

Jenn Tostlebe: welcome back everyone. We are your host, Jenn Tostlebe.

Jose Sanchez: And I'm Jose Sanchez.

Jenn Tostlebe: And this is Episode 79 of the Criminology Academy Podcast where we are criminally academic.

Jose Sanchez: In this episode we have Professor Volkan Topalli, join us to discuss active offender research. Specifically, we will discuss an overview of active offender research. The St. Louis School approach challenges associated with active offender research, and how this area of research can expand to more than just primarily qualitative methodologies.

Jenn Tostlebe: Volkan Topalli is a professor of criminal justice and criminology at Georgia State University and co-editor of Criminology. He received his Phd in experimental social psychology from Toline University in 1998. His scholarly research addresses violence and urban settings with a particular focus on the decision making of street criminals pursue these interests. He employs a multi method approach with active, non-institutionalized hardcore street offenders, such as robbers, car trackers, and drug dealers. He has conducted roughly 400 interviews with such individuals in New Orleans, St. Louis, and Atlanta. Over the past 20 years. His current research is on the decision making of offenders in cyber contacts in the future of crime and accelerating technology. He is the author of Peer, reviewed research and outlets, such as criminology, justice Quarterly, the British Journal, Criminology, the Journal of Quantitative Criminology and Criminal Justice and Behavior.

Jose Sanchez: Much of what we will be discussing today comes from one of Volkan's publications. "Learning from Criminals: Active Offender Research for Criminology", co-authored with Timothy Dickinson and Scott Jacques, published in the Annual Review of Criminology in 2020. With that being said, let's bring Volkan in!

Jose Sanchez: Hi Volkan. Thank you for joining us today. We're excited to dig into your research topics.

Volkan TOPALLI: I'm excited to have you guys day in.

Jose Sanchez: All right. So let's just get down to business. much of your research focuses on decision making among individuals who engage in street crime. And to do so you employ a pretty specific methodological approach called active offender research. And so we want to kick off the podcast with our first question.

Jose Sanchez: what actually is active offender research, you know, like, in a broad macro sense. Okay, so I'm actually my training is as a psychologist, not as a a traditional criminologist. And so most of the research I did before I got a postdoc in criminology was.

Volkan TOPALLI: you know, sort of 2 way mirror experiments with college students and laboratories that kind of thing. And I I I was very used to getting information directly from people through surveys, questionnaires and experiments. And when I started working with Richard Wright, who at the time was at the University of Missouri, St. Louis.

Volkan TOPALLI: He was doing this this interview based work active offender research work, and it sort of was a good mix, right? Because we were both used to the idea of talking to people. I was not used to the idea of talking to people who offend but he had been doing this in the UK. Actually, for years before he came to Saint Louis. So a lot of people don't know that, you know, when he was getting his Phd. In criminology at the University of Cambridge.

Volkan TOPALLI: he worked with Trevor Bennett and some other folks who were really interested in drug use and drug abuse, and nobody had spent any time

Volkan TOPALLI: actually talking to people who were using drugs. so they were creating all this policy there, all these sort of assumptions about those individuals. But nobody was actually talking to them. So so some of the first work that Richard did was talking to those

Volkan TOPALLI: individuals who were in the process of using drugs. So this is not people who had had drugs is not people who had been through therapy. Yet these are people who were literally on the skid row kind of streets of London and and places like that, and talking to them about their experiences, and why they did what they did.

Volkan TOPALLI: And then, when he came to Missouri. He was sort of talking about that research a lot, and was introduced to One of his students who had been paralyzed, actually, during a drug dealing incident and said, Hey, you know, if you really want to understand how people think how we think you know all these theories and everything that you're thrown up in class. They don't mean anything. As a matter of fact.

Volkan TOPALLI: I think Richard told me that he was in class.

