Chapter 32
Conclusions: Deciphering the Unspoken: A Collective Examination of Sensitive Fieldwork Experiences in Criminology and Security Studies

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Preceding these conclusions are the experiences of 55 researchers from 40 Universities and research centers across four continents. These scholars have accumulated a collective experience of over 700 years in fieldwork, starting as early as the 1980s. Rather than a mere compilation of authors' experiences, we aimed to undertake a comprehensive analysis of their research endeavors, extracting valuable lessons to enhance criminology and security studies in sensitive areas. The extensive review of chapters revealed both commonalities and unique aspects among the research projects.

Throughout this book, one of our central objectives was to shed light on fieldwork experiences often overlooked in scientific discussions, confined to limited circles of colleagues. Researchers may hesitate to share such experiences due to a sense of embarrassment or the perception that they hold little value or relevance to others' projects. However, these fieldwork experiences serve as practical demonstrations of how methodological decisions intersect with reality in the field, frequently extending beyond the boundaries defined by research ethics committees.

The subsequent sections delve into the diverse approaches employed by the authors of this collective book to access their sensitive samples, encompassing both shared and distinct methodologies. We explore the methodological and ethical considerations that arose throughout the different phases of their studies: before, during, and after the research endeavors. To maintain coherence, we adhered closely to the structure proposed to the authors for drafting these conclusions.

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1 Field Preparation

Proper preparation is vital for successful fieldwork, as an initial misstep can obstruct future strategies. This book's authors have used various methods to understand the territories they explored, from consulting experts and conducting literature reviews to gaining insights from Internet forums. A researcher may develop a protocol outlining the target population, potential data sources, and risks to mitigate. In some instances, researchers are obliged to submit their protocol to research ethics committees (in continental European terms), also known by the name *Institutional Review Boards* (IRBs). While some institutions enforce stringent IRB oversight, others do not. Notably, two-thirds of the research in this book did not seek prior IRB consultation. As noted by Carthy and Schuurman, IRBs require ethical data-gathering and minimal risk to participants or researchers. However, their suggestions may not align with the field approach. For instance, despite an ethics committee's advice, Menih chose casual attire to blend in. Sometimes, committees proposed different rules based on the project funding agency. Even without formal structures, researchers still acted responsibly. Most adhered to ethical standards they deemed fit, even if unconventional. Others faced unique risks, such as those in cyberspace research (such as Moneva and colleagues), requiring additional security measures to avoid potential cyber-attacks, ensure secure data collection and storage, maintain legal compliance, and meet audit requirements.

The preparatory phase for field access is often hindered by the presence of ambiguity and a lack of clarity regarding the specific object of study. This challenge arises due to the limited research or recent emergence of certain phenomena. Carthy and Schuurman emphasize the distinction between studying "extremism" and "terrorism," highlighting the need for careful consideration in approaching the field and engaging with participants. Similarly, Gassó and Gómez-Durán discuss the difficulty of studying sexting without a clear definition for the phenomenon. Bliesemann de Guevara and Macaspac recognize the complexity, volatility, and mutability of the field, particularly in violent contexts where territorial control shifts between guerrilla groups and the State. In the realm of cyberspace, defining the field itself requires substantial reflection that is still an ongoing process. Mattheis asserts that the Internet serves as their fieldwork domain, challenging the perception that it is merely a "data source."

Moneva and colleagues stress the importance of early conceptualization, as in their case, for instance, hacktivism differs from cybercriminal activities. When approaching the field, there are factors that extend beyond the novelty or elusiveness of the subject matter. The researcher's perspective can potentially distort the phenomenon under investigation. For example, Atkinson-Sheppard reflects on her understanding of Bangladeshi street children, realizing that conceptualizing them as "illicit laborers" rather than offenders or mere victims was a more appropriate research approach. She acknowledges that emotional constraints influenced her perception, preventing her from recognizing the children's involvement in criminal groups, the existing hierarchies among them, and the necessity for street children to work for

survival. Atkinson-Sheppard's emotional reflections led her to recognize her inclination to view children, especially vulnerable ones, as innocent and in need of protection – a perspective shaped by Global North conceptualizations of children and childhood. This recognition poses limitations when approaching the phenomenon or object of study, as it influences the choice of techniques and necessitates reflection on the emotional aspects related to the researcher's positionality in the field.

While the objects of study in this book vary, there are notable similarities in the approach strategies employed by the authors. The most common approach typically involves conducting preliminary documentation work, albeit limited due to the understudied nature of some of the topics, and then deciding on a specific day to initiate contact by knocking on a gatekeeper's door that has been identified during the documentation period. For instance, Del-Real and van Steen emphasize the significance of demonstrating extensive knowledge about cybersecurity issues prior to initiating contact with the participants. However, on other occasions access occurs more gradually, so perhaps it would be more appropriate to understand access as a process and not as a single moment. This approach is what Feixa applied in his work with gangs. His experience over the decades that he has researched this phenomenon is that entry into the field has never occurred all at once, but rather is a continuous process of entries and exits that, in the end – and perhaps this is one of the central elements of his reflection – is a process of adaptation to the particularities of the group under study.

The scientific literature highlights the significance of gatekeepers as the most apparent entry point into the field. Among the authors, their typology has exhibited considerable diversity, although they unanimously recognize their crucial role as the gateway. One recurring reflection revolves around the question of whether "official" gatekeepers such as social workers, police officers, or probation officers, who are often considered formal representatives of the state, are an encouraging or dissuading factor for vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups' participation in a study. Menih provides an interesting insight to this doubt. Despite initial reservations, she discovered that women experiencing homelessness, although vulnerable, had established trusting relationships with formal state organizations. A similar situation unfolded in Molnar's study on sex workers, where social workers played a facilitating role in initiating the recruitment process. Prado's case also demonstrates how social workers served as gatekeepers for accessing immigrant minors. The notion of what constitutes a formal structure may vary across countries and can encompass entities like the Men's Behaviour Change Program, which offers group therapy and other forms of treatment for men involved in domestic and family violence (Boxall and colleagues). Additionally, in the study by Borges and Faria, entities involved in the Portuguese shelter system acted as gatekeepers.

The vital role of gatekeepers also applies to the study of state elites, as highlighted by Coller and Alcántara in relation to political elites, Diamint and Martínez in the case of military and political elites, and Burkhardt and Boivin who accessed police officers. Due to their significance, the authors emphasize the importance of identifying the specific gatekeepers needed, as the individual who can open doors within one political group may not necessarily have the same influence with another.

In highly formalized organizations such as political parties, parliaments, armed forces, prisons, law enforcement agencies, or intelligence services, the gatekeeper's role extends beyond facilitating access to also authorizing it. Even if alternative means of access to the field exist, consulting with gatekeepers as a matter of course becomes necessary to prevent potential obstacles later on. Díaz, for example, took preventive measures by presenting his study to the Spanish intelligence services, even though they did not collaborate in it. Similarly, Balcells and Tamarit encountered an unfruitful response when approaching the Catholic Church through official channels, but they recognized the obligation to attempt this avenue before exploring other options.

In situations where potential participants are located – and even *constricted* – within public institutions where access is restricted, the role of the gatekeeper becomes indispensable. This is evident in the experiences of researchers like Halty, who gained access to prisons and centers housing criminal psychopaths or minors with significant behavioral issues, and Prado, who accessed migrant minors through the institutions where they were detained. In such cases, contact and authorization to access these individuals can only be obtained through these official gatekeepers. It is not always a requirement for individuals to be institutionalized; they may simply be in a situation where contact and access are only possible through these gatekeepers. This was the case for researchers like Lambelet and colleagues, who accessed probationers, and Ingrascì, who interacted with Mafia informants (*pentiti*). It is important to note that access facilitated by the state may not always involve individuals directly, but can also pertain to accessing documentation or archives. In the latter case, the experiences shared in this volume illustrate that access is often conditioned by factors such as the need to maintain confidentiality or ensuring there is sufficient staff available to anonymize and assist researchers. These considerations regarding archives highlight the additional complexities researchers may encounter when seeking access to historical or sensitive documents, requiring careful management of privacy and security concerns.

