

anonymity were promised in encouraging respondents to reconstruct their past burglaries as accurately as possible. Such insider accounts are very useful in acquainting researchers with the perspectives of the subjects (Cromwell, 1996). Exhibit 7.1 describes gaining access in a study of skinheads.

In 2008, the Pew Center on the States reported that more than one in hundred American adults was incarcerated, the largest per capita rate in the world. This fact makes research on what is taking place in such settings even more imperative. Scholars who undertake ethnographic research in prisons complain of growing hurdles to doing such investigations. These include

EXHIBIT 7.1 ▶

American Skinheads: The Criminology and Control of Hate Crime

Entering the world of violence, hate, and racial paranoia of skinhead subculture, "idiots with ideology," contains more than the usual challenge to field researchers. Similar to other field investigators (Thompson, 1967; Yablonsky, 1962), Mark Hamm's attempts were on one occasion greeted with violence. He was attacked by members of the American Front at the corner of Haight and Ashbury in San Francisco. Kicked in the shins with a pair of steel-toed Doc Martens was his punishment for having been seen conversing with an Indonesian prostitute.

Hamm (1993, pp. 100–101) describes his method:

I began to systematically collect data on the American skinheads in the fall of 1989. Drawing from the native field study approach, I started the investigation by visiting various U.S. cities where I tracked down skinheads in their natural habitat (street corners, bars, coffee shops, record stores, survivalist outlets, rock concerts, and motorcycle shops). These subjects were not hard to identify. They had shaved heads and wore white power and/or Nazi regalia. Two skinheads, for example, were tattooed in the middle of their foreheads with the mark of the swastika. To gain a broader context for the research, I used the same methods to interview skinheads on the streets of Montreal, Vancouver, London, Amsterdam and Berlin.

He simply approached these youths and asked if they would consent to an interview in a research project that was attempting to "set the record straight on skinheads." No electronic devices were used. Hamm offered ten dollars for a completed interview. Another technique

involved getting membership lists from the underground teen press and Tom Metzger's publication *WAR (White Aryan Resistance)*.

After sending letters to twenty-six skinhead leaders promising twenty-five dollars for a collect call telephone interview, Hamm obtained nine interviews plus an unexpected dividend. Three additional unsolicited leaders heard about the research, called, and were interviewed. Nonrespondents were sent five copies of a questionnaire and asked to fill one out and pass the others to four other members, and they would be paid ten dollars. This produced eight additional usable questionnaires. Using the Internet, Hamm next logged onto the *WAR* board. He identified himself as a sociologist with no axe to grind and offered ten dollars to any skinhead who came online and conversed. This yielded two responses. Finally, Hamm used the prison field methods approach and, with the cooperation of authorities, was able to interview incarcerated skinheads in four states. Hamm (1993, pp. 102–103) concludes:

In summary, then, I conducted thirty-six original skinhead interviews using native field methods, clandestine community agency techniques, and prison field study strategies. I controlled for paranoia by primarily focusing on subcultural leaders—or core members who are likely to display the highest rates and severity of hate crime violence—and by presenting myself as a sociologist operating independent of law enforcement and community service agencies. The early Haight street assault notwithstanding, I experienced no life-threatening violence.

Source: Hamm, Mark S. *American Skinheads: The Criminology and Control of Hate Crime*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993.