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# **Leveraging Identity to Overcome Temporal and Financial Limitations in Rapid Ethnography in Criminological Research**

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## **Introduction**

Qualitative research is vital in the social inquiry of marginalized, complex, and understudied populations engaged in deviant activity in urban settings (Miller & Tewksbury, 2010). Often, these groups have difficult-to-define and hard-to-reach populations; consequently, accessing sufficient respondents at the levels required for survey research is difficult or impossible (Bono, 2019; Gundur, 2019). Despite a sustained need for qualitative criminological research that examines such populations, government actors and, to a large extent, the academy generally prioritize quantitative methodologies and demand research to be produced and published quickly and cost-effectively.

Thus, long-standing, embedded qualitative research has become increasingly difficult to undertake (Brew, 2015; Kinman, 2014). Certainly, conventional ethnographies – the long-durée participant observation studies that seek to capture a wide array of cultural characteristics of the populations studied, which ethnographic purists define as “real ethnography” – are harder to conduct as most qualitative researchers face increasing resourcing constraints. These constraints, over time, have become more acute given that increases in research stipends and grant awards often lag behind inflation and the resulting increases in real costs (Hosford et al., 2021). With limited time and funding, scholars deploying qualitative methodologies must find short term solutions, thus, the focus of this article: rapid ethnography. In addition, resource-strapped, qualitative researchers must leverage social capital and consider the role their identities and positionalities play in the field to reduce time-arcs and costs needed to improve access (Handwerker, 2001; Millen, 2000; Sangaramoorthy & Kroeger, 2020).

To examine how qualitative methodologies unfold in the field under temporal and financial constraints, especially in reference to identity and positionality, elements that affect access (Baser & Toivanen, 2018; Bucerius, 2013; Gomes & Granja, 2021), we present three distinct, rapid ethnographies, undertaken by three different researchers (Aqil, 2020; Gundur,

2022; Petrich, 2019). Rapid ethnographies (Baines & Cunningham, 2013; Millen, 2000), also referred to as “quick ethnographies” (Handwerker, 2001), are long-established in the literature as a qualitative methodology distinct from conventional ethnographies. We view “rapid ethnography” as a multi-method, qualitative data collection toolkit that (1) focuses on a narrow topic and (2) draws narrative information from “numerous sources over a relatively short period of time,” in specific, set locations (Agar, 2006; Baines & Cunningham, 2013, p. 74). We acknowledge that rapid ethnographies most commonly draw their data from interviews from key informants, participant observation, non-participant observation, and document review (Baines & Cunningham, 2013; Isaacs, 2016; Millen, 2000). Though not featured in the studies discussed in this article, rapid ethnographies can also include data gleaned from surveys and focus groups and, unlike many conventional ethnographies, may be completed using a team of researchers (Armstrong & Lowndes, 2018; Millen, 2000).

To collect good, actionable data, researchers must develop linkages with the communities that they study (Sangaramoorthy & Kroeger, 2020). Regardless of a study’s duration, connecting with the community that informs the research is important if the researchers are to collect useful data that provides information that depicts a larger picture. Though rapid ethnography is distinct from conventional ethnography, both share the same principal goal: to understand culture via an exploration of the knowledge held by the informants (Handwerker, 2001).

When done soundly, rapid ethnography can produce ethnographic accounts that are impactful and informative. Across several disciplines, rapid ethnographies have provided insights on human behavior (Sangaramoorthy & Kroeger, 2020), including in sensitive, criminogenic contexts (Betsos et al., 2021; Collins et al., 2019). However, in regard to operationalizing rapid ethnographies, the literature does not consistently provide clear direction in terms of the temporal and financial considerations: how to identify and leverage one’s non-monetary assets, such as identity and social capital; or how to overcome limitations of those considerations and attributes.

To address these shortcomings, this article presents three distinct, rapid ethnographies, involving hard-to-reach populations (Aqil, 2020; Gundur, 2022; Petrich, 2019). All three studies were undertaken with significant temporal and financial constraints and by individuals with significantly different access to the populations they studied. In line with the established principles of rapid ethnography, each study deployed narrative and ethnographic interviewing of key informants as the principal data collection methods to study

marginalized and hard-to-reach populations. Additionally, each study supplemented this data with limited participant observation as well as document review. Taken together, these studies show how ethnographic methods can be conducted using constrained budgets, and how those budgets can be maximized via careful consideration of one's identity.

We confirm that rapid ethnography can be conducted ethically when undertaking research on criminogenic topics. Rapid ethnography allows the people studied to offer novel insights that contribute to the scholarly discourse. We show that rapid ethnographies need careful planning that considers the researchers' identities in order to accelerate the data-collection process and extend opportunities. The researcher's identity, relative to the population being studied, in terms of race, age, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status, has a significant bearing on the extent of immersion that a researcher can obtain in a restricted period of time. Finally, we demonstrate how deficits in monetary and temporal capital can be counterbalanced by leveraging one's identity and its associated social capital.

This article proceeds as follows: first, it situates rapid ethnography within the larger universe of ethnography by exploring why long-term embedded studies have become standard. Next, it assesses the conversation surrounding shorter ethnographic studies and the temporal and monetary limitations that typically motivate them. It then provides three reflections on rapid ethnographies conducted across four continents by three different social scientists. The three accounts cover a range of projects, researcher skill sets, and positional identities, which span from a local to a clear outsider. In short, we argue that, to maximize rapid ethnographies, careful reflection of one's identity must occur if identity is to be leveraged as social capital; through careful reflection and preparation, researchers can compensate for temporal and financial deficits and conduct research in safe, ethical ways, which advance the social inquiry of marginalized, complex, and understudied populations.

### **Ethnographic Methods and their Discontents**

Ethnography is a long and storied method of conducting social science research, employed by many fields, including, *inter alia*: anthropology, sociology, political science, and criminology. Thus, ethnography is both the art and the science of describing and analyzing observed behavior from the insider's perspective (Fetterman, 2010). Traditionally, ethnography is an anthropological method involving long-term participant observation, whereby researchers recount the experiences of the community in which they are based (Howell, 2019). Ethnography results in the 'thick description' of context, which may be

related as is or contextualized with other data to situate the ‘on the ground’ findings within a larger scholarly conversation (Geertz, 2008). This relatively, straightforward definition, however, hides a great deal of debate about what ‘counts’ as an ethnography versus a study deploying ethnographic methods (Hammersley, 2006).

Ethnography is valuable for evaluating complex situations. It allows for the study of relationships or situations not easily quantified, within environments or communities where other sources of data may be incomplete or skewed, or, for populations often excluded or rendered inaccessible by conventional research designs or methods. The insights produced by ethnographic research are especially important in criminology where social phenomena are generally less amenable to surface-level analysis. Through ethnographic and related qualitative methods, criminologists can understand individuals as holding multiple, fluid, and evolving identities (Aberese-Ako, 2017); an individual can be both a criminal and a patriot, a mother and a terrorist, or a scholar and a bigot. The intersection and interaction of identities are often keys to understanding the strategic choices and tradeoffs individuals make to shape the world around them. The restoration of agency to individuals through ethnography is particularly valuable for research subjects in the Global South, where subjects are easily ‘othered’ through a neo-colonial academic lens that undermines both the research and the respondents’ human dignity (Ciocchini & Greener, 2021). Two of the three studies considered in this article were conducted in the Global South.

