

**FOREIGN FIELDWORKERS & NATIVE PARTICIPANTS:  
A THEORY OF METHOD\***

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*Running head:* Theorizing Foreign Fieldwork

**Abstract:** Foreign fieldwork often comes with vast cultural differences between the researcher and participants. Such differences have implications for the success and findings of research. In this paper, we draw on our experiences doing fieldwork abroad to propose a theory of method. We suggest that as cultural distance increases, what is communicated by a participant (1) increasingly reflects assumptions about the researcher's culture, (2) decreasingly reflects the participant's own culture, and (3) becomes more righteous. The paper concludes by using the proposed theory to suggest practical suggestions that criminologists may employ to improve their research abroad.

**Key words:** theory of method; culture; foreign; fieldwork; pure sociology

Fieldworkers increasingly travel beyond their borders to learn about crime and law in foreign lands (Bennett 2004). Doing foreign fieldwork has its own unique challenges (Barrett and Cason 2010; Bennett 2004; Kohn 1987). Many of the special problems are related to cultural differences between fieldworkers and the population under investigation. Among a single nation's population, cultural differences between people can be vast. Such differences can be even more pronounced when comparing persons from different nations or continents. If international criminology is to advance and reach its potential, then criminologists must identify the problems of such research and devise practical strategies to overcome them.

A central tenet of science is that knowledge advances fastest when falsifiable theories are proposed (Popper 2002 [1934]). In this paper, we build on Jacques and Wright's (2008, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c, 2010d) theory of method to suggest how doing fieldwork in a foreign place affects the data obtained from participants. We begin by describing our orienting paradigm – pure sociology (Black 1976, 1998) – and strategy of theorizing (Jacques and Wright 2010a). We then describe two criminologists' experiences doing fieldwork abroad, one studying squatters in Argentina and the other researching violent offenders in South Africa. Based on that data, a *preliminary* theory is proposed that explains how nationality's relation to culture affects the findings of criminological fieldwork. We conclude by using the theory to suggest practical and falsifiable strategies that criminologists may use to better their international research.

### **PURE SOCIOLOGY**

There are many conceivable ways of theorizing cross-national cultural differences and their effect on fieldwork (see, e.g., Barrett and Cason 2010).<sup>1</sup> This paper relies on the orienting

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<sup>1</sup> In anthropology, for example, this question has been addressed through the distinction between emic and etic perspectives: emic refers to a description of human behavior by someone who is a cultural insider; etic refers to a description of human behavior by someone who is a cultural outsider (Headland et al. 1990). In anthropology the

framework known as *pure sociology* (Black 1976, 1995, 1998; Cooney 1998, 2006, 2009). The focus of this paradigm is determining how social behavior is affected by the social status of and social distance between persons involved in situations. There are thought to be five kinds of social status and three kinds of social distance (Black 1976; Phillips and Cooney 2005). Each kind of status and distance may exert its own unique effect on social behavior. *Social status* is broadly defined as a person's rank in the social hierarchy. Status increases as a person gains wealth (vertical status), community involvement (radial status), organization/memberships (corporate status), knowledge, beauty, conventionality (symbolic status), or freedom from social control (normative status). *Social distance* is conceptualized as persons' degree of connections in social life. Social distance between people decreases as they spend more time and do more activities together (relational distance), gain common memberships (corporate distance), and become closer in expressions of what is good, true, and beautiful (cultural distance).<sup>2</sup>

#### A PRELIMINARY THEORY OF METHOD

Scientific method, or research, is a social behavior (Jacques and Wright 2008; cf. Black 2000). Essentially, scientific method is a strategy for accumulating objective knowledge through observations, conversations, and manipulation. In the course of obtaining knowledge, method may also involve other aspects of social behavior, such as interaction between researchers and subjects (e.g., recruitment), the transfer of wealth between these groups (e.g., subject payments), or the application of social control (e.g., disapproval of research by Institutional Review Boards or retaliation by disgruntled participants).

