Researching Appointment Robbery: Voices from the Street

by

Arthur Gregory Vasquez

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Dissertation Committee

Dr. Alejandro Rodriguez
Dr. Jiwon Suh
Dr. Maria Martinez-Cosio

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Abstract

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Arthur Vasquez, Ph.D.

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Supervising Professor: Alejandro Rodriguez, Ph.D.

This dissertation is composed of three papers that will examine three topics related to the main research project of examining whether or not CPTED strategies have an effect on the decision to participate in appointment robbery. The first paper examines the difficulties in gaining access with the hard-to-reach population of active offenders. The second paper will provide examples of ethical dilemmas that the qualitative researcher faced while in the field. The third paper will explore whether or not criminals were deterred from deciding to engage in criminal activity due to an implementation of a CPTED strategy. These three papers together will help illustrate the stages in an in-depth qualitative research project.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1

General Introduction

The occurrence of robbery can be influenced by various factors, including the victim's vulnerability, the offender's behavior, and appropriateness of the target location (Monk, Heinonen, & Eck, 2010). Prior research has indicated that robberies that occur in the street have a higher likelihood of reoccurring in the same or similar locations (Andersen, & Malleson, 2011; Curman, & Andersen, 2015; Weisburd, 2015; Weisburd, & Amram, 2014). Therefore, prior research enables the pursuit of examining the environmental factors where robberies occur (Weisburd, 2011). As a result, there is an increased recognition of the significance of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) as an important approach to attempt in reducing crime by altering the built environment (Cozens, Saville, & Hillier, 2005; Cozens & Love, 2015). While most criminal research has been concentrated on offender's psychological and biological factors, there are a growing number of scholars who are concerned in crime prediction based on situational factors, such as CPTED strategies, which can make criminal activity either more likely or less likely to happen in specific locations (Bennett, 1986; Shariati, & Guerette, 2017; Weisburd, 2015).

There is a high probability an individual residing within the United States has been a victim of a crime or knows a person who has. This is because according to the FBI's Uniform Crime Report there were a total of 16,398,785 crimes reported in 2019 (U.S. Department of Justice, 2019). With a U.S. population of 328,239,523, this breaks down to approximately a 1 in 20 chance in being a victim of a crime (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). During the same year, there were 267,988 robberies, which breaks down to a robbery rate of 81.6 per 100,000 individuals (U.S. Department of Justice, 2019). The Uniform Crime Report estimates that these robberies cost the victim on average $1,797, for a total estimated loss of $482 million dollars (U.S.

Department of Justice, 2019). Furthermore, the UCR indicates that among these robberies, weapons were used in 55.3% of the time, while strong-arm tactics were utilized in the other 44.8% of robberies. While the prevalence of robberies is known, researchers know less about how CPTED strategies affect target selection among offenders who are involved in appointment robbery.

Crime prevention is a difficult challenge, however the strategies of CPTED have shown it can decrease the potential for a crime at a specific location in such crimes as residential burglary (Marzbali et al., 2016), robbery (Castel & Peek-Asa, 2000), and appointment robbery (Vasquez et al., 2020). Reduction in crime can be obtained with modifications and planning to the physical environment thereby making involvement in criminal activity difficult to complete or by making the individual visible thus increasing the risk of being apprehended (Armitage, 2013; Poyner & Webb, 1991; Sakip & Abdullah, 2010). For example, New York was able to reduce outdoor nighttime index crimes by 36% by randomly installing temporary streetlight towers in public housing developments (Chalfin et al., 2019; Lawson et al., 2018). Prior research has discovered that the design of the physical environment can decrease crime in the beginning planning stages (Nasar & Fisher, 1993), design (Crowe, 2000), and by removing or adding certain design features (Newman, 1973). According to CPTED, the layout and the physical elements of an environmental structure are responsible for making opportunities conducive for illegal activity (Rostami & Madanipour, 2006). As a result, under CPTED, the causal factor that increases the potential for criminal activity is the poorly or ineffective designed physical environment (Anastasia & Eck, 2007).

The fundamental goal of CPTED is to deter crime through the ability to improve the social and physical conditions of the environment resulting in a safer environment (Cozens &

Love, 2015). To accomplish this, CPTED uses environmental and behavioral psychology to focus on the environmental associations and cues amongst the people and environment to influence how people react to the physical environment (Cozens & Love, 2015). It is these environmental cues that help make legitimate users of the spaces feel safe by endorsing prosocial activities as well as increasing visibility, by not only using the built environment, but also by using the natural strategies with the design (Cozens & Love, 2015). As a result, CPTED attempts to increase the psychological risks and visibility and the offender, thereby reducing the decision-making to commit crime (Cozens & Love, 2015).

Prior research states that it is difficult to obtain and gather data from active offenders (Armitage, & Monchuk, 2017). Data that examines the crime location consists of the micro-level factors and are currently limited (Weisburd, 2015). Analysis of the top-tier crime journal, Criminology, only 31 of the 719 articles (4.3%) evaluated micro-level factors affecting crime over a twenty-five year period (Weisburd, 2015). This fact illustrates the challenges related with conducting an analysis at the micro-level within the present criminal research. This is why this research is important since it can contribute the lack of micro-level factors affecting crime. Prior literature has illustrated how environmental alterations based on CPTED strategies can result in a psychological effect on the offender by increasing their perception of risk (Cozens & Love, 2015; Jacobs, 1961; Jeffery, 1971). Although, it is uncertain to what degree the environmental alterations truly prosper in deterring active robbers who participate in appointment robbery. The present study seeks to ask whether alterations in the physical environment change the perception of risk amongst a sample of active appointment robbers, and if so, whether this changes their decision to participant in criminal activity.

This dissertation is composed of three papers that will examine three topics related to the main research project of examining whether or not CPTED strategies have an effect on the decision to participate in appointment robbery. The first paper examines the difficulties in gaining access with the hard-to-reach population of active offenders. The second paper will provide examples of ethical dilemmas that the qualitative researcher faced while in the field. The third paper will explore whether or not criminals were deterred from deciding to engage in criminal activity due to an implementation of a CPTED strategy. These three papers together will help illustrate the stages in an in-depth qualitative research project.

1.1 The Problem: A New Type of Criminal Opportunity

The 21st century has created an explosion of direct e-commerce opportunities with app and online advertisements to facilitate selling and buying items through such venues as OfferUp, Letgo, Craigslist, and Facebook Marketplace. As a result of this explosion, a new form of criminal opportunity has evolved. These internet-based e-commerce apps allow anyone to search for, buy or sell anything they need, from a used office chair to a new vehicle. At the same time, these new app-based e-commerce websites also provide potential offenders various ways to search for targets to complete a predatory offense (Durkin, 2013). While most individuals see these new apps as a fast and easy way to make extra cash by posting an un-needed item for sale, offenders see it as an easy way to specifically select the victim, location, and reward. The new marketplace apps promote an easy way to eliminate the middleman's fees (e.g. Ebay and Amazon), however individuals have to deal with the chances of being a victim of a robbery (Consumer Federation of America, 2018).

1.2 New Crime Definition

A main point of the research was to clearly separate and identify this specific type of robbery from other types of robbery. At the present moment, there is not a unified adopted term that all jurisdictions, cities, and states use to differentiate this type of robbery from the standard type of robbery. The type of robbery discussed within this study is a direct result from setting up the appointment to rob the person through utilizing an electronic device and/or cell phone app. When offenders use these direct e-commerce apps to set up a robbery, they are doing so by clearly identifying the victim, selecting the robbery location, and specifically choosing their reward.

The FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting program currently defines robbery "as the taking or attempting to take anything of value from the care, custody, or control of a person or persons by force or threat of force or violence and/or putting the victim in fear" (U.S. Department of Justice, 2010). However, when you want to know how many of the documented robberies are directly tied to the use of the offender setting up the appointment to rob them, there is not a clear number. Since there is no current universal definition for this new type of crime, it is difficult to get an accurate account of the frequency of this type of crime. For example, Los Angeles uses 'cybercrime' in some cases and 'robbery' in other cases. In various other cities they use 'online robberies' (Philadelphia), 'fraud' (Ohio & Louisiana), 'online marketplace robbery' (Detroit), and other entities use 'craigslist robbery.' Since there is not a universal adopted label for this new type of criminal activity, this paper argues for one. The suggested new term to label and identify this new type of criminal offense is 'appointment robbery'. This term was selected based on the offender's use of an electronic device and/or cell phone app to arrange the target, location, and the financial reward of the robbery. In most typical robberies, the offender does not

specifically know the financial reward or the target location and victim. However, by using an

app the offender can precisely select the reward, location, and victim. Therefore, the definition

used in this dissertation for an 'appointment robbery' is grounded in the FBI's robbery

definition, but adds the element of utilizing an electronic device to coordinate and complete the

robbery. Appointment robbery is now defined as the taking or attempting to take anything of

value from the care, custody, or control of a person or persons by force or threat of force or

violence and/or putting the victim in fear by way of using an electronic device and/or a cell

phone app to set up the robbery.

1.3 Paper 1 Summary

The first paper in this dissertation explores how similar identities and commitment acts helped

to gain access to the respondent's criminal underworld. More specifically, paper 1 examined how

the strategies of identity, rapport, and commitment acts aided in gaining access to the participants

as well as within their group. Prior research has shown that any shared identity characteristic can

help build trust (Kleinman, 1980; Tsuda, 1998). A familiar foundation of shared identities can

help in developing rapport with the individuals in the study (Kleinman, 1980). Once trust is

established, the researcher needs to maintain relationship and develop rapport. In this long term,

twenty-eight month-long research project, rapport became a blend of day-to-day interactions and

communications. The development of rapport could be facilitated as the researcher attempted to

understand the participants' perspectives by experiencing what they experience during the course

of the research project.

It is important to understand that when establishing rapport, identity matters. As the

researcher in this study observed, the researcher must recognize that the participants could have

some similar identity factors which could either help or not help how the participants could react

to the researcher. Typically, as in this study, these are usually centered on characteristics such as sex, race, age, social class, and other factors such as a similar background. Researchers who spend vast amounts of time with the participants in the field often find out that these shared identity characteristics can provide a common ground resulting in developing rapport more easily. However, at the same time, any differences between the researcher and the participant could also arise as well.

The paper also found that nurturing and developing the participant relationship is vital during fieldwork in order to gain and maintain access. It was also discovered that the level of the relationship can greatly affect the amount of access, transparency, and trust between the participants and researcher. Rapport cannot be developed quickly and easily since building rapport with participants typically takes a long time and is different for each participant and group. Additionally, rapport cannot be forced, it can only occur with openness and patience over time. Lastly, the paper found that commitment acts greatly aided in in developing a better foundation of trust, openness, and rapport amongst the researcher and participants. Commitment acts are 'acts' that are done to show the participants the level of investment and commitment the researcher has with the participant and group. These 'acts' do not have to be large or illegal; they can simply be acts of kindness or acceptance. The 'acts' are not done on purpose to gain access, since doing a commitment act does not automatically guarantee it will affect the relationship (Feldman et al., 2003). However, it was discovered that even a small commitment act, such as just eating 0.50 cent noodles together can show the participant that the researcher views them as an individual and not just a research subject.

Qualitative researchers ought to be sensitive to the developed and reciprocal nature of relationships built during fieldwork. The initial research relationship negotiated at the start of the

access process can shift as the researcher becomes more deeply embedded and immersed in the participant's lives. Therefore, what starts out as an instrumental relationship could change into a more transactional or relational one. It is important to understand the reciprocity of the access relationships and the researchers' limitations, meaning that it is important to recognize that the level of access is not only managed by the researcher, but access is based on the expectations, perceptions, and feelings of the group members, who could allow access, negotiate access, or refuse access. After accepting the level of access granted, it was found that the level of access and degree of closeness between the researcher and participants can and will shift overtime.

In this research, the researcher used participant observation as a qualitative tool to immerse himself into the environment and group of offenders. Immersion is not typically a tool used to interview participants, but the researcher's previous research experience demonstrated the importance that immersion can play in research with hard-to-reach populations and/or with sensitive issues such as appointment robbery. During this process, the researcher used strategies such as his identity and commitment acts to help develop rapport and gain access. Results indicate that the strategies of identity, rapport, and commitment acts were effective to identify gatekeepers and key informants, furthermore, the target population could not have been thoroughly examined without gaining access through these strategies.

1.4 Paper 2 Summary

The second paper in this dissertation examines the necessity of the researcher to be aware of potential ethical dilemmas during qualitative research with active offenders as well as to develop a course of action. The goal of the paper is to discuss the ethical dilemmas that emerged during the twenty-eight month-long qualitative research project and how the ethical dilemmas were addressed by the researcher. The results provide an insight into how new ethical dilemmas can be

encountered in today's technological climate. The ethical dilemmas discovered during the research project include the attempt of the researcher to separate the private life from work life, how to respond to 'friend requests', and how to ensure confidentiality was maintained during today's social network climate.

This paper aims to help qualitative researchers in being aware of the use of social networking sites as a form a relationship building as well as the potential ethical dilemmas associated with their use. The situations presented in the paper are by no means exhaustive; however, they are presented as examples of situations inherent with the digital age while conducting qualitative research. With the increased availability and use of social networking sites in today's time, it makes it difficult to keep one's private life separate when the researcher is out in the field for long periods. The dilemma of accepting a 'friend request' through a social networking site raises the issue of confidentiality. Navigating communication with participants through social networking websites is a modern form of a traditional dilemma in which qualitative researchers will have to increasingly have to anticipate and consider. As the paper provided examples, the researcher needed to respect the established friendships with the participants, and it could of made it unethical to ignore communication from them, even it was through a social networking website. The issue for both sides is that these websites make information about the researcher's personal life available, information that he may not want or intend to provide to participants, as well as to make their true identity, as 'friend' or participant, publicly known.

It was discovered during the research project that the frequency of contact varied for all participants. If the researcher set a once-a-week guideline for maintaining contact with each participant, it could result in making the participants feel pressured to check in, even though they did not want to. While some participants were okay with once a week contact, other participants

did not enjoy the guideline, essentially enjoying a spontaneous contact. Consequently, the frequency of contact was decided to be based on the participant and not set to a specific frequency. If the decision was to a set protocol, some of the participants would have felt obligated and decided to not continue in the research project.

Negotiating methods of contact was the next significant ethical dilemma to be addressed. This is because, as it was discovered in today's technological times, social networking and websites in general make it difficult to keep one's private life out of one's work life. Therefore, when the researcher decided to allow communication to include various types of social media, it created the dilemma of blending the private life and work life together. While the researcher initially saw it as protecting his private life, he did not see it as the participants genuinely wanting to know more about the primary researcher in hopes of developing a better relationship. As a result the dilemma of accepting or not accepting the initial 'friend request' was an important decision. If the request was denied, then it would let the participants know that I was not eager to be anything other than the researcher asking questions. If the 'friend request' was accepted, then I would agree to automatically blend the private life and work life. The dilemma was resolved by making personal control adjustments on the social media account to allow the researcher the ability to approve any posting on social media posting with 'tagged' the researcher's name or image. Additionally, each participant was notified that once the 'friend request' was accepted, they would lose their opportunity to maintain anonymity. In the end, the decision to expand communication into the social networking arena helped grow the researcher and participant relationship. These findings are important for future research since they are based on the future use and role that social networking sites can have in qualitative research and how researchers

need to be prepared to negotiate the ethical dilemmas associated when the researcher's private life and work life become blended.

1.5 Paper 3 Summary

The third paper in the dissertation examines whether or not environmental changes or modifications based on CPTED strategies actually have an effect in deterring active offenders who engage in appointment robbery. CPTED theory was coined by Jeffery (1971) who based his research on the work of Jacobs (1961) to create a new approach for crime control. Jeffery (1971) coined this new approach Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED). The paper will examine the collected data through the lens of four CPTED strategies: (1) territoriality, (2) natural surveillance, (3) activity support, and (4) access control. The study specifically asks participants whether or not modifications in the physical environment have a direct result on the perception of risk among a sample of offenders, and if so, whether these changes in the environment influence their decision to engage in criminal activity. Interviews with a sample of twelve respondents indicated that they think about their target location as it relates to their risk of getting caught.

Interviews with the respondents also indicated that the respondents did notice implemented CPTED strategies around the location which they were going to commit a crime. As a result, these CPTED strategies did have an impact on their decision making to commit the crime or not. Additionally, when the CPTED strategies were correctly implemented they were able to deter potential criminal activity in the specific location. Respondents indicated that the CPTED strategies increased their perception of being visible, thereby increasing the respondent's

perception of risk in participating in appointment robbery. Thus, they decided not to commit the criminal activity.

Paper 3 did find support for the four CPTED strategies examined: (1) territoriality, (2) natural surveillance, (3) activity support, and (4) access control. This finding is significant since the four strategies were considered in the respondent's decision to select a victim and target location to commit an appointment robbery. More importantly, is that the study used the offender's voices to aid in the understanding into their decision-making process as they acknowledged CPTED strategies. Based on the findings of the study, policymakers should support and implement CPTED strategies because all respondents admitted that they would not participate in appointment robbery if they could see CPTED strategies implemented at the target location. While it is understood that no policy or strategy can totally stop crime from occurring, it is argued that based on these findings, appointment robbery could be reduced where there are CPTED strategies implemented.

Chapter 2

Strategies for Gaining Access to Robbers: The Importance of Identity, Rapport, and Commitment Acts

Abstract

Researching hard-to-reach populations that are criminally active are in itself difficult. Gaining access to these populations are essential to the success of the project, however strategies to obtain access can involve navigating through complex and dangerous situations. Prior research has identified a range of factors that can influence the ability of researchers to gain access to offenders. Qualitative projects that encompass obtaining information from individuals mandate researchers to consider about from whom they need to gain information, and how to appeal to the individuals. This relationship building is facilitated by strategies of gaining access that aids not only the recruitment of participants but also increases the quality of interactions and data collection. In this paper, we examine the importance of identity, rapport, and commitment acts in relationship building to gain access with active offenders in fieldwork. This contribution offers examples in which researchers can negotiate the difficulties in gaining access.