Volkan TOPALLI: and he'd been lecturing, for, like it was like the first or second year. He was a professor as an assistant professor there, and he'd been lecturing about offender decision making. And all this. And there was this one guy in the back in the wheelchair, with his arms crossed, just with the sour look on his face. And you know, after I bought 3 or 4 days, that's very distracting for someone who lectures, as you both know, like to see somebody's

Volkan TOPALLI: getting to a star face, crossing their arms, not writing notes. So finally he said, Hey, Like. What's the deal here? Are you like? Am I saying something you don't like. Are you bored any? And the and the guy said, You know, Doc, you don't know shit.

Volkan TOPALLI: And he said, You know. And Richard being Richard, you know, said, said, well, tell me more, you know, instead of being insulted. And he said, You know you, you're getting all this stuff out of books and everything. But you really need to talk to people. And Richard said, Well, I've talked to people who are in prison have done these. No, no, no, you can't talk to people in prison, you I talk to real people doing the real thing right now in the real streets. And so they started bringing individuals in. And

Volkan TOPALLI: Richard realized, well, if you could use this

Volkan TOPALLI: as a method to extract information from people who are dealing who are doing drugs, you could certainly use it for people who are dealing drugs for people who are engaged in burglar to get money to use drugs for people who are engaged in robbery because they need money to use drugs, or for people who are robbing each other for drugs. That kind of thing. So it eventually kind of grew out of that And the idea! The big idea was that when you're getting information from individuals who are in

Volkan TOPALLI: prison who are incarcerated.

Volkan TOPALLI: what they're giving you is a perspective of someone who has been caught, not someone who is actively involved in the offense itself. And.

Volkan TOPALLI: as we all know

Volkan TOPALLI: you know you, you think about things, and you communicate about things very differently in different spaces and context and and places. Right? So if you know, the 3 of us are here on zoom talking about academic life. We got our a little academic hats on, and we're we're thinking about universities and students and all that. But if if we're at Thanksgiving dinner and we're talking with our uncle or Aunt

Volkan TOPALLI: or if we're at a reunion with our friends who aren't academics, we would talk about it very, very differently.

Volkan TOPALLI: So the the underlying assumption is that what you glean from the interviews that you do with people who are actively offending is a more, is a richer, more authentic kind of experience. You're getting as close to the offense

Volkan TOPALLI: and the offending moments as you can without sort of breaking any kind of any, any rules. Basically. So we're really interested in the foreground of crime. You know, the decision making processes take place just before someone commits the offense. and less interested in sort of the the background factors, that sort of set the stage for crime. And so, if active offender, interviewing and decision making research is really kind of about that.

Volkan TOPALLI: I don't know if that's a good answer or not. But I think I think that that

Volkan TOPALLI: yeah.

Jenn Tostlebe: yeah, you actually answered a couple of the questions that we had. So that's great. And I actually didn't realize that you had a background in psychology. And I feel like that maps on kind of perfectly within this criminological space, you know, after offender research. So I'm sure that's really helpful to you

Jenn Tostlebe: and doing it.

Volkan TOPALLI: Yeah, it was helpful. And it was a little fortuitous, because the way I got into criminology was.

Volkan TOPALLI: I finished up a Phd in social cognition and social psychology. I was studying with an aggression researcher and doing all these lab studies where you know, we bring call students in. And then we'd you know, we break them up into groups like one group. We would accuse them of being late to the experiment when they weren't, and then try and and provoke them, and then we put them in a room and make them write stories and see how angry they were. And and I just thought.

Volkan TOPALLI: that's kind of interesting to study the cognition, cognitive characteristics of decision making. But it wasn't really like real aggression and violence, like college students getting mad at you because you accuse them of being late to an experiment and then writing a story like I was like, that's not violence. And so I apply for a postdoc with the national consortium on violence research. And then their whole gig was, that was through the National Science Foundation. Their whole gig was.

