in understanding their ‘fearless’ behavior.

Shortly after my encounter with the young man and his wound on his hand I travelled with the F-side to Groningen, a city in the northern part of the Netherlands. The biggest part of this journey was done by train. Although someone mentioned that the train might be hit by stones at certain points, nothing like that happened. The train ride to Groningen did not pass any major cities. The trip was boring at times. Some guys were sleeping, some were sharing their braggadocio stories, others were reading soccer magazines and a few were smoking a joint. The last part of the trip – from the station to the stadium – was done by bus. Some young men were excited. They said that there might be a chance of a confrontation with the hooligans of Groningen and indicated that the Groningen hooligans might try to throw stones at the buses. One guy said that if this would happen he would jump out of the bus and chase the Groningen supporters. Some guys laughed. The trip was short, probably ten minutes. There was a lot of tension. It seemed that the warning was false and that nothing would happen. But then it did. All of a sudden stones hit the bus from all sides. The windows of the glass splintered into hundreds of small pieces. The first thing everybody did was to try to find protection by hiding on the floor in between the seats and the broken pieces of glass. I felt tense, but no fear. I was not hit and not harmed. I looked around and I saw all the other men lying...
Thick information

Thick description, a rich and detailed contextual account of behavior and its meaning(s), is one of the desired outcomes of qualitative research (Geertz 1973, Ponderotto 2006). In order to establish thick description one needs to collect thick information, meaning rich detailed records of acts, its meaning(s) and its context(s). If thick description is lacking in the representation, the qualitative research might be considered a failure. Interviews can, especially when repeated, mutual trust is developed and the respondent is a good narrator, result in detailed records of criminalized activities. But one of the advantages of ethnography is that one can also use observations in combination with narratives to give a rich and detailed account of the field. Sometimes this quality becomes a burden as novices in ethnography experience an overload of information (Loftland et al. 2006). But the vastness, depth and variety of the ethnographic experience is, at the same time, an immense resource for a thick description of the social world one studies.

In conversations the hooligans said they like to make the police look like fools, but the stories were not convincing to me and looked like boasting. But after being part of an activity in which the police were mocked I got a deeper understanding of what they told me. The next example shows in detail how ridiculing the police took place in practice.

The last part of the journey to AZ Alkmaar consisted of walking between the station and the stadium. The group was walking through the inner city of Alkmaar and was supervised by police. Most of them were walking with their heavy riot-gear on. Suddenly the F-side as a group started to run. Not hard, almost like leisurely jogging. And they started chanting songs. There was no intention of breaking out of the police supervision. I was surprised by what happened and at first did not understand the purpose. I saw the surprise on the faces of the police officers who had to run along with their heavy protection and armament. They were sweating. I looked around and saw smiles on the faces of the other F-siders. Then suddenly everybody stopped and sat down. The police were again taken by surprise. The police communicated through their walkie-talkies and decided to force the F-side to move again, which they did. But each time, three steps forward were followed by two steps back. It was riotous. They also stepped to the side and back again. They were singing: to the front, to the back, to the left, to the right. Again the police did not know how to handle the situation. This Monty Python act of the F-side continued for a while until some guys actually made a real go for it and ran away being chased by the police.

Words and actions: natural triangulation

Triangulation refers to the use of different methods to gain a better insight into the field (Denzin 1970). Ethnography contains a natural form of triangulation. One day the researcher talks with a person and the next day the researcher sees this person acting in a similar, or in a different way. An example from my hooligan research is related to how I tried to make sense of the conversations in which the hooligans blamed the police for being brutal, provoking and starting incidents. When I first heard these narratives I thought they were exaggerations and part of the hooligan bravado. But on several occasions I soon experienced that the police were very aggressive and reacted impulsively. The next example is related to Feyenoord-Ajax, the classic rivalry between the city teams from Rotterdam and Amsterdam.

The atmosphere was grim. The police were in their riot outfit, there were police dogs and mounted police. A white line was painted on the ground between the stadium and the station. The police made it clear that we had to follow the line and that we would be in trouble if we would deviate. On the right side were mounted police who had long rubber sticks in their hands ready for action. On the other side there were police holding German Shepherd dogs in their hands. When we just started walking I saw that a policeman, in front of me, lost control of his dog. The leash slipped out of his hand and his dog jumped aggressively at a man in front of me and tried to bite him. At the same time the group made a natural movement away from the dog towards the mounted police. They saw this as a deviation from the line and reacted violently. Immediately they started hitting the F-siders with their long sticks. Hell broke loose. An Ajax-fan was trying to get away from the jaws of a dog that was ripping his jeans. Other men saw this as an opportunity to attack the police. One guy pushed a policeman of his horse. Another F-sider was kicking a policeman who was on the ground. Most men were trying to get in a safe way to the other side.