Keywords**:** Qualitative, Gaining Access, Identity, Rapport, Commitment Acts

2.1 Introduction

The issue of gaining access to qualitative research has been discussed for some time now in various disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, psychology, and criminology (Brown, et al., 1977; Crowley, 2007; Harrington, 2003; Tracy, 2013), however, what are less visible are the combined strategies of identity, rapport and commitment acts in gaining access. Negotiating, earning, and maintaining access is vital to the success of any qualitative research project, which requires in-depth data collection through fieldwork with active offenders. Yet, most textbooks and empirical research rarely provide detailed accounts of the process and ongoing negotiation of gaining access. When access successes or challenges are recognized, it is often relegated to a short comment, appendices, or acknowledgment about a brief meeting with a gatekeeper (Michel, 2014).

Issues of gaining access are frequently a surprise to new qualitative researchers who have spent a vast amount of time developing the research design and are now eager to get into the field to obtain some answers. The issue of access can seem like a problem only vaguely associated with the actual research process. However, gaining access is an integral part of the process of doing qualitative fieldwork because not only must the researcher 'get in' to obtain the information, but the process of 'getting in' can affect what information will be available to a researcher (Brown et al., 1977).

Gaining access to participants and research sites has been challenging for researchers for many years (Van Maanen, 1998). While there are method textbooks that provide a chapter on accessing the field (Burgess, 1991; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998; Glesne, 1999; Patton, 2002; Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Feldman et al., 2003), there is no discussion on the actual difference between officially gaining permission to conduct the study and having individuals' support in gaining

access in the field (Wanat, 2008). In textbooks, the terms 'cooperation' and 'access' are frequently used interchangeably to express two distinct processes (Johnson, 1975; Van Maanen, 1998; Glesne, 1999; Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Yet, when a researcher gains approval from a gatekeeper, it does not automatically guarantee full cooperation from potential participants (Shaffir & Stebbins, 1991). The fact is that access, collaboration, and permission could be either denied or granted at each step of the process. This means that authorization and access will need to be gained as the researcher moves in and out of new areas and they meet new individuals (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

This paper assists qualitative researchers in identifying individuals who can help them gain access by demonstrating the importance of nurturing relationships through identity, rapport, and commitment acts. As part of the ongoing process of gaining access, researchers will deal with rejections and issues in developing rapport. This paper illustrates that being able to hang out in a specific setting to observe or being permitted to interview respondents is only the first step in gaining access. Access involves being in a position not only to observe and learn from talking with individuals (Feldman et al., 2003). From this standpoint, access is only not something that is obtained once and done, but it is an ongoing process that can be created, developed, and enriched over time.

2.2 What is access?

Access can be separated into two parts, primary and secondary access. Primary access can be defined as gaining permission to 'get in' with a group to undertake qualitative research. In contrast, relationship building to gain access to the individual and specific information within the group is secondary access (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). At the fundamental level, access means having an opening to a group or organization where data collection can occur. At the most

significant level, it pertains to getting consent to observe what you want, go where you want and talk to whomever you want over long periods (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). This process can be very time-intensive, involving contacting and negotiating with numerous potential participants, all of whom may or may not even respond to the request. Even more challenging is the issue that while primary access could be granted, secondary access could be even more difficult or even blocked by various gatekeepers or informants (Feldman et al., 2003).

The form and type of access also vary depending on the nature of the research project and the kind of information needed (Cunliffe & Alcadipani, 2016). For example, secondary data required for quantitative analysis can easily be obtained without having to gain access to the organization directly; as compared to qualitative researchers who require primary data to study culture and in-depth social interaction (Haragadon & Bechky, 2006). Qualitative fieldwork, as in this case, can introduce particularly challenging issues to gaining access since it requires the researcher to immerse themselves in the participant's daily lives for an extended period to observe interactions, listen to their feelings, and ask questions along the way (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Therefore, qualitative research is one of the main ways to gather rich and detailed descriptions and interpretations about people's lives for a particular setting (Patton, 2002). We argue that gaining access and maintaining access consists of recognizing its complex and relational nature, which mandates researchers to own responsibility in respecting the identity and values of their participants and understanding the possible consequences of their actions. This paper aims to examine gaining access strategies within a group of active robbers by observing their day-to-day interactions and routines as individuals and as a group. This paper will show how gaining and maintaining access to qualitative research can be influenced by

factors such as identity, rapport, and commitment acts. The access stories within this paper come from the primary researcher's twenty-eight month-long field experience.

2.3 Literature Review

Despite the significance of 'getting in,' prior literature and students of qualitative methods have not provided an expounded explanation of some issues in gaining access. While there are many qualitative research textbooks and articles that have sections on gaining access or issues related to access, there are only two books solely devoted to the topic of gaining access (e.g., Brown et al., 1977; Feldman et al., 2003). Most information on gaining access is often contained within the appendices in specific studies and not directly within the methods section (Fenno, 1978; DiIuIio, 1987). As a result, qualitative researchers are often not well trained in strategies of gaining access (Wax, 1973). Prior research often only offers a standard format in gaining access (e.g., through a gatekeeper); and hardly goes into detail on how identity and commitment acts help develop rapport in earning trust with the gatekeeper. An even more significant challenge is often encountered by the lack of theoretical models in gaining access. This is because most of what has been published on gaining access has been offered ad hoc as a series of tips (Feldman et al., 2003). While tips for gaining admission are significant, they have been explicitly offered towards each situation.

What motivates a relationship in the field context is possibly the same as what stimulates relationships in any other context. Individuals may want to help the researcher because they want to earn status through their connections, see an image of themselves of what they could have become, or because they sincerely like the researcher and therefore want to help them succeed. Possibly, the informants grant access because they hope to further expand the knowledge of their group in a way that only their group can provide. While the specific reasons for giving access are

essential in any qualitative study, in this paper, we will focus more on viewing access through the lens of developing relationships. In considering gaining access through a relationship lens, it is possible to connect the access process to something we all encounter regularly. While the nuances of relationships are often mysterious, many of us still participate in developing, gaining, and maintaining relationships. Using the relationship lens, not only associates access to something we are all familiar with, but it also draws attention to crucial strategies of the gaining access process that help individuals make decisions on the following actions to take.

Prior research on gaining access has often been associated with the process of opening a door (Brown et al., 1977). This provides an image that an entry exists for every group; moreover, since it is referenced as simple as a door, it implies that the researcher can easily find it and easily access it with the correct key. The image of a door is further supported by the term often used for access, 'entry' (Feldman et al., 2003). When access is used in this way, it places a significant amount on the researcher's actions of developing skills, planning, and the site's selection. These are critical in gaining access; however, they are not enough to fully understand the process. The example of using a door for gaining access fails to recognize that there are individuals on the other side of the door either allowing or not allowing access. These doors of opportunities do not just open on their own but must be opened by willing individuals. Additionally, entering an open door is only the beginning of many more steps to gain access (Glesne & Peshkin, 1991; Maxwell, 1996). Essentially, gaining access will continue throughout the research project, and there is no moment where the researcher can relax without worrying about losing access (Czarniawska, 1998).

To initially gain access, the researcher needs to attract sufficient attention to an individual on the inside so they will be interested enough to see who is fascinated by them. It also mandates

that the researcher be able to persuade the individual or the group just enough so that the researcher can explain why they want to access. Then the researcher needs to be not only invited in but allowed to stay for a while so they can collect information. The relationship must also be developed enough so the researcher can come and go as they please throughout the process (Glesne & Peshkin, 1991). Therefore, gaining access to research sites and individuals can uniquely differ for each research project. This is because respondents and gatekeepers may interpret what they are being asked to do within their own social context (Johnson, 1975; Feldman et al., 2003; Shaffir et al., 1980; Wax, 1971). So, researchers need to learn the social structure of their research environment to negotiate access successfully (Berg, 2004; Shaffir et al., Feldman et al.) since negotiating access is unpredictable, ill-defined, and an uncontrollable process while attempting to build relationships with gatekeepers (Burgess, 1991; Feldman et al., 2003). This is why some researchers try to negotiate access with multiple gatekeepers at various potential entry points (Feldman et al., 2003; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Johnson, 1975; Patton, 2002; Shaffir et al., 1980). Formal gatekeepers, who are considered to be in a position of power, have the authority to permit access to a specific entry for the researcher to conduct their research (Berg, 2004; Glesne, 1999; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Johnson, 1975; Shaffir et al., 1980). The informal gatekeepers within the group often attempt to protect any vulnerable group members and the research settings (Berg, 2004; Feldman et al., 2003).

While it is vital to identify the individual in the group who has the power to grant access, receiving approval from the highest level can be risky (Feldman et al., 2003; Glesne, 1999). This is because the individual at the highest level may refuse access to the group when lower levels of the group have already granted access. In some cases, the higher-level gatekeeper might lead the researcher away from sensitive areas and only allow the researcher to see what they want to be

exposed (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). However, when there are potentially multiple entry points for access, the researcher may need to gain approval from each level of gatekeepers. What could be confusing in the process is knowing what level, to begin with due to the multiple hierarchy levels (Feldman et al., 2003; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). As a result, researchers need to think about gaining access as a relentless pull and push between the researcher and gatekeeper (Van Maanen, 1998).

In conclusion, prior literature mainly focused on the researcher and treated the process of gaining access as a single process. However, previous research does not discuss how identity and commitment acts together can help build trust and the relationship with gatekeepers at various levels. Shifting the focus to the strategies researchers use to show their commitment can help future researchers in gaining access as well as can also help explain the ambiguous access process.

2.4 Methodology

Qualitative research provided an opportunity to explore twelve active offenders who, at the time of this study, were participating in robbery. The research occurred in a large metropolitan area in Texas from August 2015 to December 2017 (28 months). Initially, a total of 15 offenders were targeted, but after data saturation was achieved within the initial twelve respondents, it was agreed to stop the collection process (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Saturation of the data was obtained when the primary researcher acknowledged there were no new emerging themes in the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Guest et al., 2006). Dependent upon the sample size of the selected population, research has shown that data saturation can be obtained with as few as six participants (Guest et al., 2006) as well as with the 'rich depth' of the quality of the data (Burnmeister & Aitken, 2012; Fusch & Ness, 2015). Participants in this study ranged from 16 to

26 years old. They were all male and consisted of three African Americans, three Caucasians, and six Latinos. The sample was purposeful and is not generalizable to the general population of offenders participating in robbery.

Qualitative methods were selected since they allowed the researcher to study phenomena in the participants' natural setting in hopes of learning and to understand their lives through observation and immersion (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Huot, 2014; Spradley, 1980). The process of fieldwork and immersion provided the primary researcher with the ability to discover, identify, and describe the offenders' complex world and be able to interpret the phenomenon meaning within this study. Exploring offenders who are actively robbing victims can enrich understanding their processes, activities, and motivations by observing the participants and the setting. The qualitative methodology allowed the primary researcher to observe and interact with the respondents daily to openly discuss each of their personal experiences to grasp an understanding of their involvement in the robbery as participants in their setting (Berk & Adams, 1970; Decker & van Winkle, 1996; Hochstetler, 2001).

Qualitative methods utilized within this study were broad and diverse and ranged from observation to immersion, and were accompanied by semi-structured interviews for a comprehensive analysis. To complete this study, participant observation required immersion in the environment of the investigation to holistically understand the participant's behaviors, values, and language (McNaughton et al., 2014). This continuous process of participant access and engagement within their natural setting added to the strength of the rapport and relationship and was central to the study (Brink & Edgecombe, 2003).

Sampling

The primary researcher employed a snowball technique to identify, recruit, and select the particular pool of active offenders (Chambliss, 1975; Polsky, 1969; Watters & Biernacki, 1989). The gatekeeper was identified by the primary author, who was at the time a gang interventionist and had known him for five years. The gatekeeper was an individual who was active in robbery and had strong connections and reputation throughout criminal networks who participated in different types of crime (Vasquez et al., 2020). The primary researcher asked the gatekeeper, Tito, to be introduced to people who were engaged in robberies. Due to Tito's strong reputation in the streets, it was easy for him to clarify the study objectives and to validate the researcher as a non-threatening individual to the participant's social and legal status (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981; DeShay et al., 2020, Irwin, 1972; Vasquez et al., 2020; Vasquez & Vieraitis, 2016).

Next, criterion sampling was used to collect data from the identified offenders (Patton, 2002). The first criterion was centered on the type of criminal activity the individual participated in; for this case, it was a robbery. The next criterion concentrated on the geographic location where the criminal activity happened, and this study's purpose was a large metropolitan area in Texas. The final criterion focused on whether or not the individual was considered to be an 'active offender' in robbery. Previous research has defined the term 'active offender' as people who have participated in two more criminal acts within the two prior months and, more importantly, who were not presently incarcerated (DeShay et al., 2020; Vasquez et al., 2020; Vasquez & Vieraitis, 2016; Wright et al., 1992). All participants met the criterion.

2.5 Setting

The selected area had proved to be ripe for recruitment since the large metropolitan area had been experiencing an increase in robbery. The environment in which the participants resided

is recognized as being overwhelmed with gangs and drugs and has a high teen pregnancy rate of 11 per 1,000 females (Children's Health, 2019). The area's school district annually reports an average of 112 gangs within their schools (M. Dovick, personal communication, 2013). During the research project, all juveniles regularly attended a public school system. All adults were employed either part-time or full-time. The participants in the study came from various family units, including single-parent, multi-family, and two-parent households. Two participants were considered upper-middle-class and upper-class. In contrast, a large portion of the participants came from a low socioeconomic background as indicated by the poverty guidelines (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2017). The general geographic area where the participants lived was labeled as "high poverty" since 24.9% of people 18 years or younger lived in poverty and had an overall poverty rate of 18.3% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013).

2.6 Selecting the Group

One of the more critical processes in a qualitative study is selecting the group to study. The group chosen should be one that the researcher is not familiar with. As mentioned previously, a qualitative study aims to gain the informants' perspective of their culture, how they do things, and how they experience their environment. Two issues are critical in selecting a group, finding: (1) a group that will permit access and (2) a group that will permit the researcher to get the needed data. It is helpful to know whether you will have access to the group before launching into the full research. It is also vital to know what type of access will be permitted. In this scenario, it was essential to informally 'hang out' with a few members of the group before fully beginning the official research project because if the researcher cannot gain access, then there is no project. In this study, the primary researcher attended a social gathering at the gatekeepers' house with a few possible informants to get a sense of what kind of people could be

in the study, what type of challenges could be encountered, and the level of trust that would need

to be developed. It also aided in narrowing down the kind of research questions that might be

answered through using this specific group. Moreover, it helped the primary researcher in

understanding the social dynamics within the group in deciding whom to talk to and whom to

observe within the group.

2.7 Gatekeepers & Key Informants

One of the first steps in entering a new environment is learning some of the group's

language and nuances. To help prepare for entry into the research area, researchers often need to

be aware of and learn the setting's terminology to easily relate to the gatekeepers and informants

(Spradley 1979). Learning the language and vocabulary greatly increases the chance of gaining

access (Feldman et al., 2003). Understanding what people mean when a word or a particular

phrase is used in a specific context is vital in not only understanding what the informants are

saying, but it also enhances the relationship development between the informant and researcher

and as a result, increases the quality of information they are comfortable in sharing (Feldman et

al., 2003).

Gaining access to a group of active offenders requires a minimum of two 'roles' which

could be or could not be identified in the same individual. To start, there was a need for someone

who could actually grant the primary researcher access to the group of active offenders (e.g., the

gatekeeper, Tito). In this study of robbers, the primary researcher had already known of an

informant previously used in a prior study and whom he had known for five years. Gaining

access would not have been possible without the 'buy-in' from the gatekeeper Tito. While the

gatekeeper allowed the researcher access to his network of friends, it was costly and dangerous

to him and the primary researcher. During the initial introductions, it became apparent that some

of his peers were wondering if the primary researcher was working with law enforcement as a narc (i.e., undercover law enforcement). The benefit of this type of long-term study in the field is that the gatekeeper, Tito, was able to convince his criminal network that the primary researcher was granted access by typically saying, "He's is no narc, he is just a chill homeboy that wants to tell our story." Additionally, since it was a long-term study, the primary researcher was able to dissuade them of their belief over time by getting to know them or by showing commitment to the group.

The second role needed is a key informant. While the gatekeeper makes the access available, it is often the key informant (or informants) role to be the 'tour guide.' This person is the one with whom you can ask all of the numerous questions throughout the study. Then there are the non-key informants, who are simply observed through fieldwork and potentially interviewed later. The role of the key informant is to help the researcher understand mannerisms and personalities, decipher the language, as well as to comprehend socially acceptable and unacceptable nuances, and the like. For this study, the key informant needed to be someone who is an expert within the culture of robbers. It is also crucial that the key informant be actively involved within the group. This is because former members may not be fully aware of what the group is currently experiencing. More importantly, depending on how the individual left the group, it could be biased towards individual members. For this reason, anyone who had not participated in a robbery in over two months was excluded from the study since they would not be considered 'active' by their peers.

A key informant ought to be comfortable enough with the researcher to be willing and able to talk with you in their 'native' speech, meaning that effort was given to allow the key informant to speak freely and not make him alter his terminology to explain what is going on to

be helpful. For example, in the beginning, the key informant 'Alex' often tried to translate what was being said in slang street talk into what he considered to be 'school smart.' On one occasion, when David said, "my nig gos dat sweet azz lick da o'day;" Alex leaned over to the primary researcher to explain what David had said: "Yo, what David was saying is that he just did a robbery a couple days ago." Although the key informant meant well, the primary researcher had to remind Alex that he did not need to interpret every aspect of the language. The primary researcher informed Alex that he would pick it up as we went on, and if the researcher needed something explained, he would ask at that time. This is important because you want the informant and others around him to feel comfortable enough so as to not worry about what they say or do around the researcher. The goal was to blend in and learn from their experiences. So when Alex was needed to explain something to the researcher, Alex would be willing since he would not have been tired from constantly explaining verbiage and situations. Another characteristic of a key informant is their ability and willingness to take the necessary time to answer the questions throughout the lengthy research project. Developing the key informant involved much work, trust, and every effort was given to maintain this relationship. It is enormously difficult to 'start over' with another individual once you are deep into the project if the key informant relationship is not maintained.