There are also a number of less common gatekeepers, but whose role has been essential as well. In Turner's case, his gatekeeper was a friend "who had an events company linked to Electronic Dance Music, [who] proved to be essential lion during fieldwork, gaining access to super-club guest lists that would otherwise have been of limits with ticket prices around 80–100 euros," while in Feixa's case, throughout his long career working with gangs, his access points have been numerous: street educators, priests who had worked with boy scouts, a punk music researcher, the director of a youth house, and a rapper. In the case of Vallés' study of the Roma, the gatekeepers were respected members of the community, while Güerri and Martí's study would not have been possible without a gang leader inside a Salvadoran prison. In secret, dangerous environments or where participants are difficult to identify – such as in Carthy's or Díaz's case – the gatekeeper may be a former member of the IRA terrorist group whom a colleague introduced via email, or a former Spanish intelligence agent and a former Minister of Defense, respectively.

In certain situations, gaining access to the field may require navigating through multiple successive gatekeepers. Güerri and Martí highlight the significance of

explaining and persuading each gatekeeper, recognizing their distinct roles, and employing different approaches for each one. In the same vein, Del-Real and van Steen acknowledge the complexities associated with researching diverse categories of cybersecurity professionals, ranging from hackers to police officers, necessitating the adaptation of their access strategies to suit the distinct characteristics inherent in these heterogeneous cohorts of participants. The access process plays a crucial role in determining the level of freedom and flexibility researchers will ultimately have in conducting their investigation. It influences factors such as where access is granted, the types of participants available for study, or which files can be reviewed. As Güerri and Martí emphasize, it involves an ongoing negotiation process with the field, from obtaining central authorization to engaging with the facility's management and officials responsible for granting access to specific inmates. Within this negotiation process, there is ample room for renegotiating the researcher's presence in the field, which can have positive or negative implications.

However, despite thorough preparatory work and strategic efforts, there are instances where these endeavors may not yield the desired outcome. Refusals to grant access to the field can take various forms, such as citing an inconvenient timing, the need for further consultation, deeming the research topic irrelevant, raising security concerns, or simply maintaining silence. In such instances, researchers may encounter significant obstacles that impede their progress. In situations where access is blocked, as observed by Diamint and Martínez, alternative approaches may need to be considered. For example, seeking access through higher-level authorities, such as government ministers, may present a potential avenue to overcome initial refusals. This tactic has proven successful for these researchers in gaining entry to their respective fields of study. Alternatively, researchers may opt to exercise patience, allowing time to facilitate the removal of obstacles and pave the way for eventual access. In studying cybercriminals, Moneva and colleagues propose an interesting idea that warrants further exploration in the future. They bring up the possibility of adopting the role of buyers within illicit markets as a means of gaining entry. It is nevertheless important to acknowledge that such an approach carries significant ethical implications that must be thoroughly assessed and considered. Ultimately, while preparation and planning are crucial components of successful fieldwork, the role of luck should not be disregarded. Serendipitous circumstances or unforeseen opportunities may arise, enabling access that was not initially anticipated. While luck alone cannot be relied upon as a sole strategy, researchers should remain open to its potential influence when navigating the complexities of fieldwork.

In situations where direct engagement with participants is neither possible nor advisable due to safety concerns, researchers must resort to indirect approaches. Ingrascì, for example, faced the challenge of studying dangerous groups like the Cosa Nostra in Sicily and the 'Ndrangheta in Calabria. In such cases, the most feasible approach involved engaging with local communities to gather information and insights about the phenomenon rather than attempting direct contact with the mafia themselves. While the obtained insights may not be firsthand, alternative sources such as transcribed conversations from police eavesdropping can provide valuable

glimpses into the inner workings of these organizations, even if they cannot be considered strictly as "authentic natural settings."

2 Methods

2.1 Sampling Techniques

The composition and size of the populations under study have posed significant challenges for the authors in this book. Various factors make these populations hard-to-reach, resulting in difficulties in determining their size and composition. Secrecy plays a role in intelligence services as in the study of Díaz, while individuals who have endured human trafficking may be wary of self-identifying due to fear like in the research of Brunovskis and Surtees. In the digital world, individuals involved in illegal activities or cyberbullying may be difficult to identify, as pointed out by Vandebosch and Pabian, and some groups, such as the *pentiti* described by Ingrascì, may be extremely small and hidden. Ingrascì's research, for instance, sometimes focused on a single individual, such as the only female pentito or the only lawyer charged with mafia association who decided to collaborate with the state. In the case of parliamentary elites studied by Coller and Alcántara, military elites researched by Diamint and Martínez, or cybersecurity professionals contacted by Del-Real and van Steen, identification is relatively straightforward, but reaching and obtaining their participation presents challenges.

To address the difficulty of understanding the dimensions and composition of these populations, researchers have made different decisions. In cases where obtaining a list of individuals and designing a probabilistic sampling is not feasible, researchers propose alternative approaches. Güerri and Martí suggest selecting one out of every five inmates in each prison module when it is not possible to obtain comprehensive inmate data for sample design. However, in many cases, the sample is determined by the institution itself, making it difficult to assess representativeness and potential bias. The sample may unintentionally represent only novice offenders and fail to include more experienced individuals or those who have not yet been identified or apprehended. Ingrascì encountered a similar issue with repentant mafia members. This is a general challenge that can be mitigated through triangulation, as we discuss later.

Non-probabilistic sampling strategies have varied depending on the characteristics of the populations being studied. Prado used Facebook to identify and contact groups of foreigners in the city of Málaga, Spain. Snowball sampling and convenience sampling have been the most common methods employed by researchers in this collective work, used by Turner in investigating nightlife in Ibiza, Bliesemann de Guevara and Macaspac in conflict zones in Colombia and the Philippines, Díaz to identify members of the Spanish intelligence service, Del-Real and van Steen to contact cybersecurity experts, and Moneva and colleagues to access the hacker

community. In snowball sampling, the relationship between the referrer and referee is crucial, and well-positioned gatekeepers can play a vital role, as stressed by Carthy and Schuurman. The selection of strings and gatekeepers should ideally result in a more representative sample, despite the non-probability nature of snowball sampling. In these hard-to-reach populations, where it is challenging to control the sample or have knowledge of the entire population, researchers may rely on the concept of saturation to determine when to cease fieldwork. Saturation refers to the point at which new data or information no longer provides substantial insights or adds significantly to the understanding of the research topic. Díaz also adopted a similar criterion to decide when to conclude the fieldwork with Spanish intelligence agents. Vallés estimated that saturation was reached after interviewing 28 Roma *spoitor* and 19 non-Roma participants. Finally, despite securing the participation of about 60 cybersecurity experts for interviews, Del-Real opted to conclude their research after conducting 27 interviews. These examples illustrate the practical considerations researchers face when conducting research with hard-to-reach populations and the need to adapt sampling strategies accordingly.

Another challenge influencing sample design is the time factor. Accessing documents or obtaining necessary authorizations to interview individuals can take several months to a year. This timeline may be unfeasible depending on the type of research being conducted as noted by many authors such as Halty, Bueno, and Prado. Even when researchers follow the procedures, there is a risk of being denied access or receiving incomplete or irrelevant data. Once access is granted, it may take a significant amount of time to start the fieldwork. Researchers often face tight timelines, with pressure on their side rather than the organization's.