What ethnographers deem to be *sufficient* time in the field, for a work to be considered as an ethnography, varies, though there is an implicit consensus on the need to spend at least twelve months in a given field site (Wolcott, 1985, p. 189).<sup>1</sup> Despite a continued preference for conventional ‘long-term’ ethnographic projects, most contemporary researchers struggle to acquire simultaneously the time and resources necessary to undertake such projects. For both doctoral students and academicians, time to do fieldwork is often less than a year, and sometimes only a matter of a few weeks; budgets are increasingly lean (Hosford et al., 2021; Jeffrey & Troman, 2004). The few fieldwork scholarships that exist are typically under \$20,000 (2023 U.S. dollars) and difficult to obtain. Thus, often, only individuals with significant preexisting privilege can collect the ‘right’ kind of ethnographic data; this limitation, in turn, shapes the research universe in specific if underappreciated ways.

For many, these practical constraints, coupled with funding organizations’ preference for time-bound and action-oriented research and the pressure on academicians to publish

consistently, mean that conducting conventional ethnographies is not a viable option (Gundur, 2022; Jeffrey & Troman, 2004; Miller & Tewksbury, 2010). Instead, what are often interchangeably called ‘rapid’ (Armstrong & Lowndes, 2018; Isaacs, 2016), ‘quick’ (Handwerker, 2001), ‘short-term’ (Pink & Morgan, 2013), ‘focused’ (Knoblauch, 2005; Wall, 2014) or ‘quick and dirty’ ethnographies (Millen, 2000) are reluctantly accepted. Although individual writers define these terms differently, all include the truncation of either the time spent in the field or the scope of the study area or both.

### ***Rapid Ethnography as a Method***

Rapid ethnography is a qualitative method, which studies a narrow topic and relies, predominantly, on *in situ* narrative and ethnographic interviews with limited participant observation. The focus of rapid ethnography in topic, methodological execution, and underlying objective (e.g., exploring the informants’ knowledge) makes it a method that goes beyond ‘qualitative interviews.’ Yet, since ‘deep immersion’ is synonymous with ‘ethnography,’ whether in its conventional or rapid form, how deep is deep enough to qualify for a ‘real ethnography’ remains a subject of contemporary interest and debate (Agar, 2006; Hammersley, 2018).

Scholars who visit the field for ‘short’ periods are often lambasted (Power, 2002). The criticisms are several: ‘parachute’ ethnographers – the critique goes – engage in an extractive and exploitative mode of research that often focuses on geographically-easy sites, where they grab surface-level insights, interview easily-accessible (likely already saturated) subjects, and then jet off to write up these findings with little to no triangulation or context (Feldman & Jenkins, 1992), thereby overstating their findings and presenting their work as significantly more generalizable than it is in reality (Rist, 1980). While *in situ* observation is an indispensable feature of conventional ethnography (Jerolmack & Khan, 2014), it is neither exclusive to conventional ethnography nor the *only* source of truth that conventional ethnography draws from. Many ethnographers routinely combine different methods, including observation, to understand social behavior and interpret the world (Cerulo, 2014; Watson, 2020). Jerolmack and Khan (2014) have criticized methods, such as rapid ethnography, which prioritize verbal responses over observing actions. They argue that attitude-behavior consistency (ABC) is often unjustifiably assumed in interviews and survey-based research.

However, others have critiqued Jerolmack and Khan (2014), arguing they exaggerate the attitude-behavior problem and underestimate the efficacy of tools, such as implicit association tests, interview probes, and code-switching, to mitigate the shortcomings of interviews (Cerulo, 2014; DiMaggio, 2014). This is not to imply that the in-depth and sustained participant observation of conventional ethnography can be *replaced* with rapid ethnography, analysis of historical records and audiovisual material, or forced-choice questionnaires (Vaisey, 2009). Nonetheless, well-designed research studies, employing qualitative or even quantitative methods, can have varying degrees of ‘immersion’ in the study context. More importantly, these methodologies are able to generate meaningful data that can be used to depict complex social phenomena.

The late anthropologist Michael Agar (2006) waded into the debate of what constitutes ethnography and what methods provide valuable data. For Agar (2006), ethnography, as a methodology, needed to be, above all, flexible. He argued that ethnographers should focus on either a community or a particular problem, with a geographical bent, and present both “an ‘insider’s’ view of things [and] observations cast into an ‘outsider’s’ frame of reference” (Agar, 2006). Rapid ethnographies aspire to achieve those goals.

Nonetheless, we concede that rapid ethnographies produce somewhat different types of interview data than conventional ethnographies – snapshots rather than slowly unfolding epics. These different data types are complementary, not competitive, and unproblematic, so long as they are presented with clear scoping. In one of the most instructive works on rapid ethnography, anthropologist W. Penn Handwerker (2001) shows that statistical procedures, cultural data, and efficient time management techniques can be interactively employed to yield ethnographic data in a short time. Other scholars have argued that ethnography can be accelerated by replacing sustained presence in the field with ‘compressed,’ ‘selective intermittent,’ and ‘recurrent’ fieldtrips (Jeffrey & Troman, 2004). Although it is important to develop ethnographic strategies that help researchers ‘not to lie,’ the limitations of rapid ethnographies, in terms of generalizability, are not significantly different compared to standard ethnographies (Duneier, 2011). Moreover, the history of ethnographic research is replete with diverse methodological standpoints and theoretical orientations, along with considerable flexibility in how ethnographic research is construed and practiced.

Although the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of rapid ethnographies are congruent to conventional ethnographies, rapid ethnographies are more fragmented in

their methodological foundations (Knoblauch, 2005). Only a few studies discuss the modalities of rapid ethnographies with a view to delineate principles, a code of ethics, and strategies to navigate the fieldwork. This emerging literature discusses the advantages of rapid ethnography in solving specific problems that conventional ethnography would not resolve.

Like all research methods, rapid ethnographies are better suited for some questions and contexts than others. For instance, rapid ethnography can facilitate the investigation of spatially diverse settings, resulting in comparative studies or studies of respondents who are geographically dispersed, such as those involved in the drug trade (Armstrong & Lowndes, 2018; Gundur, 2022; Wall, 2014). Rapid ethnography can also facilitate criminological research where researchers’ long-term presence may not be tolerated, such as with individuals involved in violence (Ellis, 2022), in communities of extremists (Tetrault, 2021), or in authoritarian states. Rapid ethnographies are more accessible to scholars with organizational or personal limitations, which may include a precarious or non-research job, health or family constraints, or geographic limitations (Hosford et al., 2021). Nonetheless, rapid ethnographies are not necessarily short studies; only the time in the field is more restricted than the time spent in conventional ethnographies.