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general goal is to capture emic perspectives on the world by 'going native': paradoxically it is argued that the researcher needs to keep their etic perspective in order to be able to describe emic perspectives (Bernard 2006).

<sup>2</sup> Purely sociological theories attempt to use social status and social distance to explain social behavior. Past work in pure sociology has explored, for example, how social structure affects economic behaviors such as welfare (Michalski 2003) and predation (Cooney and Phillips 2002), cultural behaviors such as ideas and art (Black 1998), and normative behaviors, including law (Black 1976), retaliation (Black 1983; Cooney 1998, 2006, 2009), avoidance, toleration (Baumgartner 1988), and therapy (Horwitz 1982; Tucker 1999).

Jacques and Wright (2008) are engaged in an ongoing attempt to develop a falsifiable theory of method. The goal is to determine how the social status of and social distance between persons involved in research affects the quality and quantity of research. In other words, they address the question: What sociological factors *explain* method? To date, they have theorized how method is affected by (1) the intimacy between researchers and participants (Jacques and Wright, 2008, 2010d), and (2) the social status of those two groups (Jacques and Wright 2010a, 2010b, 2010c). The practical benefit of such a theory is its potential to improve research. If methodologists are able to explain fieldwork, then it should be possible to develop practical strategies to increase that behavior and make it better by manipulating its causal influences. *In turn*, the empirically proven methods of fieldwork may be used to improve criminological research in order to help it develop practical strategies for reducing crime and discrimination.

#### FIELDWORK & CULTURE

This paper builds on Jacques and Wright's work by suggesting a theory of how cultural differences between and, to a lesser degree, the social status of foreign fieldworks and native participants affect data quality. Before proposing such a theory, it is necessary first to address the question: *What are fieldwork and culture?* To be clear, we address this question through the orienting paradigm of pure sociology; therefore our conception of fieldwork and culture may be different from that of other paradigms and scientists.

Fieldwork is a social behavior that involves the collection of knowledge from *participants* by *fieldworkers*. At its core, fieldwork involves *conversations* with persons or *observations* of them or another variable (e.g., the environment), and the *recording* of *numbers*

or *stories* about the variable(s).<sup>3</sup> According to Black (1976:61), *culture* occurs when we verbalize, write about, paint, or otherwise express ideas about what is good, true, or beautiful. “It includes arts, ideas, values, ideologies, religions, languages, and ceremonies.” Furthermore, Black (1998: 160) sees culture as a quantitative variable that varies in conventionality and content. The *conventionality* of culture increases as an expression of what is good/bad, true/false, or beautiful/ugly increases. The more often a particular group communicates a specific expression, the greater its conventionality. As well, the more alike are two or more expressions of what is good, true, or beautiful, the closer those cultures are in *content*. “There may also be an aesthetic, intellectual, or linguistic distance, even a culinary or musical distance, every expression of culture closer or further from the next” (Black, 1998:160). Thus, culture is a measure of both social status and social distance. As the content of a person’s ideas becomes more frequent, then that person’s symbolic status is said to increase. And as people become more similar in culture, then their cultural distance is said to decrease.

### **CULTURE & FIELDWORK IN FOREIGN PLACES**

To a degree, nationality – defined as an individual’s place of origin – is related to social status and social distance, including cultural aspects.<sup>4</sup> In other words, the conventionality and content of what people communicate about morality, truth, and beauty often is affected by where they are raised. This is not to say that all people of the same nationality have the exact same culture, or that all countries have vast differences in their respective cultures. Rather, we argue

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<sup>3</sup> There are two other key aspects of fieldwork: recruitment and remuneration (Jacques and Wright 2008). *Recruitment* is defined as the process of interacting with potential participants and convincing them to provide data, either actively or passively. *Remuneration* is defined as payment for participation in research. For brevity’s sake, this paper does not deal with these two aspects of method. Future work should explore how culture affects these behaviors.

