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Fieldwork: Bounty Hunters

Static. The underlying silence is unnerving. “You got him?” A few unintelligible words and then some more static. What is only a few seconds, seems like an eternity to outsiders, before the roar of static once again fills the air with a “we got him!” A sudden adrenaline rush of excitement, completion and satisfaction of getting the job done is an everyday occurrence of a bounty hunter.

The subculture that this ethnographic fieldwork focused on was Bounty Hunters. Bounty Hunting is simply the art of finding and bringing bail-secured fugitives to justice. Bounty Hunters are also known as Bail Enforcement Agents or Fugitive Recovery Agents. (wikipedia.com) Their main duty is to capture bail jumpers. In 1872, U.S. Supreme Court Case (Taylor vs. Taintor), it established that the person into whose custody a defendant accused of a crime is remanded to as part of the defendant’s bail has sweeping rights to recover that person. (wikipedia.com) When a person commits a crime, he/she will have a bail set. If he/she cannot afford the bail amount, then he/she will typically go to a bail bondsman. A bail bondsman is someone who will act responsible for the debt of a person who has been accused of committing a crime. If the accused can pay a nonrefundable charge of ten percent of the whole bail amount, the bondsman contacts an insurance company which will guarantee the court to be paid the whole bail amount; pending the accused shows up for his/her court date. If the accused does not

show up to court, then the bondsman is solely responsible for getting the accused person into the courts custody. This is where the Bounty Hunter comes in the picture. The bounty hunter is contacted in order for the bondsman to receive his/her money back for the bail he posted for the accused.

A Bounty Hunter is someone who is contacted by a bondsman to capture the bail jumper. A Bounty Hunter is paid ten percent of the fugitive's bail amount. Their expenses are also covered, for example, if the fugitive is outside of the state, then the bounty hunter will not be charged. Some interesting facts that were learned about this subculture are that 90% of all bail jumpers nationwide are captured by bounty hunters. In addition to this, bounty hunters catch up to 30,000 fugitives nationwide. Bounty hunters are perceived as the "outlaw" type of security enforcer. (people.howstuffworks.com/bounty-hunters7htm). Unlike a cop, a bounty hunter needs no formal training and no state requires a bounty hunter to have any form of education. He however, must possess certain skills to be a successful bounty hunter. According to James, one of the informants that contributed to the field work, a bounty hunter must be "street smart because he/she needs to know the right people and places in order to capture the fugitive. It is important to have people skills because bounty hunting includes the help of the community, in order to gain information about the fugitive." The Bounty hunter strives to use the least amount of violence by using communication skills in order to apprehend the fugitives. Bounty Hunters must also know how to defend themselves. Combat training is not required, but is certainly recommended, because the physical ness is a big part of the job. Apprehending and controlling techniques are also good to know, because of the fugitive's unexpected behavior.

(wikipedia.com)

However, in certain states a bounty hunter is required to undergo some background

checks, like in the state of California and in the state of Texas, a Bounty Hunter is not allowed to carry firearms. (wikipedia.com) In Hawaii, there is a law pending whether or not a bounty hunter must exceed the age of twenty one and not be allowed to hold a criminal record. A bounty hunter does not need a warrant to enter the house of the fugitive unlike a cop. James said that he believes bounty hunters are more effective than the police because they have the element of surprise on their side. All the bounty hunter needs is a copy of the warrant or the certified copy of the bond.

The research was conducted on the island of Oahu on the 17th of March 2006. Two informants were used in this research on bounty hunters. They will be acknowledged as “James” and “Bond”. The main data source thus far in the field work, is through informal phone interviews. In addition to interviews, due to the difference in schedules, exchanges of e-mails have been very effective. However, participant observation was not conducted due to the type of unexpected environment the bounty hunters cover.

As mentioned, James is a bounty hunter who owns a local bail bond company, and also owns three additional bonding companies on the mainland. James has been a bounty hunter for five years while Bond has been a bounty hunter for two years. James, like Duane “Dog” Chapman or formerly known as “Dog the Bounty Hunter,” is a former criminal turned good. James served prison time on the mainland, for distributing illegal substances and then changed his act, turning to bonding companies as the answer.

James describes Bounty Hunting as “tough” and a “challenging career loaded with successes and failures. It brings an indescribable adrenaline rush that is unique to the bounty hunter’s occupation.” Bounty Hunters protect the public from suspected criminals who may be a danger to communities. According to both James and Bond, the public benefits through bounty

hunting, because the services are done free of cost to the public.

Bounty Hunters are always on the job. This is because; say for instance, Bond works on Oahu, to capture fugitives on the island. If he takes a vacation to California and sees one of the fugitives he is searching for, then he will proceed to put him into custody. For example, Bond was on the Big Island for family business, when he captured a fugitive that he had been searching for the past two weeks.

Many Americans think that Bounty Hunters all have guns, but unlike cops, Bounty Hunters are still civilians, and must abide by the state laws and regulations on gun ownership. (wikipedia.com) A bounty hunter and a bondsman have a contract to abide by which allows the bounty hunter to perform his duties. There are also Bondsmen who serve as their own bail enforcers.

A common characteristic found in both informants is the great appreciation for what they do for a living. They believe that the most important thing in Bounty Hunting is experience. Bond says, "It is like driving a car, no driving book can replace experience." According to both of the informants, their experiences are indescribable. They believe that bounty hunters are important because they help put away criminals in prison. Danger, fear, excitement, violence, exhilaration, uncertainty, and justice; just another day in the life of Bounty Hunter.