To be successful, rapid ethnographies require a significantly large amount of ‘desk legwork,’ ahead of a field trip, in the form of literature reviews, preparatory interviews, and supplementary data collection (such as reviewing social media posts of individuals within the study community or tracking development changes via satellite maps). Rapid ethnographers, unlike conventional ethnographers, cannot wait until they reach the field to begin negotiating access and the data collection process. Rapid ethnographers also are less able to do deep analysis of their data while still at their field site and may rely more heavily on written or audio records of interviews, increasing the post-field study timeline. The chart below outlines some of the tradeoffs to be considered when choosing a conventional versus rapid ethnography.

Ethnography Type	Strengths	Weaknesses
Conventional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Allows for ‘thick description’ of whole context (Geertz,</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Requires significant funding</li> <li>Requires significant time in the field (1+ years)</li> </ul>



	<p>1973) and clear achievement of data saturation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allows for long-term relationship building with interviewees and for the researcher to return over time, increasing confidence in data triangulation</li> <li>• Can show how study variables evolve over time or how cyclical variables move through their patterns</li> <li>• Better suited to mapping broader contexts and exploratory research questions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preferences scholars with conventional elite academic posts, and without health or family constraints</li> <li>• Higher chance of cultural integration by researcher, resulting in loss of important objectivity (Geertz, 1979)</li> <li>• Generally limited to one or two field sites</li> </ul>
Rapid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More accessible to early career and/or otherwise precarious scholars</li> <li>• Allows for engagement in violent or insecure contexts where long-term embeddedness creates vulnerabilities to researcher/interviewees</li> <li>• Enables researchers to develop a sense of place without significantly altering area dynamics with their presence</li> <li>• Can allow for many different field sites within the same study</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Captures a small slice in time</li> <li>• May not allow for deep relationship building and may rely on easily accessible interviewees rather than best positioned ones</li> <li>• May be perceived less generalizable and promote ahistorical understandings of phenomenon in question (Hammersley, 2006)</li> <li>• Ethical concerns about extractive interviewing ('parachuting in')</li> <li>• Can be challenging to be confident about data saturation</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better suited to questions that build on established literature</li> </ul>	
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Table 1: Strengths and Weaknesses of Ethnographic Approaches

Rapid ethnography has a place in the qualitative methodological toolkit. However, while much reflection on the mechanics and concerns of conventional ethnographies exists (Duneier, 2011; Irwin, 2006; Sanders, 2010), the opposite is true regarding rapid ethnography, particularly the impacts of temporal and monetary limitations and researcher identity on available social capital. In the next section, we outline three studies that were undertaken with temporal and monetary limitations and that used considered reflections of identity to identify social capital that was leveraged to facilitate the research.

### **Three Rapid Ethnographies: The Insider, the Domestic Outsider, and the Foreign Outsider**

At the heart of the ethnographic dynamic is the notion of identity, both of people (researchers and participants) and of spaces. Since ethnography entails a recounting of researchers' interactions in the field, the researchers' positionality and identity are central in the production of knowledge and critical inquiry (Dodworth, 2021). Consequently, realist accounts of ethnographic fieldwork have been criticized for being essentially an outcome of researchers' preconceptions and theoretical baggage (Watson, 1987). However, the other facet of ethnographers' centrality is their position as their 'subjects' subject' in the field settings (Clifford, 1983). The cultural aspects that unravel before ethnographers are largely contingent on the researchers' personal characteristics and on how these characteristics are viewed and understood by the respondents (Van Maanen, 2011). For instance, a researcher's gender and ethnic identity can largely dictate the avenues open for investigation (Aberese-Ako, 2017; Baird, 2018; Loftsdóttir, 2002). Moreover, the relationship ethnographers establish with key informants may define the extent to which ethnographers can dwell into the lives of their subjects (for example, Goffman, 2014; Irwin, 2006; Wakeman, 2014). Drawing upon sociologist Erving Goffman's (1956) work on presentation of self in interpersonal situations, others have emphasized the importance of impression management in classic ethnographic studies (Berreman, 1997; Sluka, 1990). However, few studies explore how rapid ethnographers develop an accepted presence in the space studied with little time,

and no studies discuss how rapid ethnographers leverage or calibrate identity in rapidly evolving situations.

Rapidly evolving situations may present risk to the researchers, which is of great concern to university ethics committees. Although “no study is worth dying for,” some degree of physical risk is inherent to all ethnographic work as it involves face-to-face interactions in often unfamiliar social contexts (Sanders, 2010, p. 110). Risk varies according to the stability of the research setting (Howell, 1990), the sensitivity of the research topic (Kovats-Bernat, 2002), the characteristics of respondents, and the identities of the researchers (Goldsmith, 2003). Accordingly, the ability to mitigate risk is an essential skill for fieldworkers (Belousov et al., 2007), especially for researchers with minority identities relative to the study population and with a heightened risk of victimization during fieldwork (Demery & Pipkin, 2021).

Often, the studies on fieldwork safety provide practical guidelines to mitigate risks, such as carrying credentials to the field or having a point of contact (Demery & Pipkin, 2021), wearing unobtrusive clothing, having a colleague monitor interactions with respondents from a safe distance (Belousov et al., 2007), avoiding photography in risky situations (Stewart et al., 2009), and conducting prior reconnaissance of social dynamics of the field (Lee, 1995). Although fieldwork often requires flexibility and improvisation, the extent to which one can be flexible and improvise is limited by one’s topic of investigation or identity (Kovats-Bernat, 2002). While long-term fieldwork can allow for periods of recalibration and renegotiation of identity within a place, rapid ethnographers do not have this luxury and must consider how to best leverage their resources before entering the field.

In the following synopses, we show that rapid ethnographers must use the social capital leveraged from their identities to establish relationships that steer fieldwork forward and result in appropriate, ethical, and risk-aware data collection. Furthermore, we suggest that social capital is influenced by one’s position within the field. We present three configurations, similar to those that have been established in the literature (Bucerius, 2013; Dodworth, 2021; Naeke et al., 2011). We describe the role of an ‘insider,’ someone who is from the community being studied (Dodworth, 2021; Naeke et al., 2011), and two types of ‘trusted outsiders,’ who, despite being not of the place, were able to gain insider knowledge that improved their ability to access those places (Bucerius, 2013): the ‘domestic outsider,’ someone who is from the country being studied but foreign to the community being studied;

and the ‘foreign outsider,’ someone who is foreign both to the community and the country being studied.

These studies add to a small literature that considers the nuances of overt appearance in the presentation of self by ethnographers (Abimbola, 2009; Belousov et al., 2007; Bucerius, 2013; Mookherjee, 2001) and highlight how sociocultural identity influences rapid ethnographies with harder-to-access populations, especially when researchers have limited time or finances to establish themselves, negotiate access, and solicit information. Moreover, these studies show how identity and pre-existing knowledge influence the data collection and the levels of risk present in rapid ethnographies that study criminogenic topics, such as victimization, crime, social control, and terrorism. Finally, these studies demonstrate how rapid ethnography can be undertaken with varying budget and time limitations: the authors were ‘in the field’ for as little as six weeks and no more than 5.5 months in a single field site, and spent between \$5,685 to \$31,555 (2023 US dollars) to compile their data.