2.2 Data Collection Techniques

Overall, the authors have utilized various techniques for data collection during fieldwork, including participant observation, interviews, surveys, documentary analysis, and focus groups. The interview technique has been particularly prominent among the research methods used in this book. It has served as the primary research method, a preparatory task for gathering field information, or a triangulation tool to validate and complement other data sources. Interviews provide direct one-on-one contact with participants, allowing researchers to gather rich qualitative data and insights. The approaches to conducting interviews vary among the researchers, ranging from predominantly positivist perspectives focusing on obtaining specific data, to intermediate post-positivist approaches, to constructivist positionings where meaning and understanding are cocreated between the researcher and the participant. These varying approaches reflect the diverse research goals and contexts explored in the book.

In addition to the commonly employed qualitative techniques, there exist lesser-utilized techniques within the field. One such infrequent technique is Lambelet, Ros, and Loetzer's "instructions to a double," which involved probationers

evaluating the behaviors of their peers without personalizing or referring to specific cases. Feixa, in his study of the gang members, has employed a diverse range of techniques over the years that align with the specific population and the chronological context of his observations. These techniques include participant observation, focus groups, in-depth interviews, life stories, and analysis of media reports. Among them, life stories emerge as the predominant and significant technique in his work. It is noteworthy that Bliesemann de Guevara and Macaspac, possibly due to the similarity of their research domains, also coincide with Feixa in utilizing techniques such as ethnographic immersion, participant observation, textile making methods, and narrative biographical interviews. Furthermore, Turner introduces the concept of "ethnographic immersion" as a technique that surpasses mere observation, exposing researchers to certain moral dilemmas. Turner describes an initial period of "unobtrusive observation" lasting 24 hours a day, during which he selects a specific location to meticulously observe and document his thoughts, observations, and emotions using a cell phone, capturing the essence of the moment. The subsequent phase involves marginal participation, necessitating a certain level of engagement with the participants and even potentially involving limited alcohol consumption to blend in with the environment and the people present. Once a level of trust and acceptance is established, Turner is invited to accompany the participants in their leisure activities during the evening and night, requiring a higher degree of participation.

Among the most innovative techniques are those being incorporated for the analysis of the cyber world. These include monitoring software, online ads as honeypots, and the analysis of secondary data from leaks or purchases. In the realm of topics explored in this book, there are a few noteworthy possibilities for experimentation, particularly within the cyber world. For instance, one approach involves issuing messages to different groups, directing them to various webpages or presenting diverse information (Moneva, Leukfeldt, and Romagna). Additionally, Vandebosch and Pabian have utilized other experimental techniques, such as creating vignettes to measure situational factors that explain bystanders' behavior, designing digital games, employing pop-up messages, or utilizing mock-up social networking services.

The limited utilization of archives and documentation is a notable aspect worth considering. It is indeed true that many of the observed phenomena are ongoing and challenging to document comprehensively, except police data as illustrated by Burkhardt and Boivin. However, working with files presents a different scenario. For instance, Halty's examination of prisoner files and Carthy and Schuurman's analysis of police files provided them with a counter perspective to that presented by the media, scientific publications, and interviews, despite these files originally being compiled for police use rather than research purposes. Ingrascì also reflects on the significance of accessing police and judicial archives in the context of studying the Mafia, while Lambelet, Ros, and Kloetzer discuss the importance of probation files. Access to such files can prove useful for triangulation purposes. However, the challenging and unpredictable nature of accessing both the field and documentation can potentially result in prolonged research timelines.

Triangulation, although valuable for comprehending complex fields, is a technique that is seldom employed. Boxall, Meyer, Bartels, and Fitz-Gibbon acknowledge its usage in conjunction with the "free-text narratives and comments recorded by responding police officers" when studying incidents of domestic and family violence. Ingrascì also highlights the relevance of triangulation, particularly with police wiretaps, stating that "the observed scene through reading the transcription of taped conversations can be considered an authentic natural setting" due to the unawareness of the actors being monitored. Díaz extensively utilized various sources, including declassified archives, and successfully triangulated data with parliamentary statements and press reports. Molnar and Vallés, Prado, Vandebosh, and Pabian, as well as Friis, van Lith, van Bruchem, and Lindegaard, all mention the application of triangulation with different sources or data obtained online in their respective studies on violent behavior, terrorists, extremists, and video camera analysis. Although time-consuming, researchers who have employed triangulation emphasize its high utility.

3 Ethical and Methodological Considerations

3.1 Role of the Researcher

Once on the field, one of the first things that the researcher must decide – when possible – is perhaps which role they will adapt among the target population. This must be done in priority before the target population decides for the researcher without any control. This latter might greatly impact the fieldwork journey and the validity and reliability of the results. The necessity of assigning a role to the researcher within a group arises from the group's need to categorize the stranger within their midst, thereby providing a framework for understanding what to expect, and what not to expect, from this "visitor" who will inevitably leave. Menih, who frequented places inhabited by women experiencing homelessness – occasionally accompanied by a social worker – consistently identified herself as a doctoral student to clarify the context of her presence. Boxall and colleagues as well as Burkhardt and Boivin continuously stressed that they were researchers, not police officers. Nonetheless, defining the role of the researcher is not always straightforward. Turner, in his study of leisure activities on the island of Ibiza, required time for his role to be understood, as people in that environment typically associated such inquiries with journalists or undercover police officers. It seemed astonishing to many participants that someone could "dup" the system and be paid for what appeared to be a holiday.

Features of the researcher such as their origin, ethnicity, or gender might pose challenges in regards to the role that is attributed to the scholar by the target population. However, to a much lesser extent to what other researchers have reported in the past. Interestingly, within their sensitive research field – male perpetrators of family and domestic violence – Boxall and colleagues reported no issue with gender bias

in their studies. In some instances, however, being a female researcher appears to have had a positive impact. Atkinson-Sheppard suggests that being a woman enabled easier access and contact generation on the streets and within NGOs in Bangladesh. Ingrascì formed a unique rapport with "ex-mafia women," contrasting the "chivalrous attitude" displayed by male counterparts. Among one of the more prominent *pentiti*, this attitude became a means of avoiding discussions of violent incidents. Boxall, Meyer, Bartels, and Fitz-Gibon indicate that rarely did a participant request to speak with a male researcher. One situation they did experience was the request by "indigenous respondents to undertake their interview with an Indigenous interviewer, although some prefer to speak with a non-Indigenous researcher, given the cultural shame associated with the issues and concerns about confidentiality being breached".

The investigation of sensitive topics necessitates, perhaps more than in many other areas, a profound reflection on the researcher's positionality: who I am and what reality I construct in relation to the participating subject. Prado acknowledges this when she emphasizes her understanding of the need to approach her research field while attempting to steer clear of its "cultural guidelines and hegemonic values" that could potentially distort the interpretation of the information obtained and create an image of the studied community as culturally inferior. Atkinson-Sheppard, being a foreigner in Bangladesh, and Macaspac, a Filipino citizen raised in Manila and residing in the United States, both underscore the complex relationship and positionality each had to navigate. Specifically for Macaspac, the intricacies of his situation are highlighted as someone trained in the Global North and conducting ethnographic research in his home country, the Global South. Mattheis provides a clear self-visualization and understanding of how her "identity, experience, and privilege as a white woman raised in the middle class in the United States who is committed to promoting social equality and equity" condition how she is perceived. The essence of who we are is not something we can change quickly, if at all.