During the beginning of the access process, the researcher must have an informant within the group under study who can vouch for the researcher's presence. The primary researcher had to frequently negotiate with many potential participants who hung out at the 'yard,' a neighborhood area filled with abandoned buildings. Even though the primary researcher had begun building trust with Alex, the primary researcher had been warned that he would need to be concerned with others in the group who were suspicious of the researcher's presence and

motives. Alex told the researcher, "Ah, I told the fellas that yous bees cool and shit, but you know how some fuckers are, they be trippin and think you're a cop. I told em that you jus a student trying to tell their story and shit." It would take weeks of fieldwork to be able to have someone accept the 'vouch' of his identity. A month later, Beto saw me in the yard hanging out with Tito and Alex, and he pulled me aside and said:

> "Yous say that you just wanna tell our story huh, you seem cool. If they trust you, then you must know the right people. You already know what we do, and ain't nobody got arrested, but if I find out you a cop, then I'll fuckin kill you and your family for snitchin us out bitch."

While I got 'vouched in' by the gatekeeper and the informant, it was Beto, the muscle in the group that the rest of the group respected. Once Beto laid down the ground rules by threatening the primary researcher, it opened another door to the group since now the rest of the group was more accepting of my presence. Having someone who can vouch for you to meet more participants and possibly protect you during the process of collecting data can be very important. This experience illustrates that there are many doors that need to be accessed to gain trust. Having multiple respondents who can vouch for the researcher in the field can assist the researcher to develop and build webs of relationships. Therefore, being vouched in early with certain key individuals can help a researcher and provide both vertical and lateral connections to others within the group's network.

2.8 Results

Identity

In the early stages of research development, many researchers often do not have a complete sense on how their identity will affect the research project (Feldman et al., 2003). More

often than not, researchers are mainly concerned with being taken seriously and appearing competent. An important part of getting ready to make initial contact is being confident enough to articulate why the selected individuals are interesting and what the researcher hopes to learn from them. A researcher's identity is important to the issue of rapport building, especially in this case with active offenders. While it was predicted that particular aspects of the primary researcher's identity, specifically his gender, ethnicity, and class status, might either complicate or make rapport development easier, it had not been anticipated that the number of individual aspects of the primary's identity that seemed important while attempting to develop relationships with the individuals. In addition to gender, ethnicity, and class status, the primary researcher stated that respondents talked about religion, educational background, and prior criminal occurrences as significant aspects of identity that needed to be discussed in some fashion while gaining access.

Attempting to be objective and non-biased is a goal that the primary researcher attempted to maintain. However, the primary researcher was aware that he was a Latino male, born and raised in the same neighborhood, from a low-socioeconomic class, and was associated with similar offenders, such as the participants during his teenage years. The primary researcher had been through similar experiences and the socialization process of the participants and group. Therefore my awareness of my identity as a researcher was also critical. Seeing that a high portion of the respondents and primary researcher share multiple aspects of their identity, it helped in gaining access. The primary researcher's multiple identities allowed the respondents to classify him as an insider throughout different project points. The primary researcher often resembled the respondents being observed and was often misidentified as being an intimate part of the group. On one occasion, while walking from Michael's house to Juan's apartment, we

were stopped by local law enforcement. The police officers were very rude and pushed us both on the hot hood of the police car. Next, while one illegally searched our closed bags and cell phones, the other officer asked us questions about something we had no clue about, some random auto theft that they said occurred around the block. We both just remained calm, didn't talk back, and eventually, the police drove away. Michael looked at me, saying, "They always fuckin with us Mexicans for just walkin." I responded, "It hasn't changed. I remember I grew up down the street." Since the primary researcher had lived through what they were now experiencing, and they could see that he was used to this type of experience, it helped him gain access quicker since it helped the respondents drop their guard and be more open with him, seeing that they had some similar identity experiences.

Part of the challenge with identity in the access process is that it could take time to distinguish where the researcher's identity fits as an observer of the group. The primary researcher was convinced that his ability to gain trust of the group members quickly was partially based on his general acceptance of their criminal lifestyle and personalities. In his case, he was a minority male who had come from very similar backgrounds and, more specifically grew up in and around individuals who also lived the criminal lifestyle. Therefore, the primary researcher was familiar with their verbiage, mannerisms, public display of aggressive behavior, and being used to having drugs and guns present. For example, while at the 'yard,' Tommy offered the primary researcher marijuana by saying: "You wanna hit this?" The offer was declined by indicating that the researcher had started looking for a job and might get drug tested. Tommy said, "That's wuz up, gotta get dat green." We then walked back to his car, and he then said, "Den I guess you ain't looking to buy a strap den?" A 'strap' is a gun. In being a curious

researcher and familiar in these situations, responded "Naw, I'm good, but what are you selling and how much?" Tommy, walked to his trunk, looked around, and said:

> "Right now, I gots dis 9mm is five bills ($500) cos it's a glock. Dis 38 special for 4 bills ($400). I gots two crowd pleasers (shotguns). Both em are pistol grip Mossberg's for like 3 bills ($300). Den I gots dis AR-15 for a little less than a G ($1,000). I also gots some sixty and hundred round clips for ARs and AK-47s for a hundred each."

Since the primary researcher was familiar being around this lifestyle, he entered into casual conversation with Tommy by saying, "Shit Tommy, you are rolling around dirty; remind me not to ride with you, I don't want to catch a case." Tommy and the researcher laughed it off, and Tommy closed the trunk while both of them enjoyed a cold beer leaning on the vehicle with all of the weapons inside. Since the primary researcher was comfortable being around this lifestyle, he did not judge or react negatively towards the participant or situation, which Tommy picked up on. The researcher just went with the flow of the conversation to show Tommy that he was not there to judge him and, more importantly to show Tommy that he was not afraid of being in certain situations.

On another occasion, Larry invited the primary researcher inside his apartment after a long day of running around doing random errands. When we arrived at Larry's place, there were empty alcohol bottles everywhere, leftover food and trash from fast-food establishments on the floor, a couple of dirty broken chairs, a strong smell of marijuana, and on the table were dominoes, filled ashtrays, more empty beer bottles, and marijuana with paraphernalia and the whole place had cockroaches running around everywhere. While we sat there drinking water, talking about random subjects, Larry asked, "Yo, you ho-gry?, I'm gots sum ray-man." Seeing that the primary researcher had once lived this type of lifestyle, he was not uncomfortable at all

and responded, "Yeah, I can eat." This act of commitment to eating dinner with the respondent and accepting the respondent's identity and lifestyle drastically opened the door for Larry. When the researcher did not judge the respondent's home-life, it showed Larry that the researcher would accept him for who he was and was willing to break bread with him while we argued what the Dallas Cowboys should do this week. After this night, the respondent seemed to feel more at ease with the researcher and was more open in discussing details of his life and criminal lifestyle.

From the experiences expressed above, it was discovered that identity mattered in ways the primary researcher had not expected. This could be because, as students of qualitative research, we are taught and believe that when researchers are engaged in conducting qualitative research, the 'researcher' is the primary identity that should be viewed by respondents as the primary identity. However, when conducting fieldwork, the researcher leaves their established identity and image and moves toward another space, where the interaction with individuals who could construct us in different ways (Feldman et al., 2003). Identity and positionality can significantly influence the researcher-participant relationship, e.g., whether the researcher is the same or different from the respondents in terms of ethnicity, gender, culture, and socioeconomic status. This can affect how the respondents view the researcher as generating knowledge or as a distant professional stranger (Agar, 1996). The positioning influences how the researcher is trusted and perceived by the group members and their willingness to share thoughts, experiences, and knowledge. As a result, the researcher needs to be responsive and sensitive to the constant shifting and different expectations encountered.

Everyone does not have only one identity, but rather several, which could include gender, race, class, nationality, professional status, and religion, to name a few. Therefore, it is important to note that the intersection of identities could have a substantial effect beyond each identity

(Crenshaw, 1991). In bringing various identities to interaction, the researcher and respondents could get to know each other better while learning to feel more comfortable in each other's presence (Kleinman, 1980). By broadening the range of possible identities to explore, the primary researcher could obtain information that might not have been otherwise available (Kleinman, 1980).

Rapport

An essential step in gaining access depends on developing rapport with the individuals who can offer information. Clarifying this stage indicates that a researcher can have formal access but cannot get the required information. While a researcher can gain access inside the group, they can also not have access to the information (Czarniawska, 1998). The foundation in gaining access depends upon trust between individuals and the researcher. More often than not, all one has to do simply is spend time with individuals to get to know them (Stoller, 1989). Even more important is, for others to know and trust you; all you have to do is spend time with the group. This is important from a relational perspective since an individual is likelier to open up and disclose information with someone they trust.

Initially, the researcher was randomly introduced to the gatekeeper's peers at various social gatherings. When he was introduced, he tried to minimize his presence to reduce his effect on them or the environment. While the researcher attempted to become the proverbial 'fly on the wall,' it was difficult for the group not to notice a stranger at one of their private social gatherings of active offenders. As a result, attempts were made to make small talk about topics that males generally talk about, including sports and alcohol. The hope in this process was to develop trust and familiarity with potential participants over time. However, it was discovered that although some individuals in the group were willing to talk with the primary researcher

socially, some were not because they were suspicious of the role of the researcher and the relationship with the gatekeeper. When the primary researcher attempted to make small talk with potential respondents, they would often say, "Whos you be? I don't know you. You may chill with my homeboy, but I don't trust you." Finding active offenders who would provide their experiences and stories was even more difficult. For example, when the primary researcher knew that Charles was participating in setting up victims to rob them, the primary researcher planned to develop a rapport over time before asking for an official interview. However, from the initial meetings, it was quickly apparent that the group members would not openly discuss felony criminal activity in front of the researcher.

For example, on numerous occasions, a group of robbers denied access to specific conversations that were considered 'sensitive information. These sensitive topics mainly pertained to their criminal activities that they did not want the primary researcher to know. More specifically, the members evaded any questions about robbery in the beginning. It was only over time, once further being accepted by another layer of gatekeepers, that the primary researcher could openly talk with potential respondents willing to give in-depth critical information about the research project. A strategy in dealing with suspicion from potential respondents was to identify 'internal sponsors' within the group. These 'internal sponsors' were another layer more profound than the gatekeeper and consisted of a vital member of the robber crews who could be willing to help champion and facilitate the researcher amongst the crew and could even assist in the data collection (MacLean et al., 2006; Pritchard & Symon, 2014). In this case, the internal sponsor was Charles. He was an older member of the group. He presented himself as having high self-esteem and was well respected by other group members for being willing to get into a physical altercation to protect one of his peers. At first, Charles was hesitant to talk openly. Still,

once it was discovered through small talk that we both attended the same high school in the area and were in the same automotive cluster (at different times, of course), it lowered his protective walls. We both began talking about our individual high school experiences. From that point on, our relationship grew, and Charles, the internal sponsor, began to make the introductions for the primary researcher.

An integral component in developing a relationship is rapport. Rapport is based on the amicable relationship between the informant and researcher. When a basic sense of trust is developed, it will allow for information to flow freely (Spradley, 1979). The researcher can be seen as a trustworthy individual through their actions of attentive listening, civility, and an authentic concern for the informant. Expression of these actions and behaviors is essential in any type of qualitative research. Still, the primary researcher in studying active robbers illustrated how significant it was for him in the field context to pay special attention to the expression from the qualities mentioned above. The researcher believed this facilitated rapport and trust among active offenders and their associates.

In this case, relationship building was particularly important since the researcher engaged with the informants constantly in the long-term relationship. When a researcher only has one contact with individuals in the study, it is very difficult to develop trust to get the in-depth information needed to tell the holistic story. Participants may open up due to their need to express their feelings; however, individuals are less likely to share information freely if they perceive their stories will result in negative consequences. In general, it was discovered that group members were more willing to talk to the researcher and eventually complete a recorded interview only after rapport was developed. None would have agreed if the researcher had shown up one day and asked for a recorded interview about their everyday criminal activities. However,

once the participants understood the project and developed a relationship with the researcher, they were more comfortable openly discussing the details of their criminal experiences.

Commitment Acts

Gaining access involves becoming accepted by the whole group. While access could be facilitated by the gatekeeper or by the key informant, gaining full access could also involve 'commitment acts.' A researcher attempting to establish trust from a relational perspective could involve the researcher demonstrating their commitment to the respondents through 'commitment acts.' These acts humanize the researcher because their acts are viewed as building trust while not expecting any gain in return (Daniel-Echols, 2003; Feldman et al., 2003). Commitment acts are any activity the researcher performs to be trusted by the individual and, thereby the group as a whole. An example of a commitment act is when Lumsden (2009) drove the gatekeeper to a specialty car show after the gatekeeper's license was revoked. In this study, the primary researcher's commitment initially consisted of maintaining a presence at the normal hang-out spot, which assisted in establishing the seriousness of his intent. While it may not seem to be a huge gesture, it is important to note that when the participants socially gathered, it was usually outside. During this time, it was typically over 100 degrees outside.

There were numerous acts that the primary researcher committed to validate his sincere presence within the group. For example, on one occasion, the primary researcher drove Alex, the key informant, to his peer's (and potential respondent) Josh's apartment so Alex could get a haircut from Josh. When we arrived, one of the first noticeable things was the apartment complex's dilapidated appearance. It was filled with trash, and broken alcoholic bottles, and had scores of gang members standing out front and in the courtyard. As we walked through the courtyard, you could feel the uneasiness from the gang members as we got closer, seeing that

they all stopped talking and stared at the stranger, the researcher. The primary researcher was the outsider that was walking through their courtyard, but as he followed the key informant, Alex let the gang members know that the researcher was with him, thereby temporarily vouching for the researcher's presence. As we walked into Josh's apartment, it was quickly apparent that individuals inside the apartment were heavily smoking marijuana. Alex introduced me to the group saying: "This is that guy; he is the one that I told yall about. He's a cool ass motherfucker. He's that researcher that is going to write a bomb ass story about our lives and make us famous." The group reacted very hesitantly and just responded with a simple nod of their head and said: "Whatz guud." There was an attempt to make small talk, but it was very awkward during the initial meeting. Once Alex was done with his haircut, Josh looked at the researcher and said: "What's up, you down to get cut too?" It was quickly decided to show Alex, Josh, and the others of my commitment by letting Josh cut my hair. Truth be told, Josh did a pretty good job cutting the researcher's hair, even though it was shorter than usual. This commitment act involved energy and trust on the researcher's part to take a chance to move past the discomfort feeling in getting a bad haircut, in hopes of building rapport. In the end, it worked out. Josh eventually cut the researcher's hair several more times over the next two years. In proving to Josh and the others in the room that the researcher trusted Josh to cut his hair, it showed his commitment and helped gain access to the group. This, in turn, helped open up regular discussions with Josh and the group's participation in robbery.

On another occasion, Alex, the key informant, invited the primary researcher to a social event at one of his peer's house. On our way, Alex said, "There is going to be a lot of shit going on and a lot of nigguahs, so just chill and don't ask questions, just go with the flow." When we arrived, there were individuals whom the researcher recognized from previous random

introductions. There were only a few that the researcher had never met before. As the researcher worked his way through the house and into the backyard, where the majority of the crowd was gathered, the researcher could easily see bags of marijuana, cocaine, prescription pills, and several guns on the dining room table. In the backyard, several group members were hanging out, listening to music, and talking while waiting for the food to be cooked on the grill. Within a few minutes, the researcher could see that David, who was on the grill, was having a hard time getting the grill started. Since the researcher was not aware that it would be a cookout and did not bring anything, the researcher offered to help get the grill going. As it turned out, the researcher worked the grill all night until everything was cooked. While the researcher was cooking on the grill, local law enforcement showed up to ask the owner of the house to turn the music down. As the two officers walked into the backyard from the side gate (not going through the house to see all the drugs and weapons inside), they started demanding everyone get against the fence line so they could pat everyone down. When the researcher turned around, he could see someone inside moving everything illegal out of public view and hidden away. When the officers started to yell at us and began asking us if there were any weapons or drugs; the researcher followed the lead of the other members and mouthed off to the police by claiming that he had no knowledge of drugs or guns on site. The researcher responded:

> No, there aren't any weapons here. The only drugs here are my fajitas on the grill. These guys can't get enough of them. But, sir, we are just chilling, cooking out and drinking some beer after a long week. Did someone call in a noise complaint? Oh, and do you want a taco? We got enough to share.

The officer turned toward the researcher, patted him down, looked at the food he cooked, and said: "Just keep the noise down. We don't want to have to come back." This commitment act

helped foster rapport between the group and the researcher. This was a turning point in the relationship building with the individuals the researcher would depend on for information. After law enforcement left, the group was in a completely different world for the primary researcher. Not only was the primary researcher no longer invisible, but was he was suddenly the center of attention, the object of great interest, and especially amusement. In this culture, to be teased is to be accepted, so it was well received. It was the turning point for the relationship between the group, and it meant that the primary researcher was quite literally "in."

Thus, the commitment act had two benefits: (1) it showed the group that the researcher was serious about getting to know each person, and (2) it eventually provided the researcher with unique insights into the psychology of their criminal lifestyle. The idea of commitment acts brings to the forefront a challenge that was not planned but had to be dealt with in the field quickly. Commitment acts are frequently discussed in the plural because they are often ongoing (Feldman et al., 2003). As a result, at some point, the researcher needs to decide how far they are prepared to go in order to fully gain access to the group. Commitment acts do not need to be dramatic to be effective. They also do not have to be illegal or dangerous since simple mundane acts can effectively demonstrate the willingness to listen and connect and the worthiness to be trusted (Feldman et al., 2003).