Volkan TOPALLI: we want to match people up with people who do things that are very different. So I was like this experimental, quantitative Guy, and they? They said, well, we got to put them in with somebody who's qualitative. And so They mashed me up with Richard. I thought it was going to be a disaster, because at the time I was like talking to people like this is not science. Give me a break, but it ended up being great, and my research in grad school was on retaliation, and that was a big theme of Richard's work at the time. So it all worked out really well.

Jenn Tostlebe: sometimes you just never know.

Volkan TOPALLI: Yeah, serendipity is to me the most important thing in Academia. You have to be open to all the opportunities that come to you. You can't plan. You can't say. Well, you know, I'm starting my program now. I'm going to finish in 5 years that I'm going to get a job doing this, then, 10 years from now. Yeah, like, you just have to let the opportunities come to you and be open. I'd never would have guessed that I would be doing what I'm doing right now. And it was because I was randomly assigned to work with Richard Wright

Volkan TOPALLI: 2425 years ago. So

Jose Sanchez: and if that advice on that, all familiar to any of our listeners, it's basically the advice that we get from all of our reflection episodes, like everyone that's that's a a seasoned veteran in the game.

Jose Sanchez: you know. It's all about right place, right time, and not not being so hyper focused on anything that you miss the opportunities when they come knocking.

Volkan TOPALLI: Yeah, for sure that for sure.

Jose Sanchez: So

Jose Sanchez: okay, so we want to start getting a little more more specific about the active offender research methodologies and employing them. And so and and again, this is recruiting and speaking directly to individuals who are actively engaged in offending, and so can we dive more into

Jose Sanchez: so like the goals of this this method. And so what do we know from our, you know, what does the research tell us? I'm employing this method that we wouldn't have known using offender based research studies.

Volkan TOPALLI: you know the the kind of the predominant model in criminology has been for a long time kind of a sociological, large scale kind of, you know, 30,000 to 10,000 feet above this, above the sky. Kind of way of looking at things.

Volkan TOPALLI: And so I think sociologists and economists to some extent, and maybe public health people have done a really great job of identifying all of the risk factors, opportunity factors. that are associated with putting people on a path, or making them at greater risk for engaging in in offending.

Volkan TOPALLI: But the closer you get to the individual level, and the closer you get to the offending moment. The more and more difficult it is for you to draw a straight line between

Volkan TOPALLI: these kind of big kind of what we usually refer to as root cause kind of antecedent kinds of causes. and what that individual is deciding to do right then and right there. And Jack Katz, you know, was kind of one of the first people to talk about this when you know, he said. Look, we have to think about not just the background of these things. But the foreground of these things, so the background tells us

Volkan TOPALLI: all the conditions that sort of set somebody up for engaging in a particular type of behavior. But you can't use that information to predict when that individual is going to engage in that behavior. And at that time you need a different kind of approach to do that, and the example I always like to give is.

Volkan TOPALLI: you know, somebody walks past a jewelry store, you know, 10 days in a row, right, and on the eleventh day they take a break, and they throw it through the window, and they snatch the jewelry, and they run off. Well, why didn't they do it on day 10,

Volkan TOPALLI: you know. Why didn't they do it on day 12? Why didn't they do it on day 7. What was it it happened on day 11 at that very moment that made them suddenly decide that they were. Gonna do what they were going to do. And when you look at it from that perspective, what you realize is that there's a lot of stuff that goes on during the foreground of primarily those moments that take place before someone makes that decision

Volkan TOPALLI: that we don't do a very good job of

Volkan TOPALLI: of measuring, and and so getting as close to the offending moment as we possibly can, can give us some insight into the kinds of things that influence the in the offending moment at that time. So if you talk to a number of people and say, Hey, how come you did it on day 11, and not day 10? Or how come you when you were walking down the street? You, you know. Why did you pick that guy to rob and not somebody else down the street, or Why did you? you know.

Volkan TOPALLI: what was it about that car that you like so much? You said I'm gonna Carjack this right now, for example. And we also ask a lot of kind of you know. Why didn't you questions? So have you ever seen a card that you really wanted? And you didn't go look for it. Have you ever you know