<sup>4</sup> Note that this paper uses “nationality” in a way that is meant to be distinct from “citizenship”. Our focus here is on where a person is from rather than on the government(s) of which a person is a part. Also, it should be noted that nationality is not always an all or none variable; some persons, for instance, spend equal amount of time in two or more countries throughout their life; as defined above, they would have multiple nationalities.

that in practice nationality tends to be used as a proxy for a variety of social differences—including cultural kinds. When participants realize that a researcher is of a different nationality, it is often assumed by the former that the latter will be different than many natives in terms of their culture. The social structural assumptions made about the researcher will depend on not only the nation's actual status distribution and culture, but also on the participants' knowledge – or lack thereof – of those features.

Participants' knowledge of a nation may give them a general set of expressed beliefs, values and attitudes about people from that nation. For example, they might say persons of that nationality are high or low status and, culturally speaking, educated or ignorant, right or wrong, honest or liars, and beautiful or ugly. However, it is important to recognize that people do not express the same thing in all situations. For example, what a person says in one context might be completely different from what is said in another.

These ideas – (1) that nations have a particular culture and status distribution, (2) people have assumptions about the social status of and social distance from foreigners of particular nationalities, and (3) that people's expressions vary across situations – are the focus of this paper. In the pages below, we seek to understand how these factors affect data collected from native participants by foreign fieldworkers. This is done by examining experiences from two independent field projects: a study by a European on squatting in Argentina, and another project by a European on violent offenders in South Africa.

#### A DUTCH PERSON RESEARCHING SQUATTERS IN ARGENTINA

A land invasion is the process whereby a group of people, usually a few hundred, gains access to land by collectively invading it and overnight building precarious dwellings. Such persons are generally referred to as “squatters”. To study how informal and formal systems

interact in the context of land invasions, Van Gelder travelled to Buenos Aires, Argentina. A variety of methods were used, including focus groups, in-depth interviews, surveys and field observation. The surveys were developed by Van Gelder, but executed by Argentine research assistants (see Van Gelder 2007, 2009, 2010). The interviews and focus groups were done by Van Gelder himself together with an Argentinean colleague. Field observation offered a way of seeing what was actually going on, and of verifying what was said in interviews and focus groups. Furthermore, the cooperation with local researchers and assistants ensured that nuances were understood and allowed observations to be discussed and checked.

Although the research sample consisted primarily of squatters, it also included interviews with stakeholders such as NGO representatives and government officials and informal talks with university colleagues. As social outcasts, squatters have far lower status than NGO or governmental officials. The latter groups typically have more income, employment and higher education. Based on his experiences, it seems plausible that nationality and other aspects of social structure influenced the reactions of and data obtained from participants.

#### *On Being a Cultural Outsider*

The quotes below exemplify two responses to his presence by Argentinean slum dwellers and officials, respectively: “So it takes a guy from Europe to finally come and see in what shit we are living in this barrio. You know, for us it is important to see that someone actually cares about us and shows interest” (Slum Dweller). “Why doesn’t he go research his own country instead of here?” (Local government official). These statements express ideas about the morality of foreign fieldwork and studying slums: the lower-status slum dweller thinks it is good; the

higher-status official thinks it is bad.<sup>5</sup> Both the appreciation of the slum dweller and negativity of the official may be related to the researcher's national origin and their stereotypes of Europeans. Yet the reaction also depend on the status of participants (and that of the researcher): on the average, lower-class participants more often praised and less often criticized his work than higher-class participants. Not infrequently, respondents would straightforwardly tell how they viewed Europeans and/or European academics. As one former official and now social activist told Van Gelder during an interview, "Sometimes researchers and students from Europe come to Latin America with good intentions and to do something about situation, only to be confronted with a reality that is completely different from the where they are from. But for the people here [in the barrios], it is very important that people show interest."