While the acts that were engaged in were not deliberately done to build rapport, these activities demonstrated to the group a level of engagement that gained the primary researcher trust and respect of the individuals with whom he was building the relationships. When the primary researcher did a commitment act, he was not sure there would be an explicit gain. The fact that the primary researcher did not expect to gain anything by participating in commitment acts illustrated the difference between the traditional information-gathering techniques and the

process of developing rapport through actions (Feldman et al., 2003). Such commitment acts mandate a careful balance between becoming too personally invested with the respondents and preserving the ability to step back to process the data.

2.9 Conclusion

In this study of active robbers, similar identities illustrated that the more similar the researcher was to the participants, the more comfortable they were in offering information which demonstrated how similar identities can help build trust (Kleinman, 1980; Tsuda, 1998). From this experience, identity similarity can be beneficial in forming a common ground, ultimately leading to developed rapport with participants (Kleinman, 1980). It is suggested that researchers assess any similar potential identities in common with the participants to help gain access and establish a connection (Feldman et al., 2003). These shared categories of identities can provide a foundation for building trust since the ultimate goal is to become familiar, known, and accepted (Kleinman, 1980). This can consist of perceptions of similarity amongst the participants, researcher, and group, or it could involve the intersection and overlap of identities of individuals and the researcher (Feldman et al., 2003).

While the similarity in identity did work out in this study, the fact remains that it could have been a double-edged sword. It is suggested that similarities in identity can oversimplify the dynamics. For example, people of the same racial or ethnic group do not necessarily understand racism in the same way, and they do not automatically identify more closely with similar members of their group. This presumption could result in the participant assuming both people experienced a commonality that could increase trust, but at the same time, it could reduce their need for explanation. Therefore participants who assume there is a similarity with the researcher could gloss over pertinent information from their lived experiences which the researcher might

need or want to have explained (Feldman et al., 2003). This is a disadvantage and limitation of the researcher becoming a participant within the research environment. When a researcher's identity changes and becomes similar to the participant's identity, it can make it challenging to ask naïve questions that an outsider can ask and harder for participants to answer fully.

Developing and nurturing relationships is crucial with participants in the field to gain and maintain access (Bryman, 2012; Feldman et al., 2003). The type of relationship can significantly impact the degree of access, the level of transparency, and trust between the researcher and participants. Though qualitative researchers are encouraged to develop rapport with the participants, it is frequently a systematic, long, and often mysterious process. While researchers may desire rapport, researchers cannot coax or force it from interactions; it is something that can only happen naturally with patience and openness. Typically, qualitative researchers are provided guidelines on establishing rapport, and most who have experienced it know when rapport is achieved. Nevertheless, some researchers are still not able to understand how to obtain rapport, and other researchers can specifically pinpoint which behavior leads to the rapport.

Although a researcher frequently assumes a payoff of information from the more traditional research techniques, such as interviewing or general observation, the nature of commitment acts like the ones mentioned above, does not by itself provide an assumption that anything will be gained. However, the commitment acts offer an opportunity to develop a stronger foundation of openness, trust, and rapport between the informants and the researcher. It is important to state that there is no assurance that any specific commitment act will affect the relationship positively. It could be just that the quality of the act improves the entire relationship (Feldman et al., 2003). This is because the individuals now begin to view the researcher as someone more than a researcher looking for information and now view them as someone who

views them personally. The process of gaining access is not a dichotomous variable, which means that the researcher is not one day 'without' access and fully immersed the next day. There could be 'false starts' initially entering the field, whereas your gatekeeper may not work out as hoped, leaving you to find someone else to be your gatekeeper.

Furthermore, the necessity for a commitment act may be an ongoing process, and the trust others feel toward you may come and go throughout the study. The point is that gaining access is an ongoing activity and is not a one-time shot. The process of gaining access will keep the researcher focused on the necessity to preserve the relationships in the field. It will also move them to not burn any bridge for short-term gain, as in getting a confession from an informant.

2.10 Discussion

Why is it important to understand the nuances of access? It is because the failure or success of qualitative research depends on the ability to obtain and maintain access. Researchers will encounter barriers to access on multiple levels, as well as some conflicting interests from the participants in the project and the researcher's presence in the group. In framing access as fluid, interwoven, and an emerging process of identity, rapport building, and commitment acts, researchers strive for the significance of viewing access as a continuous process. This is because researchers will continuously face new situations, new doors, and different individuals in fieldwork.

The fact that researchers can use identity and commitment acts to gain access can have some consequences on the relationship with the respondents, the researcher's integrity, and the ability to publish their work. There are no concrete solutions to issues in gaining access as well as to the choices researchers will encounter when deciding on what decisions to make in specific situations. The researcher may need to juggle gaining access with the integrity of the study with

the need to compromise, cooperate, or trade-off their values in maintaining access with the research group. The authors suggest that before negotiating access to the group, they think about the kind of relationship they would like with their respondents and its implications for the type of research they are doing.

2.11 Limitations and Future Implications

Although this study with robbers was not without its challenges, the authors feel assured of the potential benefits the paper can provide future researchers. The goal was to analyze how identity, relationships, and commitment acts led to increased access opportunities. Despite the success in identifying numerous points, the authors did not illustrate how the commitment acts could have failed, resulting in less rapport. Additionally, since the primary author and participants had a similar background and identity, it did not allow the researcher to fully experience blocked access. Further, working to gain access with uncooperative respondents after already obtaining gatekeeper approval can put the researcher in an awkward and potentially unsafe position (Shaffir & Stebbins, 1991; Wax, 1971). Gaining access in fieldwork can be an unpredictable, complex, and ill-defined process (Burgess, 1991; Feldman et al., 2003). The experiences presented in this paper contribute to understanding how identity, relationships, and commitment acts can help a researcher gain access. This paper also illustrates that simply gaining access at the gatekeeper level does not guarantee access through the varying levels (e.g., doors) within the group's environment (Burgess, 1991; Johnson, 1975). While each research site is unique, it is essential to learn the context of what is valued and who can open doors, and who can block access.

In textbooks, conducting a qualitative research project sounds straightforward. However, the books are not clear enough regarding how to negotiate access with the initial gatekeeper, and

even less with gaining access to informants and internal sponsors. For example, some textbooks may simply state: Once the physical location has been selected, the cooperation of the individuals within the environment is needed to obtain the required information. This may sound easy, but it is a complex process fraught with developing trust challenges. At every stage of the process, access to participants needs to be constantly renegotiated. Therefore it is evident that obtaining permission to enter the field or even to be introduced to individuals is an incredibly different scenario than accessing them. The latter is concerned rapport, trust, and engagement between the researcher and the individual. Thus, the qualitative researcher needs to be mindful of how the path of fieldwork was shaped as well as by the manner in which the built relationships were formed with the gatekeeper and informants. As researchers, we argue that the researcher-participant relationship that emerges in the field through identity, rapport, and commitment acts are important in gaining access, and we encourage future scholars to further examine access strategies.

Chapter 3

Ethnographic Research with Appointment Robbers: Challenges in Maintaining Contact in the 21st Century while Separating 'Private Life' from 'Work Life.'

Abstract:

This twenty-eight-month-long study reports on the ethical dilemmas encountered while studying appointment robbers from a large metropolitan area in Texas. Appointment robbery is defined as "the taking or attempting to take anything of value from the care, custody, or control of a person or persons by force or threat of force or violence and putting the victim in fear by way of using an electronic device or a cell phone app to set up the robbery" (Vasquez, Rodriguez, Suh, and Martinez-Cosio, p. 18, 2019). The purpose of the study was to provide insights into the potential ethical dilemmas researchers could encounter when studying active appointment robbers in today's technological climate. The ethical dilemmas reported include the researcher's effort to separate his private life from work life, how to respond to 'friend requests,' and maintaining confidentiality--all further complicated by using social network sites. The two significant implications for future ethnographic research include the use and future role of social networking sites and negotiating the ethics associated with social networking sites when participants become virtual friends.

Keywords: Ethnography, Ethical Dilemmas, Research Ethics, Social Networking Sites

3.1 Introduction

It is the business of qualitative researchers to develop a relationship with respondents. As part of the primary process, we explore their social lives and become intertwined in some of their life experiences. This is ethically challenging as there are frequent situations associated with the welfare of the respondent and the researcher. Both unexpected and expected ethical dilemmas are often encountered by qualitative researchers. This is especially true when the research topic is based on offenders who are actively using online and app advertisements to set up fake e-commerce exchanges to set up a robbery. In this paper, we wish to directly draw on the ethical dilemmas encountered by the primary researcher while studying appointment robbers. Appointment robbery has been defined as "the taking or attempting to take anything of value from the care, custody, or control of a person or persons by force or threat of force or violence and putting the victim in fear by way of using an electronic device or a cell phone app to set up the robbery" (Vasquez et al., p. 18, 2020).

The significance of ethnographic research for gaining insight into the lives of active criminals is undeniable (Hobbs, 2001). The understanding gained from looking at the perspectives of criminals about how they make sense of their lives has directed sociological and criminological research on crime (Sandberg & Copes, 2012; Yates, 2004). Research based on ethnography consists of various complex designs, which rarely go as planned. As a result of spending periods of time in the field, ethnographers will encounter various methodological, practical, and ethical issues. While quantitative researchers can often reference a guidebook or opt to use a different formula, ethnographers usually do not have this privilege. Ethnographers are frequently in the field where they need to make quick decisions on the best way to collect data. More importantly, they need to know how to deal with any unplanned ethical issues, such

as observing drug use, witnessing a crime, and the researcher's physical safety. These 'unknowns' make it challenging for ethnographic researchers to know what to expect and, more importantly, how to prepare themselves in order to make solid ethical decisions as those dilemmas emerge. As ethnographers immerse themselves in the natural setting, it reduces the social distance between the respondents and the researcher, consequently increasing opportunities for ethical dilemmas (Wardaugh, 2000). As an ethnographer gets closer to the respondents, it is often difficult to define their actual relationship with them. Their various roles: as a researcher, informant, collaborator, or friend are intertwined and could affect the data collection (Crick, 1992).

We believe sharing the experiences from this research project adds value to existing knowledge of ethical dilemmas. This is because of the limited information in the literature pertaining to ethical dilemmas in studying active offenders who participate in appointment robbery. We aim to provide insight into the potential ethical dilemmas researchers could encounter when studying active offenders in today's technological climate. We will discuss the decisions and rationales the primary researcher made during the study. We will present the ethical dilemmas that emerged throughout the twenty-eight month-long ethnographic research project with active offenders from a large metropolitan city in Texas. The initial goal of the project was to examine the decision-making process of active offenders. However, over time as the primary researcher developed trust and relationships with the respondents, it created opportunities for ethical dilemmas as the researcher navigated his way into the criminal subculture (Murphy & Dingwall, 2007). We believe the discussion and insights presented here, will allow future ethnographers to be prepared to effectively act when ethical issues arise.

Ethnography research methods have a long history in criminology and the study of deviance because they can generate theoretical insight and rich data through the implicit commitment of an extended presence in the culture (Fleetwood & Potter, 2017). Ethnographic research techniques allow the researcher to produce a detailed understanding of human interaction (Patton, 2002). These methods are especially beneficial in exploring deviant cultures and the individual perspectives of criminal behavior (Jacobs, 1998). While others may utilize a more structured approach, such as quantitative methods, some structured techniques could lead to participant mistrust and suspicion, resulting in a higher possibility of resistance and lack of cooperation (Winlow et al., 2001). Individuals actively breaking the law are more likely to refuse to disclose detailed accounts of their illegal activities if given a survey tool, or even agree to a one-time meeting and interview. Therefore, instead of sitting down with the participant with a pen, paper, and recorder for a one-time meet & greet, it was determined to spend a long time in the field with the participants to account for their actions, feelings, and relationships. This decision was made since ethnographic research is well suited to examining crime (Fleetwood & Potter, 2017).

Ethical dilemmas are expected during a long-term ethnographic project, especially when researching individuals who are actively involved in crime (Wright & Decker, 1997). Any researcher studying 'the social' cannot avoid encountering ethical dilemmas (Richardson & McMullan, 2007). Prior research has identified a certain degree of difficulties for emotional risks (Bloor et al., 2008; Etherington, 1996; Sampson et al., 2008), maintaining professionalism (Possick, 2009), physical risk (Barr & Welch, 2012; Lee-Treweek & Linkogle, 2000), and a variety of other ethical dilemmas (Palmer 2010; Pearson, 2009). As a result, previous research has also provided some guidance associated with the protection of ethnographers in the field by

offering suggestions on how to anticipate and prepare for fieldwork risks based on the location (Lee, 1995; Williams et al., 1992) and the focus of the study (Dickson-Swift et al., 2008; Lee & Stanko, 2003).

The most difficult ethical dilemmas discovered during this study are based on developing the relationship with the participants while separating 'private life' from 'my work life.' In ethnographic research, personal relationships, trust, and reciprocity are needed to ensure an open working-relationship between the researcher and participant (Hall, 2008). During an ethnographic study, the researcher ought to prioritize the participant's rights and interests over their own (Hall, 2008). The researcher should also try not to alter the data collection outcome and show respect for the participant by not imposing their own beliefs, morals, and interests. Furthermore, ethnographic researchers ought to consider that the relationships built with participants might not automatically end when the project ends (Hall, 2008). The ethical dilemma of 'private life' vs. 'work life' occurred while negotiating the method of contact with the respondents. This typically happens when the 'friendship' is being developed with the respondents during the ethnographic research project. It can arise when the work-life of the research project crosses into their private life, which is more likely to occur in today's new technology-based social-networking era. The ethical dilemmas discussed are based on trying to separate the researcher's private life from work life including negotiating frequency and methods of contact, 'friend requests,' and confidentiality.

3.2 Method

The ethnographic research that provided the information for this paper originated from twelve active offenders who were participating in appointment robbery in a metropolitan area in Texas from August 2015 to December 2017 (28 months). A total of 15 offenders were targeted

to participate; however, after data saturation was achieved, it was decided to conclude the collection process (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Data saturation was reached when the researcher noticed there were no new themes emerging from the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Guest et al., 2006). Prior research has shown that data saturation can be reached with as few as six participants, dependent upon the sample size of the selected population (Guest et al., 2006). Data saturation is not about the number of participants, but about the 'rich depth' quality of the data (Burnmeister & Aitken, 2012; Fusch & Ness, 2015), as well as acknowledging that there is no new data to be collected since there are no new emerging themes (O'Reilly & Parker, 2012). The participants range in age from 16 to 26 years old. All the participants were male and comprised of three Caucasians, three African Americans, and six Latinos. This purposeful population is not generalizable to the general population of offenders.

With its foundation in anthropology and sociology, ethnography is one of the early approaches in qualitative methods that are concerned with learning about people through immersion (Huot, 2014; Spradley, 1980). The process of immersion in this real-world context allowed the primary researcher to discover and describe the criminal world's intricacies and to interpret the meaning of the phenomenon under this study. Exploring active offenders at the macro level can enhance understanding of the activities, processes, and practices through engagements and observations with participants and the setting. This methodology permitted the researcher to observe the respondents' daily lives while at the same time allowing the participants to openly discuss their individual experiences to understand their involvement in appointment robbery as individual participants in their environment (Berk & Adams, 1970; Decker & van Winkle, 1996; Hochstetler, 2001).

Ethnographic methods used in this study are diverse and ranged from observation to immersion and were complemented with semi-structured interviews for a thorough analysis. For this study, participant observation mandated immersion within the setting under investigation to gain a holistic understanding of the respondent's language, behaviors, and values (McNaughton et al., 2014). This continuous progress of participant engagement within their natural environment added strength to the ethical dilemma findings and was central to the study (Brink & Edgecombe, 2003).

Sampling

To identify, recruit and select the specific pool of offenders, the primary researcher employed a snowball sampling technique (Chambliss, 1975; Polsky, 1969; Watters & Biernacki, 1989). The primary author, a gang interventionist, was able to locate and identify an individual who was an active appointment robber and had a strong reputation and connections among criminal networks involved in various types of crimes (Vasquez et al., 2020). At the time of the study, the primary researcher had already known the gatekeeper for five years. He then asked the gatekeeper, 'Frank,' to be introduced to individuals who were involved in appointment robberies. Since Frank and the researcher had already developed a relationship and since Frank had a strong reputation in the streets, he was easily able to clarify the study objectives to potential participants as well as to validate the researcher as a non-threatening person to their social and legal status (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981; DeShay et al., 2020, Irwin, 1972; Vasquez et al., 2020; Vasquez & Vieraitis, 2016).

Next, to collect data from the targeted offenders, the researcher used a criterion sampling strategy (Patton, 2002). The initial criterion was based on the type of criminal activity the offender was involved in, which in this case was appointment robbery. The second criterion was

based on the geographic location in which the criminal activity occurred, which for the purpose

of this study was a large metropolitan area in Texas. The last criterion was based on whether or

not the offender was 'considered active' in appointment robbery. Prior studies defined the term

'active offenders' as individuals who had committed two or more criminal acts in the prior two

months and who were not currently incarcerated (DeShay et al., 2020; Vasquez et al., 2020;

Vasquez & Vieraitis, 2016; Wright et al., 1992). All respondents meet the criterion.

Setting

The study was conducted in a large metropolitan area in Texas. The selected site proved

to be ripe for recruitment since the area had recently had an increase in this style of criminal

activity, appointment robbery. The area in which the respondents lived is known to be infested

with drugs, gangs, as well as having a high teen pregnancy rate at 10.9 per 1,000 females

(Children's Health, 2019). The respondents' school district reports 112 gangs annually (M.

Dovick, personal communication, 2013). The respondents in the study came from numerous

types of family units, ranging from multi-family, two-parent, and single-parent households.