***Nauman, Insider, and Domestic Outsider: Talking to Neighborhood Residents: Fieldwork Study in Two Cities in Pakistan***

Nauman’s project, which took place over four months, was a comparative case study of social order within four Pakistani neighborhoods, two in Lahore, Nauman’s hometown, and two in Karachi (Aqil, 2020). Nauman studied how social order is negotiated in contexts where agents of formal social control suffer from a crisis of normative and empirical legitimacy. In postcolonial Pakistan, the police mainly operate in accordance with the legislative and procedural protocols implemented during the British Raj. Consequently, the Pakistani public generally views the police as a repressive force. Both perpetrators and victims tend to avoid the police. Thus, social order on Pakistan’s streets is principally an outcome of informal social control processes. Nonetheless, the configuration of social order is largely contingent on the enforcement of officially sanctioned norms by the law enforcement institutions. Nauman wanted to examine this co-production of social order insofar as it could be observed through different permutations of social control.

Nauman initially used an exploratory sequential mixed methods design, where an initial phase of qualitative data collection and analysis would be followed by quantitative data collection and analysis. However, he quickly realized that his design strategy was untenable due to time and financial constraints. Accordingly, he decided to conduct narrative and ethnographic interviews involving key informants in each neighborhood. This decision to

include ethnographic observation in the fieldwork plan was supported by Nauman's institution which has a history of ethnographic research (Atkinson, 2014; Delamont, 2018). His project was funded by a grant of £3,000 (\$5,684 2023 USD).<sup>2</sup> The money covered roundtrip airfare, domestic transportation, accommodation, and the purchase of recording devices. Nauman had to pay for his meals, and interviewees were not compensated for their time.<sup>3</sup>

Nauman was born and raised in Lahore and, although his grandparents migrated from India in 1947, he is indistinguishable in his appearance and accent from most of Lahore's population, making him an insider when operating in those neighborhoods. In Karachi, where Nauman was a domestic outsider, some students Nauman knew helped him to access key informants. Nauman is a native speaker of Urdu, Pakistan's national language. Almost everyone in his study population was comfortable conversing in Urdu. The only respondent who was not fluent in Urdu asked his son to act as an interpreter. To recruit participants, Nauman first contacted a community elder, politician, or religious leader from within the neighborhood to build rapport and to obtain his initial interviews. Nauman then used the social capital acquired from those interviews and his established presence in the neighborhood to secure additional interviews. Through his personal contacts in the police departments, Nauman was able to arrange interviews with local police officers and obtain official neighborhood crime data.

Despite some concerns that residents had with his identity, Nauman benefited from his gender, age, and status in both Lahore and Karachi. As a 30-year-old male Pakistani student, he was a person who most of his respondents recognized as one to be helped. In the field, Nauman's gender allowed him to make choices that maintained his 'insider' status in Lahore and limited his 'outsider' status in Karachi, thus facilitating his research: he wore unobtrusive clothing, used appropriate transportation, grew a heavy stubble beard in areas inhabited by Pathans,<sup>4</sup> and abandoned his vaping device.

Nevertheless, some residents were apprehensive regarding his presence in their neighborhood due to the subject matter Nauman was studying. The perceived highhandedness of the police contributed to this disposition; some respondents feared the consequences that could follow if they were recorded talking negatively about the police. Moreover, a sense of insecurity pervaded the neighborhoods at that time as Pakistan had just begun to recover from the terrorist insurgency that crippled its socioeconomic life for over a decade. Nonetheless, Nauman roamed the neighborhoods' streets to observe the social life and find answers to

some of the questions that interviewees hinted at but refused to explicitly outline. He found that in informal settings he was less obtrusive. Residents were more accepting of him and were more comfortable talking in informal conversations compared to formal interviews. They would share gossip, regarding their fellow residents, and even share their own or their cohort's role in creating or exacerbating problems in their neighborhood. This information allowed Nauman to further access other people who contributed to Nauman's knowledge. The ethnographic observations and informal chats provided information that allowed Nauman to ask key respondents direct questions in the formal interviews.

Notably, Nauman hired women fieldworkers, who were also students, to interview women in keeping with the conservative cultural norms. But these women were not afforded the same privileges that Nauman enjoyed. Their presence as researchers was too discordant with the conservative, patriarchal cultural norms, which proved difficult to overcome; with the time available, they could not renegotiate their status to be 'trusted outsiders.' Consequently, this effort failed to collect meaningful data.

Nauman's fieldwork took place from January to April 2016, with Nauman spending about two weeks in each neighborhood. The project's data involved 58 formal interviews with key respondents, including local politicians, police officers, social workers, religious leaders, barbers, and real estate agents. Each interview lasted around 60 minutes, although informal discussions continued for much longer in some cases. While the time spent in each neighborhood was brief, Nauman managed to achieve saturation in three of the four neighborhoods. Fieldwork in the fourth neighborhood was cut short when Nauman received threats from a local gang who thought he was there on the police's behalf. In this case, Nauman was unable to shed the untrusted outsider label; a researcher who had grown up in the area may have been better positioned to manage this issue (Gomes & Granja, 2021).

Data saturation was made possible through 'wandering' the field (Featherstone & Northcott, 2021), non-participant observations, and informal discussions with ordinary residents at street corners, roadside restaurants, tea stalls, and parks. This insider knowledge, coupled with Nauman's ethnographic observations, not only made the interviews meaningful, as he could probe effectively, detect lies or misdirection, and often successfully strike a chord which helped the interviewees express impromptu opinions, but also allowed Nauman to triangulate his data. Though Nauman did not achieve data saturation in the final neighborhood and could not fully triangulate his findings, he was able to sketch the neighborhood's crime dynamics.

***Rajeev, Domestic Outsider: Talking to Gang Members and Drug Traffickers: Fieldwork in three metropolitan areas in Mexico and the United States***

Rajeev's project was a multi-sited study of the drug trade, which examined its mechanics in three metropolitan areas over the course of just under a year: The Paso del Norte, which includes El Paso, Texas, USA, and Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, Mexico (5.5 months); Phoenix (4 months); and Chicago (2 months). The project initially sought to evaluate the role of Mexican drug trafficking organizations in the United States, but it ultimately studied the mechanics of drug trafficking via street and prison gangs (Gundur, 2022).

Rajeev attended the same university as Nauman and was similarly supported to undertake his project. The primary concern was his safety in Mexico, given the high rates of deadly violence that were occurring in Ciudad Juárez in the time leading up to his fieldwork. Though risks are inherent in examining criminological phenomena (Holmes, 2013), most can be managed by negotiating good gatekeepers, abiding by local cultural norms, and conducting interviews in safe places. Accordingly, the ethics committee viewed that Rajeev, being an American, would manage the risks adequately. Most of the respondents interviewed, being outside of prison, were hard-to-reach and not easily surveyed; research that systematically surveyed organized criminal actors and gang members has occurred in carceral settings (Decker & Chapman, 2008; Pyrooz & Decker, 2019).