It seems these status- and culture-conditioned reactions to the foreign research eventually affected what was said. For example, many squatters interviewed were eager to convince Van Gelder that they were not usurpers or criminals. Instead, they explained their (illegal) behavior as the outcome of their dire situation and lack of alternatives in terms of accommodation, stressing the legitimacy of their actions. Squatters are motivated to stress they are not the criminals; officials and the general public often takes them to be. For example, a frequently heard remark in squatter discourse is, "Maybe it is illegal what we do, but it is legitimate!" (see Ostuni & Van Gelder 2008) and "We don't want them [the government] to give us anything, we just want [the opportunity] to buy what is ours!" It is possible that had Van Gelder been a high status Argentinean as compared to a European, then what squatters told him may have changed. Few of the slum dwellers had any knowledge of his home country, the Netherlands: "In Europe you do

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<sup>5</sup> Note that these quotes should not be read perfectly characterizing reactions by these two groups. Many officials were in fact very welcoming and interested in the study, while squatters sometimes also held a negative attitude towards it.

not have this, there everything is well arranged....Or isn't it?" or "How do they deal with land invasions in your country?" This ignorance was useful by lowering the likelihood that what participants said was affected by their preexisting knowledge of his country's culture. Moreover, being from Europe also meant standing outside the divisive lines of Argentine politics and social groups. It was obvious to the squatters that Van Gelder did not fit these cultural molds or any others they were highly knowledgeable on. In this respect, their assumptions about his beliefs, values, and ideas were not as highly entrenched. This neutrality may have made them more honest – i.e., pure in their accounts of what is happening and what they think about it.

On the other hand, some of the higher status government officials, particularly local ones, were eager to convince Van Gelder that the squatters were in fact criminals and, moreover, that they should be treated accordingly. That is, these officials, as state representatives, needed a justification for their behavior towards the squatters. In some cases, they would make clear that they had an image of Europeans as being blinded by the dire slum conditions they witnessed and therefore siding with the squatters (i.e., not being objective). These officials were therefore eager to convince him of their moral fortitude, citing instances in which they had found out certain squatters were actually political brokers, used squatting as a means of making money or that they were downright criminals.<sup>6</sup>

If Van Gelder had been an Argentinean researcher, the content of the interviews may have been different. The Argentine social science researcher is generally of the political left and those with an interest in social issues tend to combine their political posture with militantism. That is, beyond hierarchical divides, Argentinean society is highly politicized. This may function as a hindrance to getting reliable or adequate information from interviewees with a different

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<sup>6</sup> Some officials would stress their empathy with squatters or tried to present themselves as fighting for the same cause – i.e. providing better housing for the poor sectors of the population.

political orientation as they may be perceived as opponents. For example, several squatters, in particular the better-informed ones such as neighborhood leaders, told me they were skeptical of (Argentinean) student researchers, arguing their well-intentioned efforts generally did little good and could even be damaging. One leader told me: “I’ve seen it happen time and again, these middle-class students come here like Che Guevara’s to preach the revolution and mobilize the proletariat, only to go home to their middle-class homes in the city at the end of the day while we stay behind. They mean well but have no clue of life in the barrio”.

### *On Being a Cultural Insider*

Although his role as a foreigner gave Van Gelder unique access in some respects, this foreigner position had to be balanced with insider knowledge. For example, at the beginning of the research (which took four years in total), his understanding of the squatter neighborhoods was insufficient to undertake productive, intelligible interviews. To deplete this ignorance, he spent time in neighborhoods and with squatters, participating in social activities (celebrations, protests, meetings, etc.) and simply “hanging around” in local canteens or on the street. This strategy allowed him to simultaneously to gain squatters’ confidence and trust, while also obtain information about daily life in the settlements that could be used to develop and conduct subsequent interviews. The fact that the researcher returned each year for four consecutive years also increased trust between him and the squatters and decreased cultural distance: “Man, you are almost one of us now, you are Argentinean!”