During the study, all the adults were employed, either full-time or part-time in manual labor; all

the juveniles were enrolled in a public school system. A majority of the respondents came from a

low socioeconomic background; with two of the respondents were considered upper-middle and

upper-class backgrounds as indicated by the United States poverty guidelines (U.S. Department

of Health & Human Services, 2017). The location in which the respondents resided was

identified as "high poverty," with 24.9% of the population 18 years or younger living in poverty

and an 18.3% overall poverty rate (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013).

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed through grounded theory strategies (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Grounded theory methodology allowed us to discover and identify patterns in the field notes,

documents, interviews, and observations (Olson et al., 2016; Patton, 2002). This theory allowed

the researcher to systematically examine the respondents' views from the collected data and

observations to illustrate potential patterns and themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Olson et al.,

2016). In line with grounded theory, the researcher compiled and compared the observations,

field notes, and respondent experiences to generate themes and patterns for explanatory and

descriptive purposes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Patton, 2002). It was essential to compare the

fieldwork experiences to prior similar experiences of ethnographers such as Polsky (1967),

Marquart (1986), Sanchez-Jankowski (1991), Ferrell and Hamm (1998), Jacobs (1998), and

Rambo (2007).

To begin the data analysis process, we immersed ourselves in the collected data to

properly organize it and identify themes of ethical dilemmas. The most crucial step in qualitative

data analysis is to sort through the data to identify significant themes and associations (Creswell

& Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2002). The primary researcher was able to immerse in the field notes

and data to inductively examine the data for any potential ethical dilemma themes (Patton, 2002).

The fieldnotes consisted of the researcher's personal experiences and thoughts regarding the

developed relationships and patterns among the respondents and the researcher.

Next, the researcher used open coding to identify, classify, and group patterns into major

themes, and in this case, for ethical dilemmas (Patton, 2002; Strauss, 1987; Stake, 1995). My

initial data analysis produced numerous potential ethical dilemma coding labels. However, I

noticed the emergent codes to select the significant thematic categories. These major thematic

categories were related to my attempt to separate my private life from work life. Therefore, I read and re-read the collected data deductively based on how the respondents presented the above ethical dilemma as a guide.

3.3 Results

In this section we will present the ethical dilemmas encountered by the primary researcher and the decision-making process to deal with the ethical dilemmas. Given the sensitive and dangerous nature of the study, the respondents were given pseudonyms to protect their identity and to ensure confidentiality. While ethnographic studies on robbers have been conducted before (Miller, 2006; Wright & Decker, 1997), little is known about offenders who use e-commerce apps to arrange a face-to-face meeting to set up a 'fake' financial exchange to commit a robbery (Vasquez et al., 2020). We will discuss different scenarios that demonstrate how dilemmas arose while the relationships were being formed during the research project. It is understood during an extended fieldwork study unanticipated ethical dilemmas are likely to happen (Murphy & Dingwall, 2007), and some are unavoidable (Richardson & McMullan, 2007). However, it was still ethically challenging at each step of the process. The results are presented in terms of the ethical dilemmas that arose during the research based on navigating between 'private life' vs. 'work life' and include negotiating frequency and methods of contact, 'friend requests,' and confidentiality.

Private life vs. work-life

The ethical dilemma that arose early in the research project was how to navigate the method of contact amongst the various forms of communication methods while trying to ensure my private life stayed separate from my work life. Throughout the world, many people log in, create profiles, and publicly articulate their relationships with their connected peers. During the

study, many respondents preferred communicating through social networking sites rather than the traditional phone call. This shift in forms of communication is significant to the first ethical dilemma. Many participants viewed these social networking sites as essential to being 'cool' and assisted in developing their cultural identity and protecting their identity (Livingstone, 2008).

A common dilemma during ethnographic fieldwork is the difficulty separating the researcher's private life from the researcher's fieldwork. However, it is exacerbated today with the explosion and acceptance of social networking sites. Almost all American teenagers (85%) use social media (Lenhart et al., 2011). At the beginning of the study, some participants were not eager or ready to share their cell phone numbers, but they felt at ease giving me their social 'media name'. When the researcher asked Sebastian for his cell phone number, he immediately looked at me and said: "Naw man, hit me up on da gram, look me up, I go by D@NG3R". Continuing to acquire his cell phone number, I told him texting was faster, to which he deflected by saying: "Texting? Shit what if I lose my cell, I can always log into my gram from anywhere, plus I don't like to text cos you never knows who's be watching." In most cases, their social media presence allowed them to identify themselves as whomever they wanted others to view them. Every participant in the study had a social networking account, but not a single one was labeled by their real name, nor was made 'public.' The dilemma was based on the decision to adapt and change the mode of contact from cell phone calls and texts to their preferred mode of communication, social networking sites.

The decision could have been easy; the researcher could have just created a fake profile on a social networking site to maintain contact; however, doing so could be viewed as being disingenuous and 'fake' and non-trustworthy. It could also be viewed from their perspective that the researcher was unwilling to share personal information, although I experienced theirs.

Another potential misconception could be that the researcher was 'hiding' his true identity as a researcher, and they could have thought he was working with law enforcement in an attempt to infiltrate their criminal groups to 'snitch' on them. However, if the researcher agreed to use his personal social networking page to communicate with the participants, it instantaneously blended his personal life with his work life.

Negotiating frequency of contact

As soon as the researcher was introduced to the respondents, every effort was made to maintain individual regular contact to ensure open and frequent communication. However, at the same time, the researcher made a point not to seem too needy and to allow time to pass so the newly introduced participants could reflect on his true nature as a researcher and not be viewed as someone who was there to harm them legally or socially. Therefore, the most appropriate mode of contact in the beginning stages of the project was an intermittent approach due to the study's delicate nature and the stress that fieldwork could place on the participants (Hall, 2008). The researcher made sure to distance himself just enough from the participants so that he did not become a nuisance, while at the same time, he strived not to seem disinterested or only interested in their lives during data collection periods. The encountered ethical dilemma was to ascertain how frequently contact should be made to mitigate undue harm and to prevent burdening the participant. The resolution of this dilemma was to be 'familiar' and 'available' to the participants and not be pushy by only asking questions for the research project. The other part of the dilemma was that if the researcher only asked about their criminal involvement and asked too many details without being genuinely interested in them, they could have viewed him as a 'narc' (i.e. undercover law enforcement).

When Frank, the gatekeeper first introduced the researcher to David in September 2015, David initially did not want to participate in the study for fear of being identified to law enforcement. As a result, the researcher did not push David to participate since he viewed the researcher as untrustworthy. I then decided to position myself more frequently with the gatekeeper and within the community in hopes that potential participants began to recognize me and accept me as non-threatening. This worked and as time went on, David and the others started to see me more frequently and subsequently began to trust me more. In making myself 'familiar,' my availability and genuineness were no longer suspect. In the beginning stages, I also made a point talk to the participants about their daily lives in an effort to get to know them as individuals, rather than simply asking them about their most recent robbery. I did not want to seem only interested in their criminal activities; I wanted to let them know that I was also interested in them as a person.

Near the end of the study, I asked a few of the participants why they trusted me and decided to participate in the study. Several of them indicated that I was not 'pushy' or nosey and that I took an actual interest in them. Dan responded:

At first I was like aw hellz naws, I don't know this fool, and then we found out that you were a researcher, and that was even worse. I wasn't gonna talk to you, but then you kept coming around and you didn't ask a bunch of questions, you were just chill and wanted to hang out. Then you hit me up to hang out at da spot, and I didn't know if you only wanted to ask me a bunch of bullshit questions. But when we hung out, it was just to chill. You weren't just interested in the shit dat I'm into, but who I was.

Once Dan noticed I was not staying in contact with him only when I needed data, he felt at ease. A common ethical dilemma in ethnographic research is making a participant feel like they are being used which often results in a feeling of guilt (Crick, 1992). However, when each side benefits from the interaction, in this case a 'feeling of worth' by the participant and 'building rapport' by the researcher, it helps to reduce any potential ambiguity and tension between the participant and the researcher (Cassell, 1982). A major drawback in maintaining regular communication with my participants was that made it difficult to maintain the researcher role, and over time the increased frequency in communication aided in developing a 'friendship' (Hall, 2008). During an ethnographic project, the researcher needs to maintain adequate space and consider their place to anticipate any potential conflicts and reactions that could arise during the research process such as maintaining either too little or too much contact (Fuller, 1999). This dilemma was corrected by informing the participants that I would be in contact weekly but that I could not guarantee that I would be present at all social events to which I was invited. I stressed to the participants that I would make contact at least once a week, but it was not always possible to be with them every week, as they started to request, due to my personal and work commitments. I also informed the participants that when I left them a message, they were free to contact me on their timeframe as I was not there to burden them.

Negotiating methods of contact

During the research project, regular contact was maintained with the participants through a variety of communication methods. Initially, it was only by face-to-face introductions via the gatekeeper. Once a relationship was built, distrust was waned, cell phone numbers were exchanged, and communication switched to telephone calls and text messages. Telephone calls were often initiated by me and text messages were frequently initiated by the participants. To

help resolve any miscommunication, I asked the participants about the best way to stay in contact with them. All participants responded similarly to what John said: "Just text me cos you never know where I'd be at and if I can talk and shit, but I can always hit you back with a text." A few of the participants also stated they did not want to call me because they felt that they would disturb me while I was at work. In deciding to connect with the participants by text messages, it allowed the participants to respond on their time as well as making me feel less invasive.

During the initial stages of the process, the primary researcher felt some of the participants still did not fully trust him because they did not offer their cell phone numbers to maintain communication. However, a plausible reason could have been that since the population under study was active criminals, they simply did not trust anyone. It could also be that most of the participants were young and preferred to make contact through various social networking sites such as Instagram, Facebook, MocoSpace, and SnapChat. During conversations with the participants, it was not uncommon for participants to tell me to "hit me up on da gram" or asking me: "Wut you go by on 'Snap?" As a result, I had to decide on the next ethical dilemma, to expand the method of communication from the traditional telephone style to a new format through social networking websites. At the same time, as the participant and researcher relationship developed over time, most participants also took an interest in the primary researcher's private life. As a result, most participants began to look for the researcher through various social media outlets. The introduction of social media networking websites into the study presented a new challenge in the face of the traditional problem of sharing personal information, developing friendships with participants, and getting too close (Powdermaker, 1966).

The first dilemma was to decide whether to maintain and enforce the initial form of communication, the cell phone via talk or text or to embrace the new forms of communication.

The second dilemma was deciding whether to open up the relationship even more by communicating through social media networks. If I decided to keep it formal, it could shut down the relationship, however if I decided to use social networking as a form of communication, it could further develop the trust and relationship with the participants. The unintended consequence of that decision would present another ethical dilemma by sharing my personal life and therefore blending in my private life with my work life (Powdermaker, 1966)

Therefore, when several participants asked if I subscribed to any social media networks, it forced me to take a couple of steps back and assess the situation. As developing trust was paramount to developing relationships with the participants and robbery crews, I opted for the following strategy: (1) take a deep look into my current social media presence on Facebook to filter out any personal, employment, and family information on my current profile; (2) create an Instagram account to be used primarily for communication with the participants. The Instagram account was labeled with a different name from my existing Facebook account. At the time of this research, most of the participants mainly used Instagram rather than Facebook, so most participants did not even know about my Facebook account. This strategy was implemented in an attempt to separate my public and private domains and allowed me to respond to the inquiry by stating that yes; I did have a social media presence on Instagram.

'Friend request'

Once I let the participants know that I did, in fact, have a social media presence, it allowed the participants to send a 'friend request' to my personal social media page. As was expected, once I accepted the initial 'friend request,' it opened the door for the other participants to send their 'friend request.' Soon afterward, I was connected with almost all of the participants through one or more social media networks. The ethical dilemma in this situation was whether to

accept the 'friend request' which would either open up another venue to communicate with the participants, or to deny the friend request, which could potentially make the participant feel as if I did not want to be their friend outside of the research. The introduction of social media as a communication tool presented a new set of issues to consider. The participant as a 'friend' would now be able to view my private life and relationships, as well as me being able to see their private information and relationships. Another thing to think about was the dilemma of knowing that all of my current 'friends' could see whom I was adding, and the participant's friends could see whom they were adding, me. The action of rejecting or ignoring the 'friend request' could be considered unethical since it could signaled to the participant that the developed relationship was limited to the research project, thus I was not going to acknowledge them outside the specified time of the research project.

Accepting the blended life

Once I accepted the 'friend request,' it automatically blended my private life and work life. Therefore, the dilemma here is that by accepting participants as 'friends,' the research project would take a turn in the study's approach, since now they had a view into my personal life. Once they were accepted as friends, my personal life became part of the research from that point forward. For example, this became apparent when social media sent out the notification of my birthday, and before I knew it, I was receiving: "Happy birthday homie" messages from the participants. Of course, this leads to questions from Frank saying: "Eh guey, how old are you foo?", or from Mike asking: "How many candles or tequila shots should I buy you?"

The concern was that I could no longer separate my personal life from my research on social media. Prior research has pointed out that there needs to be some separation between the researcher's personal life and the research (Hall, 2008). However, once the decision was made to

accept the participants as 'friends,' it took away the opportunity to detach myself from my private life and my research. In traditional ethnography, the researcher would be able to go 'home' at some point, whether it is to their home city, country, or even their separate social group. However, with today's social media imprint on people's lives, it is difficult to holistically separate what is posted online about oneself without sharing it to the population at large. If I wanted to share something positive with my family and peers, I could not easily use social media to announce it. I had to decide if it was appropriate to 'everyone' knowing or not posting anything at all. Typically, while ethnographers are in the field, they are active members of the research group for only a temporary basis (Bornstein, 2007). Yet, by permitting the participants into my private life and my private life into my research group, I ultimately ensured that my private life and work life would eventually integrate, and I would not be able to fully separate my private life from the research for the next two years. As a result, the decision was to change the settings on my social media platforms to ensure I approved or denied any posting that 'tagged' my name, image, or personal page posting.

Confidentiality

The next dilemma in whether to accept the participants' 'friend requests' brought to light additional concerns; the major one was confidentiality. In the beginning stages, not all the people I met along the way were fully aware of the research project. This was because not everyone I encountered during the time in the field was to become an actual participant. Most of the people I met through this research project were individuals whom I met on my way through various criminal crews. Additionally, at the time of the project, some individuals on my personal social media account knew of my study, and others did not. Therefore, it could have been unethical to break the participants' confidentiality by permitting others to identify them as potential

participants in an ongoing research project on criminals. Mirroring that issue was the concern for my confidentiality. If the participants were granted access to my personal information and the people I know, I would be allowing them information that they would not otherwise have access to. Therefore 'relational confidentiality' was significant to maintain. There had to be some control over what personal information participants could view. In the end, I decided to create an Instagram account but make adjustments to my personal Facebook account to limit the amount of personal data that could be viewed by the participants and by everyone. I also informed the participants that if I agreed to accept their social media 'friend request' that their confidentiality would be compromised since we would be blending our personal information with each other. I provided the participants with both options: (1) to keep the relationship to just the fieldwork or (2) to blend our 'private life' with our 'work life,' and agree that confidentiality would be compromised. All of the participants responded similarly to Jose by saying: "It's coo mistuah, I nos you gots a life and shit and I gots mine, but I like you and trust you so I don't mind you seeing my shit. I don't post shit, shit anyways."

In the end, the participants decided to move the working relationship past the field and into each other's private life through social media. I reassured the participants that if anyone specifically asked about the nature of our relationship, I would not inform anyone of their participation in the research project. They typically responded as Thomas by saying: "Yeah don't be trippin' and telling no one that I be hitting that 'lick,' cos you said you wouldn't." "Lick" in this content means to be actively participating in theft of robbery. When other participants were informed of the risk of losing confidentiality, they often were not concerned since they had already protected their identity on social media by various other protective measures such as; not

showing their faces in any pictures, removing identifiable markings from images, and, more importantly, using aliases as their username.

3.4 Discussion

Ethical dilemmas may present themselves during any qualitative research project. The scenarios discussed in this paper demonstrate how the already challenging nature of qualitative research can be further complicated. This is especially true when the line between researcher and participant becomes ever more blurred with the introduction of social media sites as forms of communication. The dilemma of utilizing social networking sites as a form of communication raised issues of how far one should go to build the relationship while maintaining confidentiality.

Negotiating the frequency of contact dilemma was based on efforts to sustain a balance of regular contact while, at the same time, trying not to overburden the participant to feel pressured to respond to messages. There is no specific guideline indicating how frequently a researcher should contact with participants in the field; therefore, it was decided to start with once a week contact initially. This worked well for some participants; others engaged with more sporadic response rate, and others only made regular contact once a rapport was developed. Essentially, the frequency of communication was to go with the flow of each participant. If I had decided once a week protocol, we could have lost some respondents, since it could have made them feel obligated to participant.

The next dilemma, negotiating contact methods, brought up the debate: How much personal information should a researcher make accessible to their participants? One's private life can typically be kept separate while doing fieldwork for a few hours here and there. However, this is not the case when the researcher spends vastly long periods of time in the field. This is also not the case in today's rapid adoption of social media sites as a form of communication in

the United States. Social network sites provide insight into status negotiation, identity formation, and peer-to-peer communication (Boyd, 2008). Therefore, as soon as the decision to expand communication to include social media, it created a new dilemma. It was discovered that the participants in this study wanted to know information about the primary researcher in hopes of growing the relationship, and in determining my true identity as a non-threatening individual (e.g., law enforcement). However, when there was a shift to allow the participant to view the researcher's social media presence, it made it difficult for the participant to view the researcher's position solely as a researcher and not as a friend.