A strategy that is not commonplace but has been employed by some of our researchers to enhance field understanding and mitigate the challenges of being in a "no man's land," as termed by Lambelet and colleagues, is the use of peer researchers. These individuals are typically either current or former members of the group being studied. Their insight into the people, codes, language, and culture of the group enables us to bridge the gap between our distinct worlds more easily. Menih employs this strategy, collaborating with a woman well-versed in the dynamics and codes of street life, whom she refers to as a "cultural consultant". Similarly, Atkinson-Sheppard, adopted this approach by working with a human rights worker who had previously experienced homelessness. Prado, in her research, enlisted members from her research center, such as researchers or field assistants of diverse nationalities, cultures, and languages, to aid in understanding the cultural and linguistic context of her study. Feixa went so far as to hire a gang member as a research assistant, which facilitated interaction with other gang members, transcription of interviews, and assistance in interpreting the results. This gang member is also acknowledged as a coauthor in the book they coproduced. Undoubtedly, this underutilized strategy not only offers significant support in research but also carries the potential to empower the studied group or individual by providing them a direct voice.

Most of the time, the relationship between researchers and participants is imbalanced due to inherent structural inequalities. Contributors to this book specifically note that these relationships are not based on friendship or colleague rapport, but are rather unidirectional or based on mutual benefit. They caution against excessive emotional closeness, which can jeopardize the integrity of the investigation. While it is crucial not to foster friendships or a sense of equality with the participants, it is equally important to resist attempts by participants to assume a dominating role. Menih, cognizant of this, implemented preventive measures to avoid such circumstances. In the early stages of her research career, she, as a woman and young researcher, encountered patronizing attitudes from guards, which subsequently aided their understanding of the phenomenon. Sometimes participants may seek to challenge the researcher in a bid to comprehend their perspective. Bueno details instances where a participant deliberately created uncomfortable scenarios either for amusement or to test the researcher's boundaries, such as by exaggerating sexual information or adopting a seductive demeanor. Asking Carthy about parents' occupations could lead to awkward situations, especially when social class is considered, as it may undermine the researcher's credibility with the participant. Such attempts are often seen as an effort to shift the power dynamic. In Vallés' experience, one of the community's highly respected elders failed to show up at the agreed meeting time and place. Later, the same elder appeared unannounced at the researcher's house, asserting his authority. The authors typically manage these situations by maintaining silence, indicating that certain comments are inappropriate, and continuing with the interview. Nonconfrontation is generally viewed as the best strategy in these scenarios.

3.2 Locations and Times

The locations where interactions between participants and researchers took place have exhibited significant diversity, as evident in the multitude of research experiences contained in this book. Based on the authors' contributions, three types of spaces can be identified. The first type encompasses the settings where the phenomenon under observation naturally occurs, necessitating the researchers' presence in those locations. For instance, Turner conducted his research on leisure in Ibiza, which involved observing and engaging with participants in airports in the United Kingdom and Ibiza, various hotels, pool areas, cafes, restaurants, bars, and super clubs on the island. Vallés established a meeting space within the garden of the house he rented. Bliesemann de Guevara and Macaspac encountered a unique situation in rural communities in Colombia and the Philippines, where participants lacked neutral places like cafes that are commonly found in urban areas; consequently, meetings often had to be relocated to farmlands or homes, a practice that may not align with research ethics committee recommendations. The notion of "where the phenomenon occurs" poses intriguing connotations in the cyber world. In the research conducted by Moneva and colleagues on cybercriminals, accessing

these individuals proves challenging yet not impossible. They navigate the digital spaces where cybercriminals socialize and exchange knowledge, such as forums, chats, and social media platforms. A similar approach applies to forums or online environments where cyberbullying occurs, as in the case explored by Vandebosch and Pabian.

When the choice of location is not influenced by the aforementioned reasons, the key factor is to identify a space where participants feel comfortable. In many cases, participants are given the autonomy to decide the location themselves, a practice that is commonly followed by the authors of this book. The range of spaces chosen by participants has been diverse. For example, interactions have taken place in parish offices in the study of Balcells and Tamarit; NGO premises or social workers' offices in Menih's research; a caravan accommodating sex workers or sex work parlors in Molnar's case; public places such as cafeterias, offices, or private homes in Díaz's study; parliamentarians' offices in Coller and Alcántara's research; or the authors' professional offices as reported Diamint and Martínez. Ensuring privacy can be challenging in small communities, whether they are rural towns or state prisons. Vallés, Boxall, and colleagues emphasize the importance of selecting a space that maximizes participant comfort and facilitates information sharing while adhering to the security requirements outlined by ethics committees. Even in seemingly public spaces like the streets or bus stops where individuals experiencing homelessness spend their days, or in shelters where they stay overnight as in Menih's case, negotiation regarding both the space and time of interaction remains crucial.

In general, the amount of time available for the authors of this book to spend with participants has been limited. One hour is typically allocated for conducting interviews, although there are instances where the duration significantly extends beyond this timeframe. Examples of longer interviews can be found in the works of Menih, Díaz, and Coller and Alcántara, among others. Molnar and Vallés had interview durations ranging from 20 minutes to 2 hours, similar to the range observed in the interviews conducted by Diamint and Martínez. This demonstrates that the duration of interviews is not necessarily linked to the type of participants involved. Güerri and Martí highlight that the available time was often reduced due to various internal processes that needed to be followed, starting from the moment of arrival at the penitentiary until the inmate's presence.

Participant observation, although not common among the authors of this book, presents a separate case. Notable examples include Turner's 3-month immersion on the island of Ibiza in August over three different years, Atkinson-Sheppard's 3-year study with street children, and Molnar's several years of engagement with sex workers, as well as Menih's involvement with women experiencing homelessness. When conducting research using the Internet or other technologies, the element of time also plays a significant role. Ball and Broadhurst highlight that in their study of cybercrime and darknet services, interaction with participants can be a protracted process, involving delays between asking a question in a forum and receiving a response, and repeating the cycle. On the other hand, Moneva and colleagues note that offline interviews tend to require less time, and different types of data can be obtained. Some researchers have also found success with alternative formats for interviews, such as audio exchanges, as a variant of the traditional interview.

It is rather unlikely that researchers would have the opportunity to contact the same person again to gather missed information. Therefore, the experiences of the researchers underscore the unique and invaluable nature of each interaction with a participant. Each interaction represents a virtually irreplaceable opportunity to obtain crucial information and construct meaning together. However, Halty did interview once or twice on a more regular basis: the first time for the interview and the second time to administer a supplementary test. In other cases, the challenges of conducting a second interview were often associated with cumbersome and time-consuming bureaucratic processes, as observed in Ingrascì's research with the *pentiti*. That is the reason why in her case interviews lasted between 4 and 8 hours. Nonetheless, there was an exceptional situation where Ingrascì deemed it necessary to make the effort to request a new interview with one of the participants.

3.3 Transparency

Transparency is both a value and a tool for researchers seeking access to the field. It is a crucial element that should be present throughout all phases of research. Its importance lies in establishing and maintaining credibility, which allows researchers to effectively collect the necessary data. Coller and Alcántara, who have been conducting studies on parliamentary elites for over 30 years, emphasize the need to explain their objectives transparently and demonstrate reliability through previous research and publications. By showcasing their track record and commitment to protecting sources and sensitive information, they establish their scientific credibility. They also direct potential participants to their research group's website, further emphasizing their transparent approach.

In addition to obtaining informed consent, it is crucial to provide potential participants with comprehensive information about the research project, including its objectives, research team, funding, and other relevant details. In a digital age where researchers' online presence can be easily scrutinized, creating a web page – whether personal or institutional – housing information about the researchers and their work can serve as a beneficial strategy. By referring potential participants and organizations to this webpage, researchers can establish credibility and transparency, showcasing their previous articles, reports, press releases, or television appearances. Coller and Alcántara have successfully employed this approach, and Diamint and Martínez express regret that they did not do the same, as it could have potentially alleviated some of the suspicions some participants had on their work. Several authors, including Coller and Alcántara, Díaz, and Balcells and Tamarit, emphasize that gatekeepers and some participants explicitly or implicitly conveyed that they had researched their identities before granting access to the study.