Had Van Gelder rushed to interview squatters without observing their lives and interacting with them, then the data he obtained may have been different – likely less plentiful, valid, or rich. The rationale here is that as a researcher becomes more knowledgeable about the topic/population under study, then that person is better able to identify inconsistencies,

incomplete truths, or lies told by participants, and also more adept at asking questions capable of resolving such issues or probing for further details. For respondents, particularly those in higher positions or neighborhood leaders, a central concern was coming across as knowledgeable – at least with respect to some key areas that the interview was about. If perceived to be uninformed, then persons may have been more likely not to tell the researcher what they think or know. Related to this, it was important to demonstrate sensitivity to the topic under study in order to assure respondents that information they provided would not be misunderstood or misinterpreted. However, ‘ignorance’ can also be used strategically in this respect, to probe the truthfulness of the respondent. For example, by asking certain seemingly uninformed questions at the beginning of an interview, some respondents could be easily identified as blatant liars as the information they provided contradicted factual information they had access to but were unaware that the researcher had access to as well.

Generally respondents appreciated the interest of someone from abroad for their work and country’s situation, but sometimes Van Gelder’s presence was seen as an intrusion and interference with something that was not his business (see earlier quote). As the fieldwork was staged over four different periods over four years, he noticed access to the populations of interest increased over time. This is due not only to the natural improvement in his Spanish (including the local accent and slang) – which diminished cultural distance – but also because his presence in the field became known and his social contacts increased (see Jacques and Wright 2008). This allowed for more snowball recruiting, easier access but also more respect from participants in the sense that as he steadily gained knowledge about the topic under study and the country, becoming more on par with them and perhaps a more interesting conversational partner.

## A DANE RESEARCHING VIOLENT OFFENDERS IN SOUTH AFRICA

Cape Town, South Africa, has some of the highest rates of violent crime in the world, but research on violence from the offender's perspective is sparse there (Lindegaard 2009, 2010). Lindegaard conducted in-depth fieldwork among male youngsters living under different socio-economic conditions. She wanted to know how subjective experiences of male youngsters affect their involvement in or avoidance of violence. The sample included White, Colored<sup>7</sup> and Black males, age 17-25. Participants were recruited from workshops conducted at high schools and through her previous research networks in township areas and prison. The method of data collection included a questionnaire conducted among 450 high school students, group discussions, interviews and participant observations of male youngsters, both inside and outside prison. Lindegaard conducted 105 interviews with 40 different male youngsters. She followed 30 youngsters intensely in their daily lives in order to observe them in situations where they committed or avoided committing violent acts. During fieldwork she was affiliated with a local university, one of her supervisors was South African, and she continuously discussed her hypotheses and findings with a range of South African scholars both during fieldwork and writing. She also employed a Colored university student for a period who conducted a part of the group discussions. Below, we examine how her identity as a White, higher-educated, European influenced her relationship with White male youngsters and made her a presumed insider, yet how her European roots made her a supposed outsider. Throughout the following, keep in mind that like nationality, race is a proxy for culture; at least in some countries, persons of a particular race are more likely to share the same culture than are persons of different races.

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<sup>7</sup> During apartheid South Africans were categorized as White, African/Black, Colored or Indian/Asian. Colored was a category constructed to include people who did not fit any of the other categories.

### *On Being a Cultural Insider*

In the course of Lindegaard's research, half of the White participants introduced themselves as "Dutch" despite their South African nationality. She interpreted this introduction as a way of emphasizing that the participants assumed she shared more with them than just their Whiteness. This presumed cultural connection showed itself when the youngsters spoke of getting into fights and willingness to use violence. White male youngsters consistently represented themselves as non-violent but portrayed Black and Colored youngsters as having inherently violent tendencies during interviews, despite findings from the survey suggesting the exact opposite. One participant expressed it in the following way: "They [Blacks at his school] are quite violent. I don't know if it has to do with them being usually the poor or something and they are used to this situation at home or something. I guess it is something like that but they like to stick together and be violent."