The dilemma of accepting or not accepting the 'friend request' was a significant decision during this project. As previously stated, if I denied access, and rejected the 'friend request' it would signal to the participants that I was not willing to share my private life yet asked them to share theirs. However, if I accepted the 'friend request,' it would blend my private life and my work life. To ensure that I maintained control of what was posted about myself, I adjusted the privacy settings on the social media platforms to allow me the opportunity to approve any social media posting that 'tagged' my name or my image. As I attempted to protect certain aspects of my personal life when I accepted their 'friend request,' it also presented a risk to their confidentiality. The dilemma was resolved by providing the participants the opportunity to keep the relationship off social media and informing them of the risk of losing anonymity. Consequently, when communication expanded to include social networking it also grew the relationship by further developing trust.

These issues are just a part of ethnography's hidden aspects, because researchers typically downplay these challenges in research papers or more often than not, altogether omit them. It is essential to recognize that all potential day-to-day ethical dilemmas that could arise

during the time in the field cannot be foreseen in advance (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). We acknowledge that the approach taken to address ethical dilemmas in practice is not holistic, because it is impossible to foresee all dilemmas before taking on a fieldwork project. We agree with Sieber (1992) that ethnographers ought to prepare and develop an ethical dilemma guideline for their specific type of research before entering the field since not all ethnographers can expect to encounter the same ethical dilemmas.

Tallying the benefits and harms in conducting ethnography with offenders is complex. Moral and ethical debates about this issue continue to be a hot topic within social sciences (Israel, 2004). There are probably no clear solutions as to what is the 'least harmful' or 'best' way of conducting this type of research. While the standard answer is to reference the ethics manual, most manuals cannot account for the complex and random kinds of dilemmas faced in the field, especially as technology changes. Maybe the best and most honest way to deal with ethical dilemmas is to ask our peers so we can learn from each other. My sense of ethical integrity derives from my commitment to engagement with my peers, my mission to generate a deep knowledge about the participants in whose lives I become immersed, my willingness to be reflexive in the research approach, and, more importantly my concern with the confidentiality and protection from harm of the participants. I recognized the participants could feel vulnerable as objects of the study. Therefore, as each dilemma presented itself, I reminded them of the informed consent for their continuation in the study. This was important, so the participants knew of my commitment to keep my research intentions transparent.

3.5 Limitations & Future Research

A thoughtful revisit of my overall research design and qualitative pursuits in this section provide future researchers insight into the ethical dilemmas they could confront yet are less

likely to be addressed in textbooks. This paper illustrates how future researchers could navigate similar dilemmas and risks. This study does have some limitations associated with the sample population. Since I used a purposeful snowball sample to select the respondents, I had little control over the actual sampling method. This is because the participants I reached relied mainly on the gatekeeper or on previous participants who were already a participant. Therefore, the representativeness of the sample was not guaranteed since I did not know the actual true distribution of the population and the sample. Another limitation of using snowball sample is sampling bias. Sampling bias could have occurred since the initial subjects tended to only nominate others that they knew well. As a result, the participants likely shared the same traits and characteristics. Thus it is expected that the sample obtained was only a small subgroup of the entire population of active offenders. Additionally, these participants were only selected based on the geographic criterion. It did not include any potential individuals who participated in this type of offense but lived outside of the specified geographic location.

The two main points have implications for future ethnographic research. The first is the use and future role of social networking sites, and the second is negotiating the ethics associated with social networking sites when participants become our friends. The study presented a vital theme that could affect future researchers, particularly the impact that social networking sites can have on relationship development and identity protection. The impact that social networking sites can have as a method of communication during a research project is apparent. Negotiating contact with participants on these sites is a modern form of a traditional dilemma that researchers will need to consider. The need to respect the established friendship is essential, so by ignoring an attempt of communication from the participants could be unethical.

Although the situation was resolved in this case, there needs to be further research on the challenges that social networking websites could pose for researchers, not only in opening up other channels of communication and gaining access to the field, but more importantly, trying to exit the field. How does a researcher end the research project once they have become intertwined through social media into the researcher's life and you in theirs? Do you simply 'defriend' them from your social media page?

It is acknowledged that ethical principles are somewhat generic, and it is impossible to account for all potential ethical dilemmas within a qualitative research project. This is true, especially with ongoing relationships or friendships that have developed with the respondents, as well as the reciprocal nature of interactions. We have demonstrated that engaging with ethical principles is not as easy as simply using them or adapting them to your research. It is more of a work in progress of dialogue and negotiation between all interested parties. The dilemmas discussed have shown that these need to be negotiated within the boundaries of relationship development between the researcher and the participant(s). Built 'friendships' do not always create new ethical dilemmas, but it does require the researcher to carefully consider what is already known about developing relationships with the participants and to apply this knowledge when introducing social networking sites with ethical dilemmas.

Lastly, it is understandable that we are constantly repositioning, adapting, and renegotiating our personalities and identities to fit the different roles, situations, and people we move through each day. This is no different from what researchers do in an ethnographic study. We should already be aware of how to respond to participants as friends. As researchers, we should already be familiar with how to make ethical decisions in the same way we do in our personal lives. This is even more important when our private life blends with our work life. The

research indicates that friendships born out of a study are more ethically challenging than personal organic friendships. Still, it does not make the research friendships any less enjoyable. It means that it will take a little more understanding and patience to decide to continue or end the relationship once the research is over.

Chapter 4

Appointment Robbery: Do Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design Strategies Work? Voices from the Street

Abstract:
Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) theory posits that crime can be reduced with modifications and planning to the physical environment by making involvement in criminal activity more difficult to complete by increasing the visibility of the offender thereby raising the risk of being caught. A new type of criminal opportunity has evolved in the 21st Century with the introduction and explosion of direct e-commerce opportunities with online and app advertisements to buy and sell items through such venues as Craigslist, OfferUp, Letgo, and Facebook Marketplace. This new crime is defined as an 'appointment robbery'. Using interviews of 12 active robbers from a metropolitan area in Texas, this study explored whether or not offenders were deterred from participating in criminal behavior due to the implementation of CPTED strategies. Results from this study suggest that offenders reported that territoriality, natural surveillance, activity support, and access control did serve as deterrents during the decision to commit a robbery. The study examined the original CPTED theory as posited by Jeffery in 1971. The study found support for the original four CPTED strategies.

Keywords**:** Appointment Robbery, Crime Prevention, Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design, Qualitative, Robbery

4.1 Introduction

A new type of criminal opportunity has evolved in the 21st Century with the introduction and explosion of direct e-commerce opportunities with online and app advertisements to buy and sell items through such venues as Craigslist, OfferUp, Letgo, and Facebook Marketplace. Internet-based e-commerce websites, such as Craigslist, OfferUp, Letgo, and Facebook Marketplace have been described as the largest online classified advertisements where one can find anything needed from a new car to a used toy. These Internet and app-based e-commerce websites provide offenders a wide variety of appealing targets for various types of predatory offending (Durkin, 2013). This really is a new marketplace of doing business through apps, which numerous individuals see as an easy and fast way to make extra cash by posting an item they want to sell and then waiting for the highest offer. There are numerous apps and Internet forums that specialize in aiding you to sell personal belongings for fast cash. However, the Consumer Federation of America (2018) reported that when individuals attempt to sell or buy their items by using apps or online advertisements, they increasingly have to deal with potentially being robbed. These new marketplace apps promise to eliminate the middleman by providing sellers and buyers the opportunity to arrange their own terms and potentially increase their profits. However, unlike older platforms like EBay and Amazon, by which you usually mail the item to a buyer, these newer apps prioritize local buyers to avoid shipping and platform fees, thereby requiring the individual to frequently make the financial exchange in person. This in-person financial exchange increases the risk of being robbed. Across the nation, various jurisdictions report incidents where unsuspecting consumers were placed in dangerous situations after arranging and agreeing to meet face-to-face to buy or sell items such as watches, iPads, and cell phones.

The perception of meeting someone face-to-face to complete a merchandise transaction does seem dangerous; McKenzie's (2011) study argues that over time if there are enough face-to-face meetings to exchange money for goods, you will find a certain number of crimes. The study helped to provide a more accurate picture of advertisements and related crime in North America. It stated that in 2010 there were 573 million advertisements, and of these, only 0.00005 percent of those advertisements were connected with a serious crime; which means that that odds of selecting a random advertisement from online and apps that could possible result in a crime is 1 in 2 million, as compared to an individual's odds of 1 in 844,000 of being killed in an airplane crash (2011). As stated, it is safe to say that at least 99 percent of all 'meet-ups' from online and app advertisements are safe, and everyone gets what they sought out to do; make extra money and buy an item at a reduced price. What about that 0.00005 percent? While the odds of an individual picking an advertisement that is associated with a crime is low, when a crime does occur it still results in creating public panic. These public panics are then associated with a fear of crime from using any online or apps to buy/sell merchandise. When the newspapers and broadcast media promote these public panics, they frequently coin a clever name for the specific issue, incident, or crime. For example, previously the notion of 'robbery by appointment' was coined and then materialized as people posted advertisements, left information about the sale of goods on Craigslist, and subsequently found their residences robbed (Lee, 2012).

A point of this paper is to also clearly identify and separate this type of robbery from previously labeled types of robbery. Currently, states, cities, and jurisdictions have not adopted a universal term that clearly describes this new type of offense. Since the type of robbery discussed in this paper is directly connected with setting up an appointment to rob the individual by using an electronic device and/or a cell phone app, it was decided to develop a new label for this type

of robbery. The FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) program defines robbery "as the taking or attempting to take anything of value from the care, custody, or control of a person or persons by force or threat of force or violence and/or putting the victim in fear" (U.S. Department of Justice, 2010). For the purpose of this paper it has been determined that this new type of criminal offense warrants a new label. Since the offender uses an electronical device and/or a cell phone app to set up the location, target, and financial reward of the robbery, the author has coined this type of offense as an 'appointment robbery'. The definition to be used in this paper for an 'appointment robbery' is based on the FBI's definition, but adds the component of using an electronical device to set up the robbery. Appointment robbery is defined as the taking or attempting to take anything of value from the care, custody, or control of a person or persons by force or threat of force or violence and/or putting the victim in fear by way of using an electronical device and/or a cell phone app to set up the robbery.

21st Century innovations in technology have generated new opportunities for offenders to commit deviant activities. While new technology has helped several disciplines, the internet and mobile selling apps have also created new forms of unprecedented opportunities for individuals to participate in various types of crimes that would not have been previously available (Durkin, 2013). Criminals now have a new way to clearly identify a victim and calculate their reward when deciding to commit a robbery. The main difference between robbing a random victim and selecting a targeted victim from a mobile selling app or an electronic advertisement is that the criminal can determine the precise value of the reward and set the appointment in order to rob the individual. In most cases, individuals (sellers) invite strangers to their place of residence or set up a designated meeting place to purchase items that are listed for sale on such outlets as Craigslist, OfferUp, Letgo and Facebook Marketplace. As a result, these electronic

advertisements have provided criminals a new way to commit crimes by directly providing a venue for the criminal to specifically identify their victim, the financial reward, as well as the target location. Various cities have, therefore, decided to respond to this new form of criminal activity by implementing 'safe spaces' to offer a protected area where online buyers and sellers can meet to exchange merchandise. This new response to a 21st-Century crime has its foundation in Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED). Preventing crime is a complex matter and CPTED has shown it can reduce the possibility of crime with planning and modification to the physical environment by making criminal involvement more difficult to complete or by making the offender more visible and thereby increasing the risk of being caught (Sakip & Abdullah, 2010).

The purpose of this paper is to assist planners, designers, and policymakers in identifying any potential existing CPTED strategies that work in reducing criminal activity and how to incorporate them either in early planning or in existing policies by using the voices from active robbers. Although a significant body of research can demonstrate the importance of CPTED strategies in crime prevention, there is insufficient research evaluating the performance of CPTED strategies from the perspective of active robbers who have not been identified by law enforcement. Appointment robbery is on the rise across the nation and while most agencies incorporate CPTED strategies to reduce this type of crime, little is known if the actual offender recognizes the CPTED strategies and is deterred. The focus of the following analysis will examine the relationship between active robbers and the original four CPTED strategies introduced by Jeffery (1971). This paper will briefly discuss background information on using technology and crime and then will discuss CPTED to present key findings for the application of the original CPTED strategies. Next, the paper will use the voices of active offenders to

investigate if CPTED strategies had an impact on committing a crime or not. The results of the analysis will be presented by using the respondents' own words as it relates to the application of each CPTED strategy. Lastly, the paper will discuss any limitations and potential policy implications derived from the analysis.

4.2 Literature Review

New technology has created new opportunities for various types of criminal activities such as criminal markets in pornography, gambling, pirated music, and illegal drugs (Durkin, 2013). It should be made clear that the Internet does not directly cause crime; however, it is simply a strong communication tool that could potentially intensify and hasten crime (Williams, 2008). On the Internet, there is also a large black market in selling and buying illegally obtained financial and credit card information (Choo & Smith, 2008). Additionally, classified ads solicited on various types of online and social media apps are forming a new marketplace for illegal sexual services and stolen goods (Adler & Adler, 2006).

New technology allows individuals an opportunity to communicate anonymously (Durkin, 2013). It is this perception of anonymity that can embolden criminogenic behavior and could possibly be a contributing factor in various types of deviant behaviors e.g., cyberstalking, cyberbullying, and cyber harassment (Durkin and Patterson, 2011). The perceived anonymity provides the offender the opportunity to operate out in the open and avoid apprehension (Cilluffo, Cardash, & Whitehead, 2007). The opportunity to participate in criminal behavior increases with the use of anonymous emails, proxy servers, and blocked personal content, which allows the offender to visibly participate in crime and scams with relative freedom (Durkin & Brinkman, 2009).

Typical computer crimes of the past will continue to evolve as individuals become more technologically savvy as well as gain easier computer access (Davis, 2012). Computer technology decreases the probability of punishment for their indirect involvement and anonymous nature (Williams, 2008). Therefore, it should not be surprising that traditional crimes such as robbery are now being facilitated through an electronic setting. The internet reduces the need for an open-air illegal drug market as well as allows for organized prostitution to solicit electronically (New Jersey Commission on Investigation, 2000). Gangs have been documented to actively recruit new members using the internet and social media (New Jersey Commission on Investigation, 2000; Ortiz, 2018). The Nigerian 419 fraud is a successful type of fraud that shows how easy it is for motivated criminals to find a large number of potential victims since it is estimated that the Nigerian 419 fraud takes $3 billion a year from victims (Durkin, 2013).

More recently, the new technology based electronic advertisement websites such as Craigslist, OfferUp, Letgo, and Facebook Marketplace have served as a new format to provide predatory targets for offenders. Craigslist and other online advertisement apps are frequently associated in the news and social media with various types of crimes (Bercovici, 2011). The broadcast media and newspapers frequently apply the label 'Craigslist Rapist' or 'Craigslist Killer' for an array of unfortunate incidents resulting in negative public perception in using any online advertisements (Oravec, 2014). In 2009, Phillip Markoff, known as the 'Craigslist Killer,' targeted women who solicited erotic services on Craigslist (Goodnough & O'Conner, 2010). In another incident, when a family advertised the sale of a television online, a group of offenders killed the father during a home invasion robbery for the item being sold (Holtz, 2010).

As you have read above, crimes that arise from electronic advertisements and/or apps to complete face-to-face transactions are safer that you would expect. The issue is not that meeting

someone from an app to sell/buy something is dangerous; the issue is that there are different responses to the new type of crime, appointment robbery. Cities have responded with implementing 'safe zones' as well as distributing tips on conducting face-to-face financial transactions through various media outlets. Computer based crimes, as compared to traditional type of crimes, frequently do not prompt the same public and political reaction. This results in only a small amount of resources and effort being allocated to typical computer crimes (Hinduja, 2007). Public panic can be created by the media in response to a single 'Craigslist' transaction that went bad, as compared to a typical computer-based crime. Only when technology is used to facilitate a crime that results in an individual directly committing a crime against another (i.e. robbery), is when a computer-based crime will elicit a public response.

4.3 Theoretical Background

Criminologist and others frequently seek to understand why offenders commit a crime based on what Mills (1940) identified as vocabularies of motive, however, this study seeks to understand if strategies of CPTED have an effect on the decision-making skills of offenders to commit a crime. Crime prevention through environmental design emphasizes strategies that could decrease crime by directly concentrating on areas that are frequently targets of crime (Taylor & Hale, 1986).

Online shopping with face-to-face monetary exchanges has resulted in providing an offender with a new opportunity to commit a crime. This new opportunity provides the offender with more control over the selection of the reward, target and location. While new technology provided a way for new ecommerce, it also meant that a new response was needed to aid in reducing appointment robbery. One of the innovative responses to reduce crime during the 1960s and 1970s was with Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED). CPTED's

approach to decreasing crime demonstrated the need for a multi-agency model to increase their accountability for their actions. The new CPTED innovative approach utilized multiple disciplines, including urban design, architecture, criminology, and psychology (Armitage, 2018).

The effect of location on 'crime risk' has been well recognized in the literature. Prior research has found that specific design features play a role in the perceived susceptibility for crime at the individual, street, and neighborhood level (Armitage, 2018). At the property level (micro-level) this includes the absence or presence of explicit design features that can either decrease or increase the property levels' appeal to offenders (Armitage, 2018; 2006; Armitage et al., 2010; Brown & Altman, 1983; Cromwell et al., 1991; Poyner, 1983; Tseloni et al., 2014). At the neighborhood level (macro-level) this includes distance of the property to the offender's residence (Bennett & Wright, 1984; Bernasco & Nieuwbeerta, 2005; Wright & Decker, 1994), the distance of the property to an interchange of transport (Groff & LaVigne, 2001), and the distance of the property to a pedestrian walkway (Armitage, 2006; 2013).