Rajeev's fieldwork took place from January 2014 to January 2015, covering three distinct field site visits, with each visit ranging from 2 months to 5.5 months. The project's data consisted of ethnographic observations and interviews of 129 respondents, including law enforcement, community members, and, principally, people who were involved with the drug trade in some capacity. Respondents were Anglophone, Hispanophone, or bilingual. The total project budget was approximately \$25,000 (\$31,555 2023 USD); funding was provided by a fieldwork grant from the Economic and Social Research Council; expenses were reimbursed; funding was not granted upfront. This budget covered domestic travel expenses, compensation for respondents, most accommodation (which involved inexpensive rooms in shared houses), recording equipment, a 'dumb' cell phone and its service plan, and transcription of interview data. It did not include international airfare or food.

Pre-preparation was important to the project's success. Rajeev established relationships with local universities, gaining access to office space where most of his interviews occurred. Moreover, academics in these universities served as 'fixers,' introducing

Rajeev to key gatekeepers who provided further access in the community. The combination of online-recruitment, through classified ads (Gundur, 2019), and snowball recruitment, by drawing on the networks of existing researchers, allowed for diverse respondents to be interviewed to triangulate the data. Lessons learned from the first field site expedited the setting-up of subsequent field sites, thus compressing the time arcs required to achieve similar results in terms of respondent recruitment and data saturation.

Though Rajeev was an outsider of all the communities he visited, having never lived in any of them, his identity provided enough social capital to bridge gaps between him and his respondents. From a practical perspective, Rajeev, who is mixed-race (white and South Asian), and who holds a degree in Latin American Studies and Spanish, was able to use his ambiguous identity and ancillary knowledge and language skills to his advantage. In presenting as ‘Ray,’ members of the Latino, Black, and White communities were equipped to use a name that would be more familiar to them rather than the traditional South Asian name of ‘Rajeev.’

Hispanophone respondents were comfortable speaking to Rajeev in Spanish and sometimes initially assumed he was Latino (though he never presented himself as such), while Anglophone respondents accepted him as a fellow American. Like Nauman’s experience, Rajeev’s status as a student – he explicitly presented himself as such – was also important: formerly and presently criminally-involved respondents felt that, by participating in Rajeev’s work, they could make a positive contribution to society. Thus, Rajeev’s identity aided him in successfully recruiting and interacting with diverse respondents, who did not know each other, and whose interviews led to quick data triangulation. Importantly, the private nature of most conversations led to respondents disclosing key details. Like Nauman, Rajeev was able to leverage that information to make respondents comfortable with him, and more likely to disclose more information to him as a ‘trusted’ outsider.

### ***Katharine, Foreign Outsider: Talking to Terrorists and Traffickers: Fieldwork in Kenya and Colombia***

Katharine’s project examined the intersection of crime and terrorism, how the activity and actors influenced each other, and how those illicit networks wove through local communities (Petrich, 2019). Katharine used two qualitative case studies – a historical case (Colombia) and a contemporary, ‘live’ case (Kenya) – to contextualize a desk-based assessment of international law and cooperation efforts to disrupt the crime-terror nexus



(Petrich, 2022). Together, the cases offered geographic and temporal diversity and covered a broad range of both terrorist and criminal activity. Katharine recognized that the literature lacked direct engagement with conflict actors and their surrounding communities; such engagement would provide unique insight into decision-making processes, logistics, and strategic considerations of criminally-diversified, violent, extremist groups.

Unlike Nauman and Rajeev's program, Katharine's doctoral program had an uneven history of fieldwork conducted by graduate students. Few resources existed to help with writing grants, finding interview subjects, and navigating the ethical approval process. Occasionally, students would do elite interviews with lawmakers in Washington D.C. or Europe, but the idea of embedding for months in a community *a la* Geertz (1973) was inconceivable. Further, direct interviews with actors known to be involved in violence was outside the norm and required Katharine to be both methodologically innovative and bureaucratically savvy to receive the institutional permissions needed to adapt elite interviewing models to rapid ethnography.<sup>5</sup> Ultimately, safety measures mandated by the university included a shortened in-country timeline, no audio or video recording of criminally-involved actors, and a commitment to include remote interviews via video conferencing programs, like Skype. Thus, Katharine focused primarily on self-identified, criminally-involved actors. She conducted interviews in the field where interviewees could be assured that they were not being recorded against their will and where her physical presence created greater rapport. As with Nauman and Rajeev, face-to-face interviewing provided Katharine an additional measure of confidence about the information provided; body language and the tone of interviewees allowed her to recognize when certain topics were sensitive or when her respondent preferred to steer a conversation in a specific direction.

Katharine spent eight weeks in the field between January and June 2018, conducting 67 formal interviews with key informants that averaged 150 minutes each. About 70% of these interviews were completed with a local, bilingual research assistant and were conducted in English, Spanish, Swahili, or Somali. Interviews occurred primarily in public spaces, like church courtyards or community centers. Participants were compensated with a token gift.<sup>6</sup> The conversations were recorded with contemporaneous handwritten notes and supplemented by post-interview reflection memos. In addition to these formal conversations, Katharine engaged in participant observation, including informal chats with community members as she entered and exited the neighborhood. These observations supplied important situational context, enabled data triangulation, and shaped future interview questions. Participants were

recruited using snowball sampling, with the initial contact – as in Nauman’s case – often being a public-facing member of the community: a religious leader, former combatant turned politician, or community non-profit worker.

In the field, Katharine paid particular attention to her appearance, which was both modest and unremarkable. As a moderately tall, white woman with long, light-brown hair, Katharine was immediately identifiable as an unmistakable foreign outsider who was ‘not from here’ in her interview settings. She generally wore little makeup or jewelry, cropped black pants, flat or knit shoes, and a high-necked top with elbow-length sleeves. In Kenya, this appearance, together with the preferred interview location of a church courtyard, caused locals to often mistake her for a missionary or public health educator. This assumption proved useful in facilitating low-profile interviews. In Colombia, the same sartorial choices led locals to assume that Katharine was a teacher.

The funding for both field sites totaled approximately \$8,000 USD (\$9,530 2023 USD). It covered two months in country and roundtrip airfare, lodging, food, domestic transportation, an extremely basic phone, small host gifts, and compensation for research assistants. The funding allocation, however, was uneven: for Kenya, the first field site, Katharine received \$1,000 USD in institutional grants, and personally funded an additional \$2,500 through freelance editing work and credit card debt. For Colombia, the second field site, the demonstrated success of her first fieldtrip allowed her to win \$8,500 USD of institutional and independent grant funding, of which she used \$4,500.

Two factors were key in producing useful and innovative data: the extensive preparation work Katharine engaged in before traveling to the field and working with local research assistants. While in the United States, Katharine spent nine months preparing for interviews: she reviewed the literature, established contacts, and attended external conflict-zone-specific field work trainings and seminars on ethical, qualitative research. In both Kenya and Colombia, local research assistants introduced Katharine to relevant networks within their lives and communities, acting as ‘fixers’ for some interviews (particularly early in the fieldtrips), and provided key local and cultural contexts to interviews that might have otherwise been missed. These introductions also conferred social capital onto Katharine, allowing her to gain trusted status. The domestic research assistants also balanced Katharine’s foreign outsider identity, lending her a degree of local legitimacy by association.