Opinions like this were never shared with Lindegaard's research assistant who was Colored. When she discussed issues of violence with the White participants their statements would be more politically correct. For example, one youngster talked about the risk of crime among different groups: "I know people like you [indicating Coloreds] usually live in areas where crime is much worse than by us, but we [Whites] still have to deal with being afraid as well." In this quote the youngster is trying to be sensitive about the presumed differences between himself and the assistant, namely that they probably live in socio-economically different areas and also are exposed to different degrees of risk in terms of crime. Differently, the participants assumed to share socio-economic position with Lindegaard due to her being White.

Such presumptions made the White participants comfortable in talking to Lindegaard about not only the differences in violence between Blacks, Coloreds and Whites, but also in sharing share their racist ideas in general. For example, one participant explained that he would not blame the Black students at his school for calling White students racists because most of them were. When she asked him, however, if they openly talked about stereotypes based on race categories in class he said the following: “No, not really, because there are Black people in our class and we don’t feel that comfortable talking about it between them. We try to skip that subject, keep it in the grain, don’t talk about it. I think we don’t talk about it because we are supposed to have made peace.... We like to believe it but it isn’t like that so we don’t talk about it. Talking about it, it would be to admit there is a problem. If everybody starts talking about it, it just goes on and on and... there will become some... troubles if we talk about racism with some Blacks in the class. They will start fighting.” Talking about racism around Blacks was seen as taboo by Whites.<sup>8</sup> If Lindegaard had been Black or Colored, then the White participants may have provided different answers to her questions.

The experiences above show how the researcher’s common “Whiteness” – and the cultural closeness it implies – affected the data obtained from White participants. At the very least, they assumed her pro-Black beliefs are not so strong that sharing racist ideas will lead to a fight, reveal a problem, or reduce their social acceptability. In short, participants shared their racist thoughts with her because they assumed that, as a White, she might share those same beliefs to a degree.

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<sup>8</sup> Firstly, because being a racist was socially unacceptable and therefore difficult to share with others. Secondly, because talking about it equated to admitting a problem. Thirdly, because talking about it could bring about conflicts which eventually lead to fights: “they”, meaning Black students, would start fighting.

### *On Being a Cultural Outsider*

Although Lindegaard and the participants were linked by their Whiteness, they were well aware that their South African versus her European upbringing and living may have differently shaped their views on some matters. These participants expected Europeans to think that all South Africans were violent. One youngster expressed it in the following way: “I know that you guys [i.e. Europeans] only hear about our [South African] violence up there. It seems like your journalists are obsessed with the issue. But I mean we are not more violent than you are.” Another youngster tried to relativize the presumed European assumption about South Africans being violent in the following way: “I mean all big cities – also in Europe – have high crime statistics.” In the face of their assumptions about what Europeans think of South Africa, the participants were expressing the belief that their country is not a far more treacherous place. Had the researcher and participants been of the same nationality, then such statements may have been less forthcoming.

White participants also expected Europeans to be less racist than South Africans. As one participant said, “[Y]ou Europeans do not think badly about Black people.” He went on to explain that South Africans found it difficult not to be racist: “That is probably how we think and it is probably a mistake. We should think differently, but that is probably one of our land’s biggest problems, because people in South Africa, we think like that and we should all probably change that but it is not very easy.” These participants often felt torn about “what is” and “what should be”. When expressing racist ideas, they would often fight against their own words by saying things such as “but you know everybody is human”, “we are supposed to be in one team in this land”, and “we should not be racist.”

These comments show that they assumed that as a European, Lindegaard would naturally hold less racist ideas on non-White people than do White South Africans.

### **A SOCIAL STRUCTURAL THEORY OF CROSS-NATIONAL FIELDWORK**

What are the implications of these fieldwork experiences for theorizing how cultural differences and other social structural factors emanating from nationality affect data quality? First, it is clear that native participants may have assumptions – i.e., a set of beliefs – about what foreign and native fieldworkers already believe. These beliefs are based in part on national origin and also on symbolic status, as indicated by such things as education and race. At a minimum, native participants assume foreign researchers will have at least somewhat different beliefs from their own. Second, participants’ assumptions about fieldworkers’ culture affect what is communicated between them. In Lindegaard’s research, the White participants were willing to openly discuss their racism against Blacks. Lindegaard is White and so the White participants assumed she could understand their anti-Black beliefs. Yet the White participants also criticized their own racism. The White interviewees were aware that Lindegaard, as a Dane/European, “do[es] not think badly about Black people.” This shaped the data obtained by affecting the participants’ explanations of their beliefs and violent actions.