Crime prevention through environmental design was initially presented by Jeffery in 1971, who was motivated by the work of Jane Jacobs (1961). Jacobs stressed that diverse land use along with increased pedestrian activity are significant attributes for neighborhood safety. Starting in the 1960s and 1970s, researchers proved how the built design could play a role in preventing crime in place-based approach (Jacobs, 1961; Jeffery, 1971; Newman, 1973). Over the next few decades, the strategies of CPTED started to be accepted as an effective approach in crime reduction (Armitage 2013; Poyner & Webb 1991). The goal of CPTED is to decrease crime occurrences by manipulating the build, design, management of the built environment, and the natural environment. CPTED focuses on relationships amongst the environment and people while using behavioral and environmental psychology (Cozens & Love, 2015). More recently,

Armitage (2013) defined the aim of CPTED as "The design, manipulation and management of the built environment to reduce crime and the fear of crime and to enhance sustainability through the process and application of measures at the micro(individual building/structure), meso (neighborhood), and macro (national) level" (p. 287). Under CPTED, there are built elements that could sway how individuals respond to environmental clues based upon their perception of the environment (Cozens & Love, 2015). CPTED's strategies provide for elements that are aimed at discouraging individuals who have a propensity to commit criminal activity, in this case, robbery. Traditional crime prevention typically relies on reactive law enforcement procedures as well as intensive capital investment on mechanical and/or electronic devices; however, CPTED attempts to reduce crime by utilizing natural and mechanical strategies with location design and individual activities which can be implemented proactively at the initial design stage (2015).

This paper will examine the data through the lens of the original CPTED theory proposed by Jeffery (1971) who used the research of Jacobs (1961) to develop a new approach for crime control which was named Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) (Greenberg & Rohe, 2007). The original CPTED approach is based on the effective use and proper design of the built environment to decrease fear and the occurrences of crime (Crowe, 2000). Prior research identified four strategies that makeup CPTED to modify the built environment for the purpose of decreasing crime (Cozens, 2002; Carter, Carter, & Dannenberg, 2003; Kajalo & Lindblom, 2015). These four strategies are (1) territoriality, (2) natural surveillance, (3) activity support, and (4) access control.

Territoriality

Territoriality is the capacity of the physical environment to create perceived zones of territorial influence (Cullen, Agnew, & Wilcox, 2013). The strategy of territoriality conveys the physical sense of being owned or private with a designed purpose. Territoriality is a design concept that tries to promote a 'sense of ownership' of the space to reduce potential criminal opportunities by motivated offenders. When spaces are clearly defined, it is easier to identify potential offenders. The research found that when territoriality strategies are implemented, it resulted in offenders reevaluating a target's vulnerability, thereby decreasing burglary (Brown & Altman, 1983). This concept can include symbolic barriers such as small changes in road textures and signage, as well as real barriers such as gates that can clearly define and indicate areas as being public, semi-private, or private (Cozens & Love, 2015). Some examples of the physical features that help convey this include: walls, fencing, sidewalks, signage, and landscape borders. High rise buildings have weak territoriality because of shared doorways, courtyards, and lobbies (Cullen, Agnew, & Wilcox, 2013). Consequently, low and mid-rise buildings have higher territoriality since they have private doors, fewer residents, and unique yard space (Cullen, Agnew, & Wilcox, 2013). Additional research findings also found support in the use of territoriality strategies (Anderson, MacDonald, Bluthenthal, & Ashwood, 2013; Wortley & McFarlane, 2011).

Natural Surveillance

Natural surveillance is the way an area is planned to maximize the possibility of formal or informal observers of the space in order to witness potential suspicious behavior. Surveillance refers to the degree to which potential offenders perceive the likelihood of being seen, even when their perception could be wrong. Surveillance is also obtained by strategic placement of

buildings in a development such as making sure that the entrances to the buildings face towards the street. This is done to make sure that sightlines are not blocked by obstructions such as high fences and shrubbery, and to make sure that rooms that face the street are active rooms (i.e., living rooms, kitchen) (Armitage, 2018). Surveillance is the capacity of physical design to provide surveillance opportunities for residents and their agents; this includes such things as the height of the buildings, the number of access routes, placement of buildings, and height and placement of shrubbery/trees (Cullen, Agnew, & Wilcox, 2013). Under natural surveillance, windows allow residents to survey exterior and interior spaces. Therefore, high rise buildings have weak natural surveillance since there is little or no view of the common and street areas (Cullen, Agnew, & Wilcox, 2013). Consequently, areas with high degrees of natural surveillance have a reduced level of crime risk (Armitage, 2006; Van der Voordt & Van Wegen, 1990; Winchester & Jackson, 1982). Areas that offenders perceive to have a high level of natural surveillance have less likelihood to be vulnerable to crime (Brown & Bentley, 1993; Nee & Meenaghan, 2006).

Activity Support

Activity support pertains to the use of signage and design to promote intended patterns of usage of the public space. The strategy of activity support aims to put activities that are inherently 'unsafe' (i.e., those that involve financial transactions) into areas that are 'safe,' which are areas that have a high activity level and that have opportunities for surveillance (Crowe, 2000). The premise is for 'safe' activities to function as magnets to attract ordinary individuals into the specified area, thereby serving to discourage potential offenders from coming into the area (Cozens, Saville, Hillier, 2005). Also, increased levels of activities in mixed use communities have been found to reduce opportunities for crime (Petterson, 1997). While this

increases the 'eyes on the street' (Jacobs, 1961), it could also increase the opportunities for crime by providing more potential targets for a motivated offender.

Access Control

Access control focuses on decreasing opportunities for crime by hindering access to possible targets while also generating a heightened perception level of risk in potential offenders. Access control examines the physical guidance of individuals coming in or going out from an area through strategic placement of exits and entrances, landscaping, fencing, and lighting. The goal of access control is to provide space for an intended user, thereby keeping out individuals that do not belong to the area. This strategy can contain informal (i.e., natural), formal (i.e., law enforcement), and mechanical (i.e., locks) (Cozens, Saville, Hillier, 2005). It has been argued that access control strategies can prevent crime by decreasing the opportunities to offend as well as the rewards of offending (Cornish & Clarke, 2003). Prior research found that the layout of streets and walkways encouraged activity by pedestrians and thereby reduced crime (Hiller, 2004). There is a correlation between the level of crime and the design features when there are no features to restrict pedestrian movement throughout neighborhoods (Newman, 1972; 1973; 1980; Poyner, 1983, Poyner & Webb, 1991). Other research found decreased levels of crime when there is some pedestrian movement with busier streets (Hillier & Shu, 2000). Lastly, there is reduced crime in areas with increased levels of restricted access as compared to areas that have lower levels of restricted access resulting in more crime (Beavon, Brantingham, & Brantingham, Eck, 1997; 1994; White, 1990).

4.4 Methodology

Qualitative methods were used for this research since it allowed the offenders to openly discuss their personal behaviors and experiences so that the researcher could develop a better

understanding of their involvement in appointment robbery as individuals and in the setting of their environment (Berk & Adams, 1970; Decker & van Winkle, 1996; Hochstetler, 2001). The study used field research since it consisted of using two types of methods to obtain the data, asking questions and direct observation (Maxfield & Babbie, 1995; Patton, 2002). Semi-structured interviews were chosen to examine and question their rationale when selecting a target and whether or not they were deterred by environmental or physical features (Patton, 1987). An advantage in using qualitative research for this particular study allowed the researcher to get close enough to gain first-hand experience in the offender's feelings, motives, intentions, and often contradictory and detailed perspective of the social world, all of which are problematic to capture with quantitative methods (Cromwell & Birzer, 2014; Glassner & Carpenter, 1985; Polsky, 1967). The sample was purposive and consisted of 12 active appointment robbers from a metropolitan area in Texas. Prior research has defined 'active' offenders as had committed two or more acts of crime within the previous two months and were not presently incarcerated (DeShay, Vasquez, Vieraitis, 2020; Vasquez & Vieraitis, 2016; Wright, Decker, Redfern, Smith, 1992). All respondents meet this criterion.

The data were collected through semi-structured interviews in an informal manner, which allowed for the order and content of the questions to vary for each respondent (Patton, 1987; Wright, Decker, Redfern, & Smith, 1992). The interviewing style permitted the respondents to feel at ease within their own environment and allowed them to speak freely (Polsky, 1969; Wright, Decker, Redfern, and Smith, 1992). For the purpose of this study, each participant was provided an assigned pseudonym for the research project and interview. The research and interviews were conducted from August 2015 to December 2017. The research project was approved through the Institutional Review Board and the Office of Research Compliance

through the University. The interviews typically lasted between 45 minutes to an hour, were audio-recorded, and then transcribed. A high percentage of the interviews occurred 'in the street' where the respondent felt more comfortable, although some interviews were conducted in fast-food restaurants, at their homes, and in cars. After consenting to participate in the interview, respondents were asked to talk about the most recent appointment robbery that they were involved in. This style of structural, descriptive, and contrast questions allowed the respondent to talk about a precise series of events directly related to appointment robbery (Spradley, 1979). During the interview, the researcher prompted respondents with questions about why they participated in appointment robbery, their perceptions of the rewards and risks, as well as their specific situation decisions prior, during, and after their commission of appointment robbery.

In order to identify the active offenders, snowball sampling was used to recruit participants from the streets of the metropolitan area (Chambliss, 1975; DeShay, Vasquez, Vieraitis, 2020; Polsky, 1969; Sudman, 1976; Vasquez & Vieraitis, 2016; Watters & Biernacki, 1989; West, 1980). The author, a gang interventionist, collected the data and had the ability to identify a gatekeeper through prior contact (McCall, 1978). The gatekeeper was an active appointment robber who had a strong reputation among the criminal underworld and had connections with networks of criminals (DeShay, Vasquez, Vieraitis, 2020; Taylor, 1985; Vasquez & Vieraitis, 2016; Wright, Decker, Redfern, Smith, 1992). The researcher had known the gatekeeper for five years at the time of the study. The informant's reputation aided the researcher in being introduced to the informant's criminal associates and appointment robbing crews who were also actively participating in criminal activity (McCall, 1978; Taylor, 1985; Wright, Decker, Redfern, Smith, 1992). Since the informant had a strong reputation in the streets, the informant was able to help clarify the research objectives to potential respondents and

to validate the researcher as a non-threatening individual to their legal and social status (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981; DeShay, Vasquez, Vieraitis, 2020; Irwin, 1972; Vasquez & Vieraitis, 2016). When each interview was completed, the researcher asked the respondent to provide any referrals.

Respondents range in age from 16 to 26 years old. There were three Caucasians, three African Americans, and six Latinos, and all were male. The respondents in this study came from various types of family units ranging from single-parent, two-parent, and multiple family households. At the time of the interview, all of the juveniles were enrolled in a public school system and the adults were either employed as part time status or employed full time in a manual labor type of employment. A high proportion of the respondents came from a low socioeconomic background; however, four were considered upper middle class. A high number of respondents lived in an area that is classified as 'high poverty' with 27.1 percent of childhood poverty rate and seventy-one percent of all students were qualified for free or reduced lunch at school in 2017 in this area (Children's Health, 2019). The area from which the respondents reside in is known to be infested with gangs, drugs, as well as being known for high teen pregnancy rates at 10.9 per 1,000 females (Children's Health, 2019). The school district which the respondents attend annually reports 112 gangs within the district (M. Dovick, personal communication, 2013).

Each transcribed interview was read and deductively manually coded based on how the offender made sense of their crime using Jeffery's 1971 crime prevention through environmental design theory as a guide (Strauss, 1987). The aim of this study was to comprehend the ways in which appointment robbers noticed any CPTED strategies while committing crime. As was discovered during coding, one-hundred percent of the respondents recognized one or more of Jeffery's CPTED strategies. The main argument for CPTED is that individuals will not commit a

crime if they perceive the potential costs outweigh the rewards. To answer this, the researcher made a note of the specific reasons the respondents provided for why they decided to commit or decided not to commit appointment robbery based on the crime prevention through environmental design strategies. Respondents were specifically asked what event, if any, would deter them from participating in appointment robbery. Additionally, respondents were asked, what event if any, would deter them from committing an appointment robbery at a specific location. Respondents identified various reasons which are presented in the next section.

4.5 Results

Prior research has discussed reasons why robbers decide to commit criminal activity from weighing the costs and benefits (Cornish & Clarke, 1986), anticipated rewards (Bennett & Wright, 1984), alert and motivated opportunitism, (Bennett & Wright, 1984; Topalli & Wright, 2004; Wilson, 2019), spontaneous and impulsive (Alarid, Burton, & Hochstetler, 2009), and to a need to prolong surpluses (Jacobs & Wright, 1999). However, no research has directly discussed the reasons that would decrease the opportunities of appointment robbery based on crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) strategies while using the voices of active offenders. As respondents provided several reasons why they rob, they frequently offered specific details on how they plan, decide, and ultimately commit appointment robbery. These details are directly associated with the design of the location in which the crime will occur. A goal for appointment robbery may be to obtain a financial reward; however, the question posed is what municipalities can do to decrease appointment robbery in their jurisdictions based on the offenders' own narrative. The data suggest that while there are motivations to commit appointment robbery (Alarid, Burton, & Hochstetler, 2009; Bennett & Wright, 1984; Cornish & Clarke, 1986; Jacobs & Wright, 1999; Topalli & Wright, 2004;), the offender may be deterred

from committing a crime, such as an appointment robbery, at a specific location based on a particular design of the location (Anastasia and Eck, 2007; Armitage & Monchuk, 2011; Armitage, Monchuk, & Rogerson, 2011; Rostami and Madanipour, 2006; Sakip and Abdullah, 2010). Interviews of active appointment robbers revealed that they select locations based on the lack of crime prevention through environmental design strategies. Respondents also identified specific locations that they preferred to rob someone as compared to locations that they would not. This is why the value of CPTED strategies in the prevention of crime is important to investigate through the narratives of offenders. Respondents were asked to recall the most recent appointment robbery they were involved in to discuss specific aspects of the location and target, to identify why they decided to commit an appointment robbery, or why they did not decide to commit appointment robbery. The study does not use the respondent's true name; each respondent was assigned a pseudonym for this study to protect their identity and to ensure confidentiality.

Territoriality

The strategy of territoriality is to encourage a sense of ownership in order to discourage opportunities for criminal offenders. Territoriality uses design strategies to specify a space as semi-private, private, or public. This can be done by the use of landscaping, art, and signs to identify the type of space. Seventy-five percent of the offenders did recognize areas that promote ownership as Taylor stated,

> *"When I start to set up a meeting place, I always ask for the address*
>
> *so I can google it to see what kind of neighborhood it is in. If it is too*
>
> *nice, then I know I might not fit in when I go to the meet."*

When probed to expound on the offender's perspective of what is meant by a nice neighborhood, Taylor said,

> *"Shit, like if I know that the area has their own security and gates to*
> *get into their neighborhood or like if their yards are all taken care of*
> *and they have a bunch of decorations out on the yard, then I know dem*
> *fuckers will be all nosey when I roll up in my g-ride."*

Other respondents were asked to describe locations they would feel more comfortable to commit robbery which Robert summarized as,

> *"Man, I like to tell them to meet me up like at some random*
> *neighborhood that I know. I just give them an address, and I tell em*
> *that I'm going to be outside on my way out, so like they think I live*
> *there, but I really don't. I just want a place where I can blend in and*
> *where I know aint nobody gonna be in my business."*

Seventy-five percent of the offenders often decided not to rob an individual when the physical environment was able to create a perceived zone of territorial influence. It was discovered that respondents at one point in time decided not to commit an appointment robbery based on their perceived risks when they thought the area had a sense of ownership. The most common theme when they decided not to commit an appointment robbery was when they felt the physical design made it appear the area was well maintained. When offender Taylor saw that a neighborhood looked well maintained, he felt "*nervous in places that that I know looks too nice and shit, cuz I know they be having rent-a-cops rolling around looking for shit that don't fit in, you feels me.*" When asked to explain their perception of an area being 'well maintained,' respondents frequently talked about symbolic barriers such as signage that indicated the area's

name. Michael stated that if he went to meet someone, and the area looked like it is very well protected, then he would tell the seller than he changed his mind and cancel the meet up or even meet up and tell the seller that he was no longer interested. Michael expounded on this by stating,

> "*If they ask me to meet up in an area that had like those special signs*
> *on top of their street signs or if I saw signs that said sum shit like,*
> *'Now entering some neighborhood', then I would feel like,*
> *uncomfortable and cancel that shit.*"

Respondent Steve also indicated that he would not rob an individual in an area that had 'special neighborhood signs', when he stated, "*Hellz naw, I ain't goin' to hit a lick in a hood that has those signs on top of the street names cuz those are protected hoods.*" The special signs that Michael and Steve referred to were the neighborhood revitalization signs. These signs provided a symbolic barrier for the offender since the area promoted that the area had a high sense of ownership.

Natural surveillance

Natural surveillance increases the opportunity of observations in an area with the use of proper placement of landscaping, lighting, and windows (Peak, 2013). The goal of natural surveillance is to have continuous observation of any potential offenders. Physical features can be modified and areas could be designed so that an area is constructed in a way to maximize surveillance opportunities (Sohn, 2016). When respondents debated their decision to either rob someone or not to rob someone, one-hundred percent of the respondents discussed about the risk of being seen during the commission of their crime. As a way to reduce their chances of being seen during their crime, offenders often attempted to restrict the target selection to places that

have fewer 'eyes on the street.' Respondent Mark stated, "*When I set up a place to meet up, I never tell em to meet me at a gas station or shopping strip, shit those places are always busy with people.*" When probed to describe an area where they would commit an appointment robbery, James said, "*I always pick an area that is not very busy, like away from the stores and streets, or an area that is by a lot of businesses that are already closed.*" The researcher then asked if he would meet up at a specific time of the day, to which James responded, "*Yeah, I try to set up the meet later in the day, by a closed store, but not at night, but like when it starts to get dark.*" James further expounded that if he thought someone passing by could see him then he would tell the seller, "*naw man, I don't want it no more*" or that "*it was not what he wanted after all.*" What Mark and James were describing was selecting a location to commit an appointment robbery that was protected by tall buildings and out of the surveillance of formal and informal users.