## **Results and Discussion: Considering Identity in Conducting Rapid Ethnography**

### ***Reflecting on Identity during Pre-fieldwork Preparation***

Identity plays a role in all ethnographic research. While Agar (2006) indicated researchers' identities and personal histories as important environmental parameters in all ethnographies, he focused on how these attributes influence the results researchers obtain. In rapid ethnographies, however, identity may determine whether a study is possible within a given time frame and with the available budget.

Despite working on three different continents in varying contexts, each of us was able to recruit participants and collect high-quality qualitative data (see: Table 1), even while facing financial limitations. Although we had modest grants, we all had to self-fund some costs or pay costs up-front before having them reimbursed. Compressing the time in the field alleviated this burden. Importantly, overall time spent in the field does not necessarily correlate to greater interview saturation or proportionally greater interviewee contact (as measured by either number of whole interviews or by interview minutes), a common critique of rapid ethnographies. Shortened time arcs required an immersive style of interviewing. While demanding for the researcher, this technique mitigated some time-based logistical restrictions caused by our financial constraints.

For these rapid ethnographies to achieve data saturation, we all conducted significant pre-preparation or remote work before entering the field to maximize the time available *in situ* for in-person interviews, rather than logistical coordination. These lead tasks included standard ethnographic practices, such as developing knowledge of local norms, customs, and language; arranging for research assistants and 'fixers;' drafting interview protocols; and scheduling interviews with accessible subjects, such as community leaders or public figures. Critically, we considered how our identities and positionality would enable or restrict our access; each of us worked to mitigate any limitations by carefully choosing interview settings, the positionality of our research facilitators, and developing insider knowledge wherever possible. Thus, rather than 'dropping in' to conduct interviews superficially and then leaving as quickly as possible, we immersed ourselves as deeply and as quickly as possible in our interview contexts to understand the communities in which we were working. However, we were mindful not to let our embeddedness generate reciprocal expectations vis-à-vis our respondents. In a criminological context, developing personal ties with respondents can result in substantial ethical issues surrounding reflexivity and privacy (Pelvin, 2022).

What fieldworkers can or cannot achieve in terms of immersion is substantially determined by their perceived identity (Baird, 2018; Goldsmith, 2003; Loftsdóttir, 2002). Notably, some may need to use different aspects of their identity in changing circumstances while others may need to outrightly conceal their identity in risky situations (Goldsmith, 2003; Kovats-Bernat, 2002). Thus, reflecting on the role of one's identity was a critical first step in pre-preparation for each researcher.

We situated our identities within the anticipated social milieu of our research sites and reflected on the varying outcomes that our self-presentation could produce in terms of data opportunities. This reflection included an assessment of how our positionality would be likely perceived by our respondents. Although we had to fine-tune our self-presentation frequently during our fieldwork, the limited time available in rapid ethnography necessitated preemptively considering identity dynamics. Consequently, Nauman's decision to grow his beard to blend in, Rajeev's decision to use his nickname for greater acceptability, and Katharine's sartorial choices to remain unobtrusive reflect an acute awareness of self-identity in the pre-preparation phase.

Moreover, Nauman and Rajeev understood, before the fieldwork, that affirmation of their student status was critical in recruiting respondents who might otherwise refuse to talk to them. Similarly, Katharine, as a White woman operating in non-White, largely patriarchal spaces, knew that she had to meticulously select local research assistants who would serve not only as translators but also as 'fixers' who could improve her access to and trustworthiness within the field. In short, we all engaged in extensive reflection on identity *before* our fieldwork. And our reflections allowed us to readily exploit opportunities, minimized the need for later adaptations, and reduced our time in the field.

### ***The Role of Identity in the Field: Accelerating Access***

Identity, which was central to the dynamics of the interviews, allowed us to accelerate access to respondents in many situations. For both Rajeev and Katharine, establishing a 'comfort zone,' in which they interviewed their respondents, was critical to their projects' success. These comfort zones involved spaces that were not only safe for the researchers but also comfortable for the respondents; they included libraries, churches, cafes, and community centers. These actions were necessary to manage distrust, like that described by Gomes and Granja (2021), from curious, but skeptical respondents. Moreover, we took measures to build

rapport, such as offering beverages and asking less-sensitive or obvious questions at the start of our interviews.

Nauman leveraged his insider status and advanced social capital to bypass some of these measures and interviewed respondents at their homes or workplaces. However, establishing comfort within our interview space was paramount in getting respondents to relax and share openly. While many of Nauman's and Katharine's respondents preferred not to be recorded, they agreed to talk in detail for protracted periods and allowed for the recording of field notes. Remarkably, almost all of Rajeev's respondents agreed to be recorded, and the remaining allowed for the recording of field notes. Had our self-presentation communicated risk to the respondents, recording of responses would not have been allowed.

These closed interview spaces, coupled with identities that our respondents accepted, led to respondents comfortably sharing insider knowledge with each of us, which we then used to establish our trustworthiness to get others to open up further faster (Bucerius, 2013). Nauman's presentation strategies proved fruitful; he was able to press questions and gain explicit answers to his queries from the wide array of respondents he interviewed. His capacity to speak Urdu and his familiarity with cultural references allowed him to identify cryptic responses and use that information to become a trusted party, which then made respondents more likely to unpack them explicitly.

Rajeev's ambiguous ethnic presentation was an important advantage; he never presented as any particular ethnicity and addressed the question of his ethnicity (always truthfully) only when it was specifically asked. Respondents largely viewed Rajeev as a person of color and as someone who could understand issues related to race. Rajeev's fluency in Spanish, coupled with his knowledge of the relevant slang in English and Spanish, allowed him to discuss topics in the same manner as his respondents. In doing so, Rajeev established precision in his conversations and allowed respondents to indicate nuance that went beyond superficial accounts. His knowledge of a variety of unrelated, but known, actors allowed him to ensure that he obtained sufficiently diverse accounts of important players and groups to establish saturation on agreed key facts.

Katharine found that having visibly different identities than her interview subjects provided some surprising benefits. Male respondents, particularly older men in positions of power, often assumed that Katharine had limited preexisting knowledge and situational comprehension; as a result, they became overly explanatory. This phenomenon, colloquially

known as ‘mansplaining,’ provided a wealth of knowledge about respondents’ perceptions of their environment, key variables, and relational dynamics. In turn, Katharine was able to ask more direct and specific questions without causing offense, something which an interviewer with a more closely affiliated identity might have provoked. In terms of benefiting from shared identities, by presenting herself as a modest and feminine woman, Katharine was able to interview women, a significantly under-accessed population, in the community about their experiences with crime and extremism. Doing so resulted in a much more holistic picture of illicit dynamics and allowed a narrative of agency to emerge that was previously lacking in the literature (Petrich & Donnelly, 2019). In her research on illegal tiger skin suppliers in Lhasa, China, sociologist Rebecca Wong (2015) also found that her gender identity was a facilitating factor in eliciting responses from suppliers who felt a ‘sense of pride in their achievements’ (p. 699).