However, there are certain contexts where achieving such transparency is not feasible. For example, inmates in correctional facilities often lack Internet access, making it impossible for them to independently verify the researcher's identity or credibility. This can create a fertile ground for suspicion, with inmates perceiving

the researcher as an undercover police officer seeking to extract information. In some cases, providing personal information about the researcher can even pose a safety risk, as illustrated by Halty's experience with criminal psychopaths. Navigating the balance between transparency and potential risks or constraints posed by specific settings is a complex endeavor. Researchers must carefully consider the context and the potential implications before deciding on the level of transparency that can be reasonably achieved while ensuring the safety and ethical integrity of the study.

Transparency encompasses not only revealing the identity of researchers but also effectively communicating their research objectives. Carthy and Schuurman recognized that their initial verbose and formal messages to potential participants might have deterred some from participating. Reflecting on this issue, they adjusted their approach and found greater success. They began with a concise introductory message and then arranged phone or Skype appointments to discuss the research in detail, including informed consent procedures. This shift in strategy proved to be more effective in engaging potential participants. The importance of providing comprehensive information extends beyond researcher identity. Gassó and Gómez-Durán's experience highlights the significance of conveying all necessary details. When sending questionnaires on teenagers' sexual behavior to school principals, they observed that those who received the questionnaire were more open to discussing the data collection process and informing parents, compared to principals who did not receive the questionnaire. The latter group, in large numbers, declined to participate in the study. This demonstrates the impact of providing information and engaging stakeholders, which can influence their willingness to collaborate.

In the study of phenomena like cybercrime, Moneva and colleagues highlight the value of public profiles that allow participants to verify the researcher's identity and authenticity. Ingrascì's experience with *pentiti*, who have been conditioned to be suspicious since childhood, further underscores the need to create a trustworthy environment. In cases such as Díaz's engagement with intelligence officers, where confusion with journalists or curiosity-seekers must be avoided, strict adherence to anticipated topics and the distribution of his research center's business card served as protective measures. The challenge of establishing trust is also evident in Feixa's work with gang members, who initially questioned his identity as a researcher, suspecting him of being a policeman or journalist. Macaspac, in his research on rural communities, had to navigate between the roles of "social worker" and "political activist" to gain acceptance and build rapport. Overall, transparency plays a vital role in research, ensuring credibility, generating trust, and facilitating fruitful engagement with participants. By openly communicating objectives, demonstrating reliability, and adapting to the specific context, researchers can establish the necessary foundations for successful data collection and collaboration.

Transparency serves also as a means to address participants' concerns and misconceptions regarding the purpose and focus of the research. In cases where sensitive or controversial topics are being investigated, participants may question the

motives behind the study. Balcells and Tamarit encountered such inquiries when investigating cases of abuse within the Church. Participants expressed curiosity about why the researchers chose to focus on this particular aspect rather than other topics like Catholic family dynamics or education. By being transparent and open about their intentions and motivations, the researchers could provide participants with a clearer understanding of the research objectives. Similarly, Molnar and Vallés faced questions from Roma community members who wondered why the researchers were specifically interested in studying the Roma population and not non-Roma individuals. In this case, transparency was necessary to address concerns about potential biases or misconceptions. By engaging in open dialogue and explaining the reasons for their research focus, the researchers could dispel any notions of favoritism or disregard for other cultural groups. By addressing participants' concerns and providing clear explanations for the research focus, researchers can build rapport and alleviate any doubts about their intentions.

Related to transparency, some researchers engage themselves to provide feedback to the participants and stakeholders about the results of the research. Brunovskis, Surtees, and Halty found that promising to provide feedback to organizations eased access to trafficked persons and criminal psychopaths, respectively. However, caution is needed regarding the "price" of such access. For Halty, informed consent must include this communication of results and parents must understand the difference between being informed of research results and receiving an individualized report on whether their child "meets the criteria for psychopathy." In the case of sex offenders, Bueno recommends providing feedback to the prison director at the end of the fieldwork, without revealing specific individual data. Coller and Alcántara found that sending parliamentarians a preview of the results before publication kept participation high across different waves of the study. Diamint and Martínez encountered more issues than benefits when providing intermediate data, as attempts to alter or influence the investigation emerged once preliminary data were known.

Nevertheless, a recurring theme is that participants often express preference to the researcher that certain parts of the interviews or meetings remain unrecorded. In such instances, the investigator must balance the convenience of having the recording against the likelihood of gathering more information if the session is not recorded. When recording is not feasible, swift note-taking or jotting down of key words becomes essential, followed by documenting the information immediately after the interview concludes. Memory should never be the sole method of information retention, given its selective nature where some elements adhere more firmly than others. Bueno suggests having a second researcher present, particularly if the primary investigator is inexperienced. This approach, however, is often unfeasible due to budgetary constraints. In Bueno's case, postgraduate students were hired for this role. Instances of dual-researcher presence are also seen in the fieldwork of Coller and Alcántara, as well as Balcells and Tamarit.

3.4 Rapport

Numerous chapters have extensively discussed the diverse strategies employed to establish rapport with research participants, reflecting the varied personalities of researchers. Transparency, as mentioned above, is a key step to cultivate rapport. Researchers have employed various strategies to establish rapport with participants, all centered around connecting with the human being behind the "participant." Some strategies are basic, such as personalizing invitations, addressing participants by name, or engaging in conversations on topics unrelated to the research. Other strategies involve nonverbal cues, such as maintaining eye contact, using animated facial expressions and reassuring tones of voice, and minimizing interruptions during observations by refraining from taking notes, giving participants sufficient time to interact, avoiding impatience, utilizing open-ended dialogue-style questions, discussing sports or employing humor are additional rapport-building techniques cited by most of authors. In addition, respecting cultural differences and sensitivities has also been cited as key elements in establishing rapport with participants.

In addition, the significance of speaking to participants in their language with their vocabulary is emphasized across various contexts, including intelligence officers by Díaz, police officers by Burkhardt and Boivin, sex workers by Molnar, women experiencing homelessness by Menih, migrant women by Mesquita and Faria, cybercriminals by Moneva, Leukfeldt, and Romagna, military elites by Diamint and Martínez, and probationers by Lambelet, Ros, and Loetzer. Speaking their language entails understanding their world and the experiences they will be asked to share. Demonstrating a lack of understanding of their world not only hampers cooperation, but can also engender suspicion, as highlighted by Moneva, Leukfeldt, and Romagna in their research on cybercrime. This understanding does not always have to be limited to technical knowledge specific to the research topic. Borges not only adapted her language to that of the refugee women but also took the initiative to learn about their countries of origin and the names of regional dishes, further enhancing the connection and rapport established. Carthy and Schuurman draw attention to the importance of language use when dealing with terrorists or members of extremist groups, as certain words or phrases may resonate positively with some individuals while causing offense to others. In the case of Boxall and colleagues, gatekeepers warned them that using terms like "perpetrators", "abusers" or "offenders" in recruitment materials could hinder the recruitment process and subsequent rapport with the participants. Similarly, Güerri and Martí point out that researchers are often unfamiliar with the slang used in prisons, at least initially, prompting them to request translation of prison-specific terminology into their own vocabulary during initial meetings.

However, certain situations present challenges in cultivating rapport due to the lack of control over the interview environment and conditions. For instance, Ingrascì highlights the scenario where she interviewed mafia *pentiti*, wherein the police could ask to be present. In such instances, the researcher's primary challenge was to disregard the police's presence, although complete control over the participant's

ability to do the same was limited. Similarly, Halty acknowledges the difficulty of building rapport with inmates within a prison setting. Bueno concurs with this predicament, specifically within the context of engaging sex offenders in prison; in this case, in addition, there were the serious consequences for him if the rest of the inmates discovered the crime for which he was in prison. Nonetheless, the lack of control over the interview environment is not exclusively confined to prison settings. Vallés' research with the Roma community exemplifies situations where the interview took place in the Roma women's homes, and the men "joined the interview and took control of the answers" […] "relegating the women to the background."