Natural surveillance could be viewed as a form capable guardianship since this strategy could decrease crime because a potential offender perceived they were being observed, even though they were are not. Respondent Jacob stated that he would not show up to rob someone if he felt like he was being watched. When asked to explain, Jacob stated,

> "*I always show up to the area early so I can look around, and if I see a bunch of lights, cameras, and people, it just makes me nervous cuz I know that I could be caught, so like, then I would tell that person that I'm running late and shit or just not show up.*" He further said, "*It's funny how close that person came to be robbed by me.*"

Even though Jacob was not sure if the lights would illuminate on him, or if the camera actually worked, or even if the people would notice him, he said, "*I ain't risking it, I don't know*

if they be watching or not, but it ain't worth doing that little 'lick' (robbery) and getting caught up."

Activity Support

Activity Support refers to encouraging outdoor happenings by the location and planning of public space for safe activities. The strategy of activity support encourages acceptable behavior by using signage and design to promote the use of public space as a 'safe location.' When there are safe activities, it attracts non-criminal individuals who then become part of the system of natural surveillance, resulting in their participation to discourage would-be offenders to commit crime (Cozens, Saville, & Hiller, 2005). Safe locations are identified by the placement of 'safe place' signs to promote and attract legitimate users to engage in activities such as monetary transactions (e.g., selling or buying items from classified advertisements).

This 'safe place' sign informs the public that the location provides surveillance as well as provides a high level of visibility (Cozens & Love, 2015). Although these 'safe' signs are not typically located in areas where offenders would choose to rob, one-hundred percent of the respondents did mention that they would not select a location to rob someone if they saw the 'safe place' sign present. Charles specifically stated that "*hell naw, I would never meet up or rob someone if they selected a location that had one of those fucking 'safe place' signs, cuz you know those places all have cameras and shit.*" Even though Charles was not sure if the place had cameras, as long as he saw the safe place sign, he perceived it as a location that had numerous cameras as well as a place that law enforcement frequently visited. Charles expounded, "*those safe signs make me nervous, cuz you never know who is watching. Sometimes I see those bitches at gas stations and shit, and I'm like, are they recording now cuz I can't see the camera*" Another respondent Max also stated similar concerns about 'safe place' areas by stating, "*those*

places that have those signs are fucking hot with cops and cameras. Erry time I see one of those

stupid signs, I always see cops cruising by or inside that store getting somethang."

Another strategy of activity support is that it can include such things as allocating for open public space, promoting public activities in open community areas, and implementing walkways (Sohn, 2016). When areas are designed to increase public activity, it also increases the opportunities for surveillance (Crowe, 2000). Respondents such as Taylor stated that he would not rob someone if he visibly saw people near-by participating in daily activities. When asked to elaborate on what he meant, Taylor said,

"*Shit, you know if they tell me to meet them at a neighborhood, and I*

show up and I see people all outside, washing cars, and jogging and

shit. You know they gonna see or hear me if I try to rob someone."

Similarly, Derrick expressed the same concerns when he reported that, "*I aint trying to rob someone right out in front of everyone, I ain't that stupid.*" When Derrick was asked to describe a good place to rob someone, he said,

"*I would hella not pick a place that is crowded and I would not pick a*

place is has a lot of people coming and going. I would make sure to

pick an older neighborhood or an apartment complex where there are

less people around."

Access Control

The strategy of access control is aimed at decreasing criminal opportunities by increasing the perception of risk in potential offenders. Access control refers to the design strategy which aims to decrease opportunities for crime by denying access to potential targets as well as generating an increased awareness of risk for the would-be offender (Cozens, Saville, & Hiller,

2005; Mair & Mair, 2003). Eighty-three percent of the offenders indicated that they did recognize access control strategies. At the neighborhood level, the physical elements can include such things as implementing local neighborhood parking restrictions, closing off traffic through specific streets, and other features that could induce psychological barriers for the offender (Cozens, 2002). Access control strategy depends on physical elements to create psychological barriers for potential offenders. When offenders saw even a small barrier, it introduced a psychological barrier by making them aware of the increased risk of committing the appointment robbery. Edward stated that a simple 'one-way' traffic design made him nervous since he knew that he would have a difficult time trying to escape. Edward said,

> "*Man, if they wanna meet at a busy area like with a lot of stores and*
>
> *shit, I'm cool with it since I know they will have lots of ways to get out.*
>
> *But man, when I see those 'one-way' street signs, shit, then I know it*
>
> *will be hard to do it, and den there's traffic and shit.*"

The physical elements also attempt to keep unauthorized individuals out of communities. This strategy was noticed by Rick who stated that,

> "*If the bitch picks a spot to meet that is out in the open and has only*
>
> *one way in and out, then I'd tell 'em to pick another place, but I'd say*
>
> *some shit like, 'I'm running late and I know of another place closer'.*
>
> *That way I get to pick a spot that is easier to get away, you feel me.*"

The location respondents primarily selected was chosen on whether or not the offender perceived they had easy access with multiple entrances and exits. Respondents picked a location that had an easy access to escape routes, as Edward stated,

"When I set up a robbery, I always pick a place that has lots of exits and is close by freeway, cuz if you have to bounce real quick like, then I can."

Access control also encompasses the strategic placement of lighting and cameras to increase the risk of being seen by pedestrians. One of the main goals for offenders is to not be seen by others as they commit crime. Respondents discussed their heightened awareness of being seen when lights and cameras were present while committing an appointment robbery. Respondent Adam talked about this while he discussed the risks of committing appointment robbery,

"Shit, as soon as I pull up I always look for cameras and lights, cuz I ain't trying to get caught up on camera and shit. But for realz, I'll show up a little bit early so like if I see a camera, I will park away from it so they don't get my plate or my face."

Respondent Steve also mentioned lights and cameras when he said, "*I always try to have the meet up at the edge of a parking lot or away from places that have stores since I know they will have lights, cameras, and lots of people.*" When Steve was asked: 'Do lights and cameras deter you from committing a robbery?' Steve responded by saying,

"Hell yeahs. If I can't get the guy to meet up at another location, and they want to meet at a place that has those stupid 'yellow safe' signs, then I know I ain't gonna do it, cuz then if I rob da bitch, then I know that they be recording me. Or like if they want to meet up right by the front of a store, den I know there will be a shit load of lights and cameras. That's why I always be da one to set up the meet first, and not let them pick a place. "

4.6 Discussion

In this study, we examined whether the perceptions of active appointment robbers were influenced by the strategies of crime prevention through environmental design that are implemented by municipalities. Interviews with respondents revealed that they did dedicate time to think about getting caught, potential consequences, and the risks of offending as it related to target and location selection. Respondents did use personal strategies in an effort to reduce the likelihood of getting apprehended. More specifically, respondents discussed the significance of having a plan, which consisted of various crime specific measures to decrease the chance of detection before committing an appointment robbery. In having a particular plan prior to robbing someone, respondents were able to reduce their perceived threat of detection and apprehension by informal and formal agents of social control. The study found that when CPTED strategies were implemented, they had an impact on the decision-making behavior of the offender. When CPTED strategies are properly applied, they can deter potential criminal behavior in those specific areas since it increases the offender's perception of being observed, thereby increasing their perception of risk in committing an appointment robbery, resulting in the decision not to commit the appointment robbery.

The study did find support for the four CPTED strategies as introduced by Jeffery (1971); (1) territoriality, (2) natural surveillance, (3) activity support, and (4) access control. The roles of the strategies are significant factors for the respondents in deciding on the target location to commit an appointment robbery. The research did find that physical and symbolic features did have a direct influence in deciding the target location. The strategy of territoriality was supported when the offenders recognized the sense of ownership of an area by visibly seeing the gates,

maintained landscape, and specialized signs to identify the type of space. When ownership is felt by the offender, it decreased the likelihood that the offender would commit the crime. Additionally, with regards to neighborhood revitalization signs, while they are meant to indicate the neighborhood received grant money to clean up the community, it was a surprising finding that offenders often correlated these signs with a sense of ownership, and then decided not to commit the crime. Natural surveillance was supported when offenders stated that they would attempt to set up a robbery in locations that was away from the view of others with low surveillance. If the respondents could not pick a location that was away from pedestrians, then they would not commit the appointment robbery.

The strategy of activity support was supported through the use of 'safe zone' signs. One-hundred percent of the respondents reported that they would stay away from committing crime near a location that had a 'safe zone' sign because they knew that the location had working cameras, lights, and was associated as a location that law enforcement were present or visited frequently. Also, when respondents witnessed individuals outside participating in daily neighborhood life they would not commit the appointment out of fear of being seen or not fitting in. This finding is in line with Jane Jacobs (1961) who said that the more individuals on the streets, the safer the individuals become since their 'eyes on the street' create informal surveillance for the neighborhood. Lastly, the strategy of access control is also supported by this research. When the respondents viewed the physical features as potential barriers, they stated it also created a psychological barrier often increasing their risk perception which often prompted them to decide not to commit the crime. Once offenders noticed that a location had few exits and entrances, it made them nervous since it limited their escape routes. Overall, one-hundred percent of the respondents indicated that when CPTED strategies were present it helped them to

decide not to commit the crime since they perceived the risk was too great for the potential reward.

4.7 Conclusion

It is understood that our research does have limitations. First, the sample population was small and therefor our findings cannot be generalized. In theory, all research should have (when possible) used probabilistic sampling methodology, however it was nearly impossible to do this in the field (Bernard, 1995; Trotter & Schensul, 1998). This is particularly true as in this case for stigmatized, hard-to-reach or hidden populations (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). While our sample population is small it was understood that data saturation had occurred by the time twelve interviews had been analyzed (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). The aim of the study is not to generalize appointment robbers who select their targets and locations arising from the use of online or app advertisements at large. The study focus was to provide an opportunity to tell the story of a select few appointment robbers and their decision making process as it related to CPTED strategies.

Social desirability response is the second limitation that could have influenced the data. Since respondents were acquired from a well-respected offender, some may have answered in a way they believed to be more socially acceptable for their peers than would be their 'true' response. The respondents could have done this as a way to display a favorable criminal self-image and to evade receiving negative evaluations from their peers. To address this limitation, the researcher attempted to develop a rapport with each respondent prior to the semi-structured interview. This was done to make the respondent feel at ease with openly talking with a researcher as compared to being asked to participate from a well-respected offender.

While we acknowledge this study has limitations, our research contributes to what is known about CPTED theory and its effects on target and location selection by using the voices of offenders which have previously been omitted in the literature. The findings are relevant to future ideographic research of how adoption of CPTED strategies can have an effect on the decision-making process of would-be offenders. This research confirmed the importance of CPTED strategies in deterring possible crime. The research also found that in order to reduce crime arising from appointment robberies, municipalities ought not to only depend on formal tactics (criminal justice system) to curtail appointment robbery, but should implement proactive strategies of CPTED in crime reduction policies. Therefore, this study provides relevant implications for scholars and practitioners to take into account for the future. The exploration of the data presented in the research offered an account of the struggles faced by municipalities as they deal with a new 21st century problem in their jurisdiction.

Future research ought to investigate any potential reduction in appointment robberies with increased implementation of CPTED strategies in a specific area. Moreover, not many municipalities utilize CPTED strategies, and more specifically, numerous jurisdictions do not have an official policy mandating area for 'safe transaction zones. Municipalities ought to consider including guidelines to officially develop, maintain, and support CPTED strategies in an effort to reduce appointment robberies and other crimes. Since not all municipalities use CPTED strategies, it would be valuable research to examine any potential differences in appointment robberies. Also, if other municipalities are not enacting CPTED strategies, it would be important to examine which factors contributed to decision of not using CPTED as a component in their crime reduction policy. Lastly, research should study any changes amongst other types of crimes where CPTED strategies were recently implemented.

Our research provides an understanding into the decision-making behavior of appointment robbers, specifically the study offers insight into how CPTED strategies, when implemented, did influence the decision-making behavior of the offender and thereby suggest future policy implications. First, policymakers should encourage and support the use of CPTED strategies which reduce the opportunity for offenders to commit an appointment robbery. Respondents of this study admitted that they would not commit an appointment robbery if the CPTED strategies were implemented at a target location. While CPTED strategies are unlikely to completely eliminate appointment robbery, they have the potential to decrease the amount of appointment robberies. Second, policymakers should designate specific areas within the municipality as a 'safe transaction zone' to conduct the face-to-face financial transactions. These 'safe transaction zones' are grounded in CPTED theory since the safe space is typically located at a public municipality building (e.g. law enforcement), well-lit, and is usually monitored by a surveillance system. Respondents of this study indicated that location to commit crime was important. Therefore, eliminating or at least decreasing the opportunities for offenders' ability to gain access to a specific area could help to decrease and even prevent appointment robbery. Third, law enforcement, policymakers, and community leaders should make an effort to effectively communicate to their local communities of the 'safe transaction zones' and the increased risk for an appointment robbery if they are not utilized to complete face-to-face financial transactions. Therefore, leaders of the community are needed to promote members of the community to get involved in prevention activities. Lastly, policymakers should push for a single label and definition for this type of crime. It is argued that since the offenders need to use an electronic device to facilitate the robbery, that it be provided its own definition. Currently, there is not a universal definition for this new type of crime, so it is difficult to get an accurate

account of frequency. For example, these are just a few of how some jurisdictions classify this new type of crime; 'cybercrime' (Los Angeles), 'online robberies' (Philadelphia), 'fraud' (Ohio), 'online marketplace robbery' (Detroit), and 'craigslist robbery' (others). If there was a universal definition for this type of crime, there would be a better way of knowing the actual amount of frequency and then resources could be allocated to address this specific type of crime.

Chapter 5

General Discussion

This 3-paper dissertation sought out to contribute to three areas of knowledge: (1) strategies for gaining access, (2) ethical dilemmas, and (3) to the Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) literature by analyzing the respondents' own voices. The first paper examined the challenges in gaining access to hard-to-reach populations, and more specifically, three strategies that can be used to obtain access. The paper analyzed the importance of identity, rapport, and commitment acts in the development of relationships with participants in the field. The results from the first paper found that having a similar identity characteristic with the respondent helped to develop rapport and trust with the respondents. Additionally, it was discovered that commitment acts offered an opportunity to create a sturdier foundation of rapport, trust, and openness between the researcher and respondents.

The second paper examined potential ethical dilemmas that could be encountered while studying active appointment robbers in the current technological and social network driven climate. The ethical dilemmas encountered were based on the researcher's attempt to keep his private life from the work life. Results from the paper illustrate the complexity in using social networking sites as a form of communication since it opens the doors to issues of confidentiality. The issue raised was based on how far the relationship can be built without compromising theirs, or the researcher's confidentiality. The third paper examined the effect that implemented CPTED strategies had on the decision-making process of offenders who were actively participating in appointment robbery. The paper found that the four CPTED strategies examined; (1) territoriality, (2) natural surveillance, (3) activity support, and (4) access control did play a significant factor in their decision to or not to commit a crime at the specific target location. More specifically, the study found that symbolic and physical features of the build environment

directly influenced their decision to or not to commit appointment robbery at the selected target location.

As previously stated, research on each of the three papers above is limited. Each study offered a different point of view by offering an in-depth inquiry into the individual experiences of twelve respondents. Prior literature has omitted research with offenders who are actively participating in appointment robbery, and these three papers aimed to correct this oversight by providing the respondents' own perspective by using their own words. The goal of the three papers was not to generalize appointment robbers at large. The qualitative research design allowed the researcher to tell the experiences and story of a few offenders who at the time of the study, were engaged in appointment robbery. While the scope is limited, the sample size allows the author to paint a picture of the decision-making process as well as the perceptions of risk and rewards from individuals who are involved in appointment robbery that has been omitted from prior research literature.

As a total, the three papers advance the social sciences field by improving our understanding of (1) how strategies can help gain access, (2) to prepare for ethical dilemmas in today's technological climate, and (3) how CPTED strategies can influence the decision-making process to commit or not to commit crime. As jurisdictions within the United States are investing in CPTED strategies to deter crime (Bliss, 2019; Jaramillo, 2020; Trickey 2017a; Wisniewski, 2019), this dissertation can provide added guidance to policymakers on how to implement CPTED strategies to modify the built environment in an attempt to reduce crime. More specifically, the findings confirmed the significance of CPTED strategies in deterring potential crime. Overall, the findings advance research in qualitative methodology, ethical dilemmas, and theory, while providing tools for future researchers to explore.

The research contributes to CPTED theory by validating the strategies are still useful in today's technological times and new types of crimes. It is also important to state that the CPTED strategies that were developed in the 1970s are still relevant for a new type of criminal activity. While the CPTED strategies were coined over fifty years ago, they are able to be put to the test and show that the strategies can still deter potential offenders and crime. The findings found that in order to decrease this new types of crime, municipalities cannot only depend on formal strategies (law enforcement), but ought to implement proactive CPTED strategies in their crime reduction policies in the 21st century. Additionally, the identity of the researcher played a significant role in not only gaining access, but in the rapport development process in building the relationship and trust. It is now understood that having similar backgrounds and being of the same ethnicity greatly helped the researcher during the research project. These identity similarities allowed the researcher to fully understand their experiences and rationales in their decision making process. In being a Latino male from the same neighborhood, it greatly provided a deeper insight into understanding the participants in their natural setting. This is why it is important to have a wide diverse pool of researchers that can relate and see things that others cannot see.

Lastly, policymakers should push for a single label and definition for this type of crime. It is argued that since the offenders need to use an electronical device to facilitate the robbery, that it be provided its own definition. Currently, there is not a universal definition for this new type of crime, so it is difficult to get an accurate account of frequency. For example, these are just a few of how some jurisdictions classify this new type of crime; 'cybercrime' (Los Angeles), 'online robberies' (Philadelphia), 'fraud' (Ohio), 'online marketplace robbery' (Detroit), and 'craigslist robbery' (others). If there was a universal definition for this type of crime, there would

be a better way of knowing the actual amount of frequency and then resources could be allocated to address this specific type of crime.

Chapter 6

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