However, it is important to note that while our identities accelerated access to certain actors, it also created some barriers that were difficult to overcome given our abbreviated field visits. For instance, Nauman was unable to successfully recruit women into his study. Cultural norms do not allow a man to speak to a woman alone. In the instances when women spoke to Nauman informally, they often deferred to men nearby or stated that the questions that Nauman asked were men’s business and not theirs. Contrastingly, Nauman’s gender identity allowed him to have candid discussions with some police officers, which could have been a difficult prospect for a female researcher (Yang, 2022). Plus, Nauman did not have sufficient social capital to avoid suspicion in his final field site and was forced to abandon it. Therefore, researchers’ social position may confer them advantage or disadvantage depending on the context they find themselves in.

Rajeev did recruit some women, but they were a minority in his study. Some women were recruited via classified ads and were able to tell their stories in private. However, given that Rajeev is a man, he found, congruent with anthropologist Philippe Bourgois’s (2003) experience, that women recruited using more conventional recruitment strategies were typically strong personalities who could ignore the patriarchal rules of their communities and speak to him over any objections of male counterparts. Rajeev also understood that he lacked the social capital to have any sustained presence in certain areas of Ciudad Juárez.

For Katharine, identity created certain guardrails and limitations in terms of access and safety. Interview times had to be carefully considered to ensure no travel occurred after dark. Moreover, because she was a visible target for street crime, clear plans for exiting the

interview and neighborhood safety had to be considered beforehand. Conversing with men alone in private residences in Kenya was difficult, and the few times the situation occurred, the dynamics were highly un conducive to a productive conversation. Similarly, Katharine had to navigate inappropriate comments or suggestions from a minority of interviewees. Finally, as a clear outsider from a Global North country, Katharine found that some interviewees aggressively sought financial remuneration despite agreeing to the terms of the study which clearly indicated no monetary compensation was available.

Nevertheless, the comparative advantages our identities gave us in our field sites represented comparative disadvantages that others, with the same resources, could not likely overcome. For example, when considering our case studies, Nauman and Rajeev could not have switched places and gathered the same amount or kind of data; neither would have had sufficient social capital and knowledge to make up for the budgetary shortcomings. In short, the compressed time arc in rapid ethnography does not allow for anyone to establish presence in the field that time affords practitioners of classic ethnography.

In sum, despite limitations to the capacity to leverage our identity, all of us were able to use some of our attributes to our advantage in our data collection strategies. Moreover, all of us used information gained from ethnographic observations and initial interviews to establish knowledge – and a degree of ‘insider’ identity – of risqué or sensitive subjects with our respondents, and this strategy encouraged respondents to corroborate, refute, or expand on sensitive topics. We also learned that face-to-face interviewing with our target populations was imperative if we wanted candid responses to questions relating to crime and deviance.

For Nauman, the technological limitations of Pakistan, particularly at the time of the fieldwork and within the poorer neighborhoods, made online interviewing a non-starter. Similarly, while Katharine was open to using remote communications to interview respondents, that enthusiasm was not reciprocated by prospective respondents, rendering the strategy ineffective. Rajeev conducted a handful of phone interviews, but he found that it was difficult to establish a meaningful dynamic with his research participants as they afforded reduced time to the experience and were less open to answering comparatively sensitive questions. Ultimately, our experiences taught us that leveraging identity in the field is vital in making subjects comfortable, and comfort accelerates access to data and its collection, while minimizing risk.

## *Identity and Risk*

Identity played a significant role not only in the collection of data, but also in our risk profiles. Most existing scholarship on risk management in fieldwork consists mainly of tales of the field in risky contexts (Belousov et al., 2007; Dixit, 2012), neat guidelines for risk mitigation (Demery & Pipkin, 2021; Sluka, 1990), and the need for pragmatic reflexivity (Dodworth, 2021; Kovats-Bernat, 2002). However, the safety toolkits presented in such studies or derived from anecdotes of fieldwork are more useful in mitigating ‘background risks’ – risks faced by everyone by virtue of being in a particular space – than in mitigating ‘presentational dangers’ of working in the field as a researcher (Goldsmith, 2003, p. 112).

First, we benefited from our own life experiences. Like most, we have felt ‘out of place,’ at some point in time. In these situations, we rely on coping mechanisms that we have developed to avert risks in our everyday lives. For each of us, prior experiences as minorities and outsiders in social situations, including academia, helped us deploy risk management strategies during fieldwork. Criminologists can also mitigate risk by leveraging different facets of identity at different points in time during fieldwork. Nauman faced circumstances where revealing his contact with the local police averted risk and circumstances where this same information needed to be withheld. Similarly, where possible, we, as researchers, transitioned between insider and outsider aspects of our identity by placing differential emphasis on each, depending on the contexts in which we found ourselves.

We learned that compensating for social capital deficits goes beyond managing physical appearance and overcoming linguistic barriers through research assistants. It also requires careful thought to make choices that manage the risks that may be caused by our identities. This disposition goes beyond a ‘localized ethic’ (Kovats-Bernat, 2002), whereby researchers consider and value the advice and opinions of respondents in deciding which questions to ask and in determining an acceptable level of exposure to risk; it involves surrendering to the social and cultural settings of the field sites (Wolff, 1976).

During the fieldwork, we frequently found ourselves in situations where we implicitly acquiesced to the labels accorded to us if they lowered risks to personal safety and increased opportunities for data collection. For instance, Katharine did not contest her perceived identity as a missionary since this label made her less visible to potentially hostile elements. Similarly, Nauman attended prayers in the mosque before interviewing Imams to gain legitimacy and to reaffirm his insider status. In Rajeev’s conversations with people actively involved in the drug trade, he refused to pass judgement, even when asked by his respondents



to do so. Respondents were less likely to view the researchers as threats if the researchers exhibited a fluid identity which was amenable to the respondents' expectations. Nevertheless, one must be cognizant not to minimize social distance to the extent that immersion becomes a risk.

Beyond its influence on data collection and rapport, identity informed the safety concerns of the researchers and their institutions. To reduce risk, standard guidelines recommend that researchers in the field have a point of contact or choose an interview location away from the active site (Belousov et al., 2007; Demery & Pipkin, 2021). However, risk is also a function of time and ongoing negotiations of identity. Establishing rapport and maintaining trust are intricate and fragile processes which can erode over time or disintegrate due to an unpredictable incident (Jacobs, 1998). Identity contributes significantly to the tolerability of risk. Whereas insiders may continue for as long as they deem appropriate since background risks are almost equivalent to presentational risks, outsiders, particularly those who engage with respondents from opposing groups and may need to negotiate various identities, may find themselves in situations where one group views the research activities as detrimental to its interests.

With these risks in mind, criminologists must consider how long they can stay in the field before exposing themselves, their research assistants, and the interview population to unacceptable levels of risk from both government and criminal actors. In some cases, a rapid ethnographic stay may prove to be fruitful. Nauman, as a domestic outsider operating in a neighborhood where even the police were reluctant to enter, gathered data seamlessly for a week before a local gang, thinking he was associated with the police, deemed his presence a threat. In other situations, the level of risk involved is not worth taking; Rajeev decided not to conduct his research widely in Juárez due to his gatekeepers' warnings that doing so could provoke an immediate and unescapable violent response.