Lindegaard’s experience suggests the following proposition: *As a participant and fieldworker become further in cultural distance, what is communicated by the participant may (1) increasingly reflect assumptions about the researcher’s culture and (2) decreasingly reflect the participant’s own culture.* In other words, as researchers and participants become less alike culturally, then participants more often express ideas similar to those of researchers and less

often say what they really believe.<sup>9</sup> Different nationality is typically a strong indicator of cultural distance. The theory predicts, for instance, that a White South African will more often divert from communicating their true beliefs when speaking with a White European as compared to another White South African.

In Van Gelder's study, low-status (squatters) and high-status (officials) persons were willing to provide information. By gaining more knowledge through extensive observations and interaction in the *barrios* and the broader community – which is an aspect of symbolic status – higher quality data was obtained. The participants' beliefs about the project's value, however, was affected by Van Gelder's foreign status and assumptions about his culture. This was reflected in the data through participants' strong appeal to their righteousness. The low-status participants sought to explain that they were not like “real criminals” and were instead taking legitimate actions. Differently, some high-status participants justified their sometimes punitive actions by suggesting that the squatters are, in fact, real criminals and deserving a just desert. All of these justifications are centered on presenting a righteous image.

In short, the propositions outlined above suggest a *preliminary* theory of how the social structure – especially the culture – of fieldworkers and participants influences the quality of data obtained in criminological fieldwork. The larger the cultural distance between researcher and participant: 1) the higher the chance that information provided by participants reflects what they expect the researcher believes; (2) the lower the chance the information reflects what the

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<sup>9</sup> Note that these propositions assume the participants' have social information about researchers' culture, whether valid or not (see Black 1989).

participant thinks is true; and, 3) the higher the chance that participants claim to behave righteously.<sup>10</sup>

What are the practical implications of our theory for improving cross-national criminological fieldwork? It suggests at least two pieces of practical advice for criminologists who want to do fieldwork abroad: Data quality will increase as the researcher increases her or his knowledge of what participants think prior to speaking with them; this is true because such knowledge may be shared with participants to reduce alteration of what they say due to assumptions that the researcher lacks such knowledge of what they think.<sup>11</sup> Also, data quality will increase to the degree researchers minimize or neutralize participants' assumptions about their culture; this is true because participants will be less likely to change what they say due to assumptions about what that researcher believes.<sup>12</sup> In short, then, an ideal fieldwork situation is one where researchers are able to demonstrate to participants knowledge of their lives and interests, and yet also neutralize participants' assumptions regarding what they believe researchers think about their lives – including its validity, attractiveness, and morality.

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<sup>10</sup> Also note the experiences outlined above suggest that getting access to sensitive populations can at times be easier because of a foreign status.

<sup>11</sup> For example, to gain access to White youngsters' perceptions and practices of violence, Lindegaard would participate in sport activities at school, and go to shopping malls and night clubs in the area in order to gain knowledge about the daily lives of these youngsters. This knowledge – for instance about who won the last rugby match at school or which band played in a certain night club last weekend – was a way to demonstrate an understanding of people's ways and interests, and thereby a way to gain access.

<sup>12</sup> For example, when van Gelder would initially meet potential participants, he would intentionally aim to give little away regarding the exact focus of his study. Rather, the standard reply or introduction was that he was writing a book about the 'informal city' in Buenos Aires. Participation meant for many that they were able to tell their stories to an outsider and get a chance to mention how they saw things, as the quote by the resident mentioned earlier. This was enhanced, we believe, by reducing their minimizing their assumptions regarding what the study's specific focus happened to be.

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