The embodied research experience

The dominant media images of criminalized persons like hooligans are strongly related to fear, danger, irrationality and immorality. They are stigmatized, portrayed as different from middle class society, as outsiders and folk devils (Becker 1963, Cohen 1972). The perspective from the inside – the emic-perspective – is scarcely covered. Through ethnography, researchers in criminol-
ogy can embrace the emic-perspective, because they not only talk with people and observe them, but also experience and feel how it is to be part of the social world they study. By “taking the same crap they’ve been taking” ethnographers can get “deep familiarity” (Goffman 1989: 125,130). In relation to this Ferrell uses the concept of “criminological verstehen” (Ferrell 1998):

“...a researcher’s subjective understanding of crime’s situational meanings and emotions – its moments of pleasure and pain, its emergent logics and excitement – within the larger process of research into criminality. It further implies that a researcher, through attentiveness and participation, can at least begin to apprehend and appreciate the specific roles and experiences of criminals, crime victims, crime control agents and others caught up in the day-to-day reality of crime (ibid: 27).”

During the hooligan research my understanding of the emic-perspective was especially related to certain episodes and moments in which differences and similarities became unambiguous. It was related, for instance, to moments in which the distinctions were so clear that I became aware of what specific ways the hooligans gave meaning to the social world they live in, as such how they manage physical injuries and pain. It was also related to situations in which I experienced an unexpected commonality between myself and the hooligans, through which I understood parts of the emic-perspective. The next example is related to the previously mentioned Feyenoord-Ajax game.

After the mounted police started hitting the hooligans, most F-siders started to run across the open space. I was running with the crowd to the other side. The situation was frantic. The mounted police were chasing us, hitting some men, dogs were running and the Feyenoord-fans started to throw stones at us. It was pure mayhem. I had to run for my life. It was like a lion was chasing me. But the strange thing was that I was not afraid. It felt good. Like a rush, as if I was totally energized, all my senses were aroused. I was in survival mode. It felt great.

The physical experience of arousal while being in a dangerous situation opened the door for me to understand the F-siders in a more profound way. After this experience I could understand and sense what the F-siders meant when they talked about the kick of being a hooligan and how important this was for them. The next example shows the embodied experience of how the police relate to hooligans.

The F-siders collided into a scrimmage in front of the stairs of the Feyenoord stadium. I was pushing back and forth in order not to be crushed by the crowd trying to get in. With one hand at the front and one hand at the back I was creating some space for myself. Out of the blue two policemen were pulling my left arm and shouting that I should not do that and that I had to come along with them. Just a moment later, some hooligans shouted that I should get rid of the police and join them and pulled at my other arm. I had to decide what to do. Who was the sanest? Who would listen to me? I could see that the police...

men were nervous, agitated and that the situation could escalate quickly. I decided that the hooligans, whom I have never seen before and since then, were the most reasonable party to approach. I told them it was okay and that I would talk to the police. The F-siders let me go and the police took me to a quieter place where they said in a firm way that if they caught me being involved in disorderly behavior again I would be arrested. After which I could go.

The confrontation with the police put me in the position of a hooligan. The police defined me with their action as a troublemaker. I experienced how it is to be treated by the police and learned how arbitrarily the police can act. At the same time I gained a fuller understanding of the loyalty among the hooligans. The last example of an embodied research experience is related to the intense collective intimacy of hooligans when their team is winning.

The stadium was sold out. The two teams were equal in strength and the game was exhilarating. Ajax scored first, in the second minute. Feyenoord in the 11th, and Ajax again in the 20th minute. Feyenoord scored just after half time. It seemed that the game would end in a draw. But Ajax scored in the 62nd minute. The Ajax fans were ecstatic and without any holding back celebrated the goal. As one collective, the F-side exploded in shouts, screaming, embracing, dancing and falling over each other. Two big older guys with beer bellies and tattoos embraced me and others joined us while moving up down in euphoria. When the game ended, the F-side could not leave the stadium because of safety measures. We had to stay inside for half an hour. The F-side was singing all the time. It resonated in the empty stadium. The collective singing created a strong feeling of belonging. The F-siders were not interested in singing at the match. They were singing to the players who were standing next to them. Others were sticking their hands up. This was Turner’s community, this strong emotional experience of being together. I got shivers all over my body when the F-side, sang the Liverpool anthem: you never walk alone.

Conclusion

I have described several qualities of ethnography that can help criminologists access a rich understanding of crime and deviance such as I experienced with hooliganism. The first ethnographic quality is related to access. For many groups, ethnography is the only way to approach its members. Questionnaires and interviews cannot be used for various reasons. Because of the physical face-to-face presence of researchers, members of the groups can get used to them and trust them. Because of their continued presence they can also approach ethnographers via their preferred way of communicating. This is related to the open, fluent and fleeting way in which ethnographers interact with others, so ethnographers can adjust their way of communicating to the peculiarities of the setting. Another important issue related to access is that because of face-to-face contact ethnographers can deal with fear related to images of crime
and deviance. The media-representation and the emotions that are related to it are put into perspective when one starts to interact with persons in the field.

The second quality of ethnography discussed in this article is its exposure to the full experience of social life. Being part of a marginalized or criminalized group one is able to experience aspects of their social world, which have not been covered by media, police and more distant research-approaches. The ethnographic experience will reveal many unanticipated facets which are worthy studying and which are relevant in obtaining a rich understanding of crime and deviance.

Interviews can result in thick descriptions of criminalized activities. But the advantages of ethnography over interviewing is that it creates thick information consisting of fleeting conversations, observations and embodied experiences, which can be used for in depth interpretation of the social world being studied. The intensity, variety and immensity of the ethnographic experience form a great resource for a thick description of the social world one studies.

Triangulation, the use of different methods, helps to describe and understand the social worlds we study. Different sources and angles can confirm findings or shed a different light on them. Ethnography contains a natural form of triangulation, which is related to the prolonged stay in the field. For instance, over time one sees that words match, or differ from action.

The emic-perspective of the insiders’ view is a common goal for qualitative researchers. They want to see how the people they study define their social worlds and how this influences their behavior. This is especially relevant for criminology. Our lens is heavily influenced by media-images in which criminalized persons are stigmatized as dangerous, irrational and immoral. Although interviews can be used to create an emic-perspective, ethnographers can embrace this perspective more profoundly, because they not only talk with people and observe them, but also experience and feel how it is to be part of the social world they study. In this sense they are able to live the experience of those they study and see how they perceive the world.

Ethnography is of course not the methodological answer to all research questions. But if one is interested in gaining a rich emic-understanding of criminalized and marginalized groups, ethnography is in many cases the best choice. In some cases it is not, because the use of ethnography within criminology depends on the accessibility of groups. Some groups are hard to access, because of their level of crime and violence. Entering these groups is dangerous and one might get involved in criminalized activities, which have some juridical and ethical ramifications (Goldsmith 2003, Kovats-Bernat 2002, Sharp/Kremer 2006). These issues also play an important role in choosing a covert or overt role. Needless to stay one gets easier access when one does not reveal one’s researcher role, but the exposure of this might lead to severe sanctions by those studied.

Still there are many criminalized groups to be accessed by ethnography. The question then remains: why don’t we see more publications based on ethnography in criminology (Buckler 2008; Tewksbury/Dabney/Copes 2005). I suggest some provisional explanations.

One explanation is related to the personality of the researcher. Not everybody wants to engage in uncomfortable, dangerous situations during hours when other people sleep, visit friends or are just spending time with their family. Ethnography of criminalized groups is a form of academic bungee jumping, a form of edgework, which is challenging to those not willing to take risks. Another reason why ethnography is problematic for some is because it is hard to fit in with the academic agenda of teaching, publishing and management. To put it simply, in some academic settings one really has to be a zealous ethnographer to create the circumstances for doing ethnography. The ‘time-publication ratio’ is also not in favor of ethnography: spending months or years in the field might not result in the requested publications one is supposed to write on a yearly basis. So, when one is career-driven, ethnography is a dicey path to success.

Another reason for some not to engage in ethnography is that it does not relate to their definition of social science. If one opts for a positivistic paradigm one might see ethnography as a subjective and non-scientific method. When one is only exposed to quantitative methods, ignorance towards qualitative methods is understandable. But this ignorance has consequences because those with hardly any profound academic exposure to qualitative research are also editors of journals and members of grant-boards. They decide whether ethnographic research gets published or funded. A last explanation has to do with funding. Most of the funding goes to big quantitative projects. There is a bureaucratic reason for this: the process is manageable and the output is controllable, which are essential prerequisites for academic accounting.

Although there are many barriers to doing ethnography, it is still done. A tentative explanation for this is that some criminologists believe in it passionately and will take the hurdles to do ethnography. And maybe that is a good thing, because only by being truly committed does ethnography result in a rich understanding of crime and deviance (Köbben 1980).

**Literature**