### ***Identity, Social Capital, and Budget***

We have considered how identity can be leveraged to accelerate access and must be considered in managing risk; this final section considers the role of identity and social capital in searching for strategies to identify and minimize costs. Although we had variable costs and time in the field (see: Table 2), all of our research represented short field visits conducted with minimal costs. Coming from low-to-modest-income households, we understood how to

budget aggressively and identify opportunities to reduce costs. We reduced expenses by avoiding costly meals, expensive hotel accommodations, and first-class air fares.

Researcher	Risk Concerns	Time	Cost (2023 USD)	Outcomes
Nauman	Threats from local gangs; concerns over police interference	6 weeks: Field Site 1: 3 weeks Field Site 2: 2 weeks Field Site 3: 1 week Field Site 4: 2 weeks	\$ 5,685	58 field interviews (~3,500 minutes of recorded interview time)
Rajeev	University safety concerns re: violence in Mexico	11 months: Field site 1: 5.5 months Field site 2: 3.5 months Field site 3: 2 months	\$31,555	129 field interviews (~12,000 minutes of recorded interview time)
Katharine	Physical appearance; university safety concerns; language fluency	8 weeks: Field site 1: 3.5 weeks Field site 2: 4.5 weeks	\$9,530, total Fieldtrip 1: \$4,170 Fieldtrip 2: \$5,360	67 field interviews (~10,000 minutes of recorded interview time)

Table 2: Fieldwork Time, Costs, and Outputs; all amounts in 2023 US dollars.

As noted above, our identities resulted in varying risk tolerances. Nauman, being a Pakistani national, was able to use transportation systems and accommodation that foreign people would have been less likely able to access. These resources allowed Nauman to keep his costs to an absolute minimum. Foreign researchers would have likely had additional expenses, including pricier hotels or drivers, given the limitations they would face in accessing the neighborhoods studied.

Similarly, Rajeev was able to access his field sites unencumbered. His capacity to blend into the population meant that he was never worried about accessing public transportation or occupying space in a given neighborhood. Rajeev also drew on his extensive social capital, stopping with friends rather than staying in hotels as he drove across the country. Furthermore, he used the website Couchsurfing to stay with strangers. This tactic was especially fruitful when going to a new city as the Couchsurfing hosts provided Rajeev with local advice and assisted him to find inexpensive housing in locations that were well-placed for his research purposes. Other researchers on a budget could similarly develop access to networks, such as Couchsurfing, but this process takes time and investment prior to engaging in the fieldwork. At a minimum, choosing to stay in short term housing that is privately contracted offers both budgetary and logistical advantages, by positioning the researcher in convenient locations.

Katharine had the fewest benefits of the three in terms of leveraging her identity and existing social capital. She had to make pragmatic decisions between trading off access, budget, and safety. At one field site, she stayed in researcher housing maintained by a local NGO which functioned essentially as a hostel for visiting scholars. The bunkhouse, which was very modest in both price and amenities, provided the unexpected advantage of being deeply integrated into the local neighborhood, smoothing interview access and increasing feelings of security, as well as offering a scholarly community with which she could strategize and fact check interactions in real time. At her second field site, she rented a small studio with kitchen facilities that allowed her to eat the majority of her meals at home. Nonetheless, security concerns in both locations, meant Katharine chose accommodations with door security which slightly increased her accommodation costs. She did not, however, opt for a driver in either location, due to cost considerations and ethical concerns: she did not want interviewees to be observed by someone who was not affiliated with the study. Not using a driver created two significantly risky incidences: waiting for a ride share and walking to a bus station exposed Katharine to harassment and intimidation by men on the street. These situations were clearly opportunistic responses to her physical appearance or her visual ‘outsider’ identity rather than reactions to her study; nonetheless, they were deeply unsettling and are a clear example of tradeoffs made when balancing research on a shoestring budget versus best safety practices.

## **Conclusion**

Rapid ethnography is a useful tool to collect rich qualitative data on deviant actors and circumstances. Moreover, when financial limitations force compressed time arcs in the field, these time limitations can be compensated by adequate pre-preparation, which includes careful consideration of one's identity. Within rapid ethnographic studies, identity shapes practicalities, choices, and possibilities. Importantly, identity determines how one can access the field. While insider or outsider status can affect the capacity to collect certain data, this identity alone is not a roadblock to a successful fieldtrip. Thus, regardless of status, through careful pre-preparation, researchers can leverage social capital drawn from their identities to their advantage. When deficits in social capital cannot be overcome, adjustments, such as hiring fieldworkers or research assistants, may compensate. Moreover, by considering one's identity carefully before entering the field, one can prepare to be flexible within the field, which will allow for better research opportunities, a greater chance of data triangulation, and, most importantly, a superior capacity to negotiate difficult situations and minimize risks. The failure to articulate one's identity in criminological fieldwork may decrease the quality of data collection and increase issues of personal safety, especially when dealing with high-risk populations. Thus, rapid ethnographies can be useful in the study of marginalized, complex, and understudied populations, especially when these studies are faced with financial or temporal limitations, among other constraints. However, the success of rapid ethnographies largely hinges upon the researchers' ability to critically reflect on their relative identities before and during the fieldwork and to leverage their identity in ways that optimize data collection.

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<sup>1</sup> Anthropologists interested in rural cultures considered one year to be an ideal time frame for understanding the annual cycle of planting and harvesting. Jeffrey, B., & Troman, G. (2004). Time for ethnography. *British Educational Research Journal*, 30(4), 535-548. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0141192042000237220>

<sup>2</sup> The converted values throughout are calculated using historical exchange rates from <https://xe.com> and processing shifts in costs using <https://www.usinflationcalculator.com/>.

<sup>3</sup> Attempts to pay early interviewees for their time were not well received. Key informants were respected members of their neighborhoods. It is against cultural norms to receive compensation from a student guest who is completing his studies.

<sup>4</sup> Pathans (Pashtuns) are an ethnic group primarily based in Afghanistan and north-western Pakistan. The group has a sizable presence in Karachi and Lahore. Pathans are generally considered conservative in their religious beliefs. A beard is a symbol of religious piety in Islam; thus, growing a beard established rapport with the study population.

<sup>5</sup> Katharine’s university was very concerned about this project and needed significant persuading to allow her to go to Kenya with the express purpose of interviewing conflict actors. Interviews in Somalia (Katharine’s first choice) were entirely out of the question. Somalia has experienced a high level of internal conflict since the early 1990s; the current federal government does not effectively exercise power beyond the capital city of Mogadishu. In 2018, Somalia was listed as a ‘Level 4 – Do Not Travel’ country by the United States Department of State. Kenya was off the table until Katharine managed to find lodging with and a nominal affiliation to the Oxford University Refugee Studies Centre, which was well established in Nairobi.

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<sup>6</sup> These host gifts were usually food—sugar, tea, or chocolate—valued at less than \$2 USD. Interviews that were conducted in coffee shops or other places of casual dining did not involve a host gift; instead, Katharine paid for the interviewee’s beverage.