The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated modifications in fieldwork, rendering the task of generating rapport more challenging. Nonetheless, researchers whose fieldwork was affected generally report that it was still possible to establish acceptable rapport through virtual platforms or even when physical distancing and face mask that covered a significant portion of the face were required. Mesquita and Faría conducted interviews with migrant women online amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. To ensure the participants' freedom of expression, a code word was established to indicate if they were no longer alone in the room, hindering open communication. Additionally, the presence of a translator sharing the screen with the researcher and the refugee woman further complicated the situation, impeding the researchers' ability to simultaneously comprehend the participant's words and nonverbal cues.

Establishing rapport with individuals who are significantly different from us, as often encountered in the topics explored in this book, can be tremendously complex. Several authors in this work express their initial fears and concerns about developing hatred or strong repulsion toward the participants once they come face-to-face with them. This apprehension is understandable, considering the abhorrent behaviors some participants have engaged in, such as committing acts of violence against vulnerable individuals or even murdering their own family members. Mattheis, a researcher studying male supremacism, faced a unique situation where she herself is identified as a threat by the very groups she studies, experiencing episodes of online harassment. Ingrascì reflects on the conflicting feelings she experienced when listening to a 'Ndrangheta *pentito's* account of a series of murders, describing it as a horrible reaction within herself. However, she managed to maintain a neutral attitude during the interview, perceiving the interview setting as a separate world that facilitated this neutrality. Yet, she acknowledges the difficulties of coping with those feelings once she left the setting and transcribed the interview. Carthy and Schuurman discuss how encounters with participants can generate discomfort and even anger, serving as reminders of researchers' own biases. In certain cases, the researcher's position vis-à-vis the participant can be even more complex to manage. Halty, for instance, describes her participants as criminal psychopaths with a superficial charm and manipulative capabilities, despite the atrocious acts they have committed, such as the violent deaths of siblings or parents.

Rapport, however, does not serve as an impenetrable defense against deception or distortion from the participants. The identification of the latter is imperative to protect the reliability and validity of the research. Halty candidly acknowledges instances where participants have lied to her, either from the beginning of the

interview or even midway through. She has learned not to confront them, as it can introduce an additional element to assess psychopathy, and more importantly, confrontation does not facilitate the progression of the interview. A similar situation involving manipulation of the study was encountered by Friis, van Lith, van Bruchem, and Lindegaard in their research on violent interactions between ticket inspectors and ticketless passengers in public buses in Denmark. To promote utmost transparency regarding their research objectives, participants were provided with prior research findings. This allowed them to familiarize themselves with the researchers' hypotheses and the specific observations the researchers sought to make. However, some participants later expressed suspicions that certain participants (ticket inspectors) had modified their behavior while under observation. Whether driven by different motives or sharing similar reasons, instances of deception can also manifest in the cyber world as highlighted by Moneva and colleagues. In such cases, participants may attempt to impress the interviewer by exaggerating or downplaying their activities or may choose to engage in an agreeable and accommodating conversation rather than a challenging one.

3.5 Compensation

Compensation plays a pivotal role in influencing the recruitment of potential participants. It can be material or immaterial, from financial incentives to social benefits. While monetary compensation may seem the most direct means of attracting participants, this book's authors often did not favor it, either by choice or necessity. Fernández and Bartolomé encountered issues when offering gift cards as compensation, inciting discontent among non-recipients at a youth center. They even faced instances of blackmail, such as a minor demanding increased pay and threatening to delay the interview. In response, they chose to withdraw the offer and lose the participant. Güerri and Martí attempted to compensate inmates, but they were often hampered by budgetary limitations or bureaucratic constraints. Putting money into each participant's prison account proved burdensome for staff, leading to alternative suggestions such as donations of books or soccer equipment.

Carthy and Schuurman rejected a proposal to gain access to terrorists, who had not previously been part of any scientific research, in return for financial incentives. Similarly, Feixa was usually hesitant to offer payment, fearing it could engender a "chain of interest" that might bias the results. Nonetheless, Feixa made an exception by compensating a gang member for project hours. He could not, however, hire a Latin King or a Ñeta due to funding institutions' refusal – a hurdle he later overcame. Menih chose not to compensate her homeless women participants, opting instead to build trust. This decision proved effective as none of the women sought compensation. However, she did offer coffee and cookies. Atkinson-Sheppard used a similar approach, providing food or money to street children in Bangladesh while observing their daily routines.

Nonmaterial forms of compensation can also prove effective. Halty found that the opportunity to break the monotony of daily life was a significant incentive for young inmates to participate in her studies. The researcher's mere presence could act as a protective element against extortion or violence, according to Bliesemann de Guevara and Macaspac. Other researchers found value in communicating the importance and uniqueness of the participants' contributions, or earning the support of a prestigious or authoritative figure. Moneva and colleagues found that IT security students might prefer extra assignment points over modest monetary compensation, highlighting the potential appeal of nonmaterial incentives. Vandebosch and Pabian took a novel approach by raffling a cinema ticket among participating schoolchildren.

However, caution should be exercised when compensation is linked to personal benefits, particularly among vulnerable populations. Güerri, Martí, Carthy, Schuurman, Bliesemann de Guevara, and Macaspac emphasized that researchers must be clear that participation would not impact personal circumstances, such as prison benefits or relocation assistance for refugees. Misleading participants could give the false impression that the researcher can improve their situation, potentially affecting the data's reliability, and the "voluntariness" of their participation.

3.6 Protection of the Participants

Participant's protection plays a significant role in the research projects included in this book. Researchers take various steps to protect participants from stigmatization and harm. The protection of research participants is encapsulated in a well-known document referred to as the informed consent. This document, typically the outcome of careful deliberation by the researcher and, potentially, the ethics committee, outlines the terms for interaction between the participant and the researcher. The key elements of informed consent include understanding, capacity to consent, and voluntariness. First, the prospective participant must comprehensively understand what they are consenting to. To enhance understanding, Carthy and Schuurman present the document after an initial discussion; however, this strategy is not universally effective. Due to the complexity of addressing ethical issues and the low literacy level among participants, Molnar and Vallés explained them that informed consent is a requirement from their university to ensure respect for the person. Menih made extensive efforts to explain her research objectives to women in street situations slowly and in simple terms.

The second aspect is the capacity to consent. Commonly, this involves minors and individuals in state custody, as illustrated by the cases of Halty, Pereda, and Bueno. In the research on cyberbullying by Vandebosch and Pabian, after securing parental consent, the minors were asked if they wished to participate, investing significant effort in explaining the nature of their participation. Fernández and Bartolomé sought consent from parents or guardians, but always asked the minors if they wished to be part of the study. They advise working with participants who

can legally consent, that is, those aged 14 and older in Spain. Therefore, contacting parents, either directly or through schools, is vital, as studies involving minors often go through school channels. In situations where participants are held in establishments or institutions under state control, the ethical responsibility shifts to these gatekeepers. Regarding street children, due to the inability to contact their parents, the director of the NGO where they stayed consented on their behalf. With detained minors, Halty left consent to be arranged directly between the center and the families. Only in the case of Brunovskis and Surtees was a minor denied continued participation in the study despite parental consent, indicating a gatekeeper's intent to protect the NGO. In studies involving online communities, consent management can become complicated. When participants might be lying about their age, attempting to seek parental consent could risk losing valuable sample data. When in doubt, it is recommended to treat participants as minors.

Finally, voluntariness in participation need to be considered from various angles. It entails eliminating coercive elements and using an approach that reinforces the voluntary nature of participation. Importantly, power imbalances between the researcher and the participant, as pointed out by Vandebosch and Pabian, can result in individuals feeling pressured to participate or continue participation. Researchers must be alert to any discomfort that might invalidate given consent. In the case of minors, they might comply due to expectations from parents or gatekeepers. This dynamic can also occur in environments with power imbalances, such as the military training centers in Martínez's study. In a highly hierarchical environment where dissent is not a valued element of the organizational culture, trainees in a military classroom have few options to show that their consent is not voluntary or even to leave. The cyber world introduces complexities around obtaining consent. The ongoing debate about the public or private nature of online information and the need for informed consent is aptly described by Mattheis. In situations involving honeypots, ethical dilemmas arise since we might be deceiving the participant by not informing them about the study. With groups that perceive informed consent as dangerous, such as immigrant minors, consent can be both verbal and written. For individuals who view signing official documents as risky or testimonial, recorded oral consent can be utilized. In certain situations where recorded oral consent is inappropriate or unsafe, the researcher can use "single-party testimonial consent."

Anonymization of participants is a fundamental measure of protection. Several methods are used by researchers to maintain the anonymity of their subjects, such as replacing names with codes or pseudonyms. This process extends not only to transcripts or recordings but can also be applied in informed consent. However, care must be taken to ensure that the data provided do not allow for deductive revelation of the participant's identity, especially in small communities or specific populations. When considering online research and cybercrime, anonymity extends to nicknames and online identifiers. Similar to physical-world names, these nicknames are unique identifiers within their online communities. Moreover, researchers must be mindful of rephrasing online messages or communications as they can be traced back to the participants.

A significant dimension of protection also involves not revealing all the information collected. This raises questions about whether this constitutes self-censorship or participant's protection. Some researchers acknowledge they are more considerate about what information to disclose, especially when the information may have a potential negative impact on survivors or specific groups. Finally, the media plays a dual role in research dissemination. While it can be an ally in broadcasting research findings to a broader audience, it can also attract undesirable attention. This media attention could lead to adverse outcomes ranging from the loss of funding to the stigmatization of the research group or community. It is therefore essential for researchers to prepare and manage their research dissemination materials carefully and potentially liaise with their institutions' press and scientific dissemination services for effective media management.

3.7 Emotional Risks

In this collection of experiences, the editors note that while situational risks have garnered some attention in the recommendations from ethics committees, emotional risks have received less. Several researchers admitted overlooking the potential emotional cost of their research topics, especially early in their careers. In addition, some experienced serious emotional attacks or pressures. Mattheis faced harassment from extremists on social media, receiving varied responses from peers, however without a clear line of action ranging from the opposite extremes of "fight back" to "don't feed the trolls." On the other hand, researchers such as Borges and Faría felt helpless about their inability to help more to these refugee women, and Bueno had disturbing experiences working with inmates who had abused minors. Notably, emotional exposure does not exclusively stem from personal contact; it can also arise from interacting with materials. For instance, Mattheis found her work with subjects related to hate, extremism, and violence particularly challenging due to the disturbing content, while Burkhardt and Boivin mention the traumatic effect on watching highly violent police content.

Emotion management should ideally start before entering the field, as Atkinson-Sheppard illustrates, who dealt with shock and anxiety while working with street children. Likewise, Pereda highlights the emotional impact of working with victimized minors, and Prado echoes the same sentiment from his experience with incarcerated youth. However, safety recommendations provided by ethics committees to address such issues seem insufficient. Mattheis, for instance, found a lack of resources and guidance to tackle harassment. The accounts presented in this book highlight the pressing need for more attention to emotional risks, which, if left unaddressed, can profoundly affect researchers. Enhanced support from ethics committees and more robust systems to deal with these emotional challenges are necessary for the well-being of researchers and the integrity of the research process.

Authors' strategies to minimize the emotional fatigue can take many forms, such as delaying interviews, taking breaks, or reducing the intensity of fieldwork.

However, even with such strategies, researchers often grapple with strong emotions like anger, grief, frustration, powerlessness, fear, exhaustion, distress, and disgust. Consequently, they have developed various coping mechanisms such as limiting the number of cases worked on per day, meditation, mindfulness techniques, maintaining general fitness, and spending time in nature. Above all, debriefing with colleagues, partners, or supervisors seems to be a common and critical emotional protection technique used by almost all researchers. However, the responsibility often falls on close associates and family members, who most probably do not have the specific training needed to assist in the process. Keeping a fieldwork journal has also proven extremely useful for many researchers as it serves not only to document their work but also to record their experiences and emotions. Despite these strategies, researchers must confront the realities of project timelines and funding, which may restrict their ability to take necessary breaks.

The role of transcriptionists and translators in research is frequently underestimated – as research actors – yet their involvement is crucial. These professionals form the bridge between raw data and analyzable material, transforming spoken words into written text or translating content into other languages. Their work goes far beyond a mere literal conversion. They are often tasked with conveying complex and nuanced linguistic elements, which can profoundly impact the understanding and interpretation of the data. Incorporating transcriptionists and translators from the outset of a research project can have several benefits. First, it enables them to become familiar with the project's objectives, terminologies, and context. This early immersion can lead to more accurate and contextually relevant transcriptions or translations. Second, their integration from the inception of the project encourages trust-building between researchers and these professionals. This trust is key in ensuring open communication and mutual understanding, which can significantly enhance the accuracy and relevance of the transcribed or translated material. Finally, transcriptionists and translators can provide a layer of emotional protection. Research often involves dealing with sensitive or emotionally charged data. Having professionals who are skilled in handling such material can safeguard the emotional well-being of both participants and researchers while ensuring that the emotional undertones of the data are preserved and accurately reflected in the transcriptions or translations. Therefore, acknowledging the critical role of transcriptionists and translators and involving them from the beginning of a research project can profoundly enhance the research process and outcomes.

3.8 Departure from the Field

Regarding the departure from the field, formal farewells with gatekeepers, such as sending them a copy of the finished work or a summary of the main findings, seem to be common. This gesture not only shows appreciation for their assistance, but can also provide valuable feedback to help improve their work or practice. However, saying goodbye to participants can be more challenging due to a variety of reasons.

The researcher might continue being connected to the field, either through further similar research or by virtue of living in the same area. Researchers with an activist leaning may stay involved in advocacy for their participants or to continue addressing the issues studied.

Another consideration is the emotional toll and sense of responsibility researchers often feel toward their subjects. Some researchers find solace in the knowledge that their work could potentially help mitigate suffering or improve conditions for the participants or similar groups. It is also evident that giving feedback or providing a form of contact for participants can be an important part of the departure process, even if it is not always utilized by the participants. Researchers must also be cautious in navigating relationships with participants that might want to extend beyond the research project, particularly when dealing with sensitive topics or populations that might involve manipulation.

In many cases, a specific act or event symbolizing the farewell seems to be a fitting conclusion. This can take various forms, such as small parties or workshops to present the results. Some researchers have maintained a long and close relationship with some of the participants; however, it is not the most frequent. Ultimately, although parting can be difficult, both the researchers and their participants generally understand that it is an inevitable aspect of the research process.

3.9 Red Lines

Navigating the research ethics field is often complex, as it requires a delicate balance between obtaining the necessary data while ensuring participants' rights, privacy, and safety. It is, therefore, crucial to establish "red lines" or ethical boundaries that must not be crossed, both for the researcher and for the participants. It is interesting to note how different researchers address these red lines differently, depending on their research context. The boundary established by Carthy and Schuurman, for instance, serves to prevent participants from disclosing past or future illegal actions – what seems to be the most evident red line for most authors – that they have not previously revealed to the authorities. Similarly, Moneva, Leukfeldt, and Romagna ensured that their virtual interactions did not foster or encourage illegal activities.

Working with vulnerable groups, especially minors, poses additional red lines. In the case of Prado, the intention to commit suicide expressed by some minors required a specific protocol to ensure their safety. This included encouraging the minors to speak to a trusted inmate or prison professional and checking whether an anti-suicide protocol was in place. This example demonstrates the importance of having a plan for possible crises and being proactive in ensuring participants' welfare. Fernández and Bartolomé highlight two scenarios where confidentiality commitment can be breached: when minors are victims of abuse or mistreatment, and when they are causing harm to themselves or others. The latter scenario aligns with Prado's approach, but it also involves notifying the authorities. The same strategy

was employed by Vandebosch and Pabian when they observed severe cases of cyberbullying.

Addressing the issue of minors revealing criminal acts, Halty's approach demonstrates the importance of ensuring the welfare of the child over strict adherence to confidentiality. She proposes a process of discussion and mediation, guiding the minor toward disclosure of that information to the person in charge of the center. Similarly, Atkinson-Sheppard, while working on the streets of Bangladesh, agreed on a child protection policy with the NGO director, which involves mutual consultation and assistance when a child discloses a risk to themselves or others. These cases underscore the complexity of working with minors and the importance of prioritizing their safety.

However, it is crucial to understand the implications of cultural and geographical context when dealing with these issues. Not every approach that works in the Global North can be applicable in the Global South, due to potential lack of social services or the risk that police involvement might pose to the child. As such, researchers must adapt their red lines and responses to suit the specific contexts in which they work. Furthermore, researchers must also establish boundaries unrelated to legal issues, to preserve their objectivity and the validity of their work. Menih, for instance, decided not to consume alcohol when offered, while Turner made it a point not to interview individuals in extreme states of intoxication. These guidelines are important to maintain the researcher's professional conduct and to ensure reliable data collection. But the researcher must know when to intervene. For example, in a case of severe ecstasy intoxication of one of the tourists, contrary to what the girl's friends said, Turner decided to call two doctors to help the tourist. And this situation leads Turner to state that these red lines are an "issue that requires careful consideration before starting the fieldwork."

These examples show that establishing ethical boundaries is not a one-size-fits-all process. Instead, it requires careful consideration of the specific research context and participants involved. However, some common principles apply across different scenarios, such as the need for clear communication about these red lines and the informed consent process, a commitment to prioritize participants' welfare, and a readiness to act responsibly when these lines are crossed. Despite the complexities and challenges, the ultimate aim is to ensure research integrity and respect for participants' rights and dignity.

4 Looking Forward: Lessons Learned

The wide range of experiences detailed in this book makes it challenging to extract a singular set of lessons learned; indeed, it could be argued that this section on lessons learned reflects the biases of the three editors who have penned them and may be more a result of our own perceptions, needs, insecurities, and certainties when it comes to fieldwork. Regardless, it is crucial to conclude with the understanding that

these lessons serve as reflection points and potential avenues for improving research in criminology and security studies.

The first lesson we have drawn emphasizes the need for flexibility in approaching the field. If any research topic can be erratic and unpredictable, this is especially true for sensitive hard-to-reach groups. Consequently, we must prepare intensively for the moment when the field reveals all its facets and aspects of the problem and be ready for surprises. Turner, for instance, shares his insights on which is the best timing to ask participants about illegal drug use. The timing is not exact, so the researcher's most valuable tool is the ability to "read the dynamics of the situation and instinctively know when it feels okay to ask these difficult questions." Ingrascì discusses "how to make this space rewarding without neglecting rigorous procedures and overcoming the pitfalls that this field of research produces by definition," a feat achieved by "emphasizing transparency and reflexivity as much as possible." Despite the long duration of fieldwork on these topics, most of the investigations included in this book limit contact with the participant to a single occasion. This solitary instance, though unique, is the time from which we must extract as much information as possible. Consequently, we may have a distorted perception of the field and believe we have broad knowledge when, in reality, we merely possess fragments of numerous individuals' lives and experiences. Therefore, preparing thoroughly and ensuring a good sample are essential tasks.

Second, the need for better training to manage the multitude of varied and intense emotions generated in the field is an aspect all researchers agree upon. Beyond having a protocol provided by or developed in collaboration with the ethics committee, it is essential to train doctoral students and early-career researchers, as pointed out by Borges and Mattheis and corroborated by nearly all researchers. Mattheis even mentions including a provision for "trauma counseling" in his recent grant applications. This focus should extend to often-overlooked roles, such as translators or transcribers, who handle sensitive material alongside researchers.

Third, the positionality of the researcher and their relationship with the subject under investigation is a significant concern for researchers, especially given the lack of information, training, and most importantly, reflection. The sensitivity of certain subjects, whether due to the vulnerability of the participants or the detestable nature of their behavior, can make it challenging to identify our position during fieldwork. The diverse cultural schemas we have can cause certain situations and relationships to carry different meanings. As Molnar and Vallés have suggested, we must "be self-critical and question our own assumptions." The concept of normality, for instance, varies between a repentant mafia woman and a street child working in an "illegal" capacity. Both have worldviews that may not align with those of the researcher, making it crucial to know where we stand.

Researcher activism is another important aspect. It is complex to enter these fields, conduct research, and leave without aspiring to effect some change in the unjust relations we have witnessed. Some researchers clearly state their stance before entering the field, while others advocate that the knowledge gained, despite the associated emotional cost and hardship, should be used to better societal policies regarding significant social issues. The research field often serves as a medium for

the researcher to perceive unexplored human dimensions and reflect on possible courses of action. Therefore, it is essential to engage young researchers in conscious reflection on their approach to the subject of study, particularly the participatory action research approach.

Fifth, data protection is another area requiring further improvement. Many researchers have acknowledged that current data protection systems have weaknesses. Not all of us have the technical expertise to fully understand the intricacies of the cloud where we store our data, the devices we connect it to, or what residual data might remain on another system or cloud when we delete it. There have been instances when we have retained data for future reference or situations when a research fellow who had a copy of the database misplaced their computer or left the research center without returning the data. Thus, it is critical that we continue to improve on data encryption and de-anonymization, even during the research design process. Furthermore, we need to identify the most reliable video conferencing systems, as not all countries offer the same level of security in communications.

Sixth, one promising direction for future research is the application or adaptation of our current understanding of the digital world. What we have learned so far is that while some topics can be addressed with minor adaptations, others require us to learn from colleagues already exploring these areas, discussing their methodological adaptations. Aspects like data ownership, the observer's role, researcher safety, and research rhythms still need careful deliberation. Mattheis aptly notes that the protocols used in the so-called "real world" contexts may not have been fully adapted for digital research, and researchers engaging in online studies may not have received training on widely agreed ethical and safety protocols for their work.

Finally, more emphasis should be placed on exiting the field. They can be emotionally and logistically challenging, but proper preparation and adaptability are necessary. We should honor our promises to participants and help them understand the process that has aroused our scientific curiosity. Simple gestures such as sending them summaries of the final conclusions in clear language can be a way to reciprocate their time and attention. Or even producing an audio, or maybe a short video to ease them the access to the conclusions. We, as researchers, are the only ones who have a complete view of the whole research. We are the only ones who can give coherence to what we heard and experienced; however, for the participants, the transcribers, the translators, they will only have brushstrokes – sometimes painful ones – and for which they cannot create a narrative that helps them to cope with the potential emotional impact.

In sum, balancing methods, ethics, and emotions are indeed integral parts of research, especially when investigating sensitive topics. Our interest in these topics may stem from a desire to understand complex social problems and contribute toward solutions. By sharing these experiences, we can foster collective learning and improvement in our research practices. We hope that the experiences and knowledge gained over the years by all the authors during their fieldwork can be invaluable not only for us, but also for other researchers navigating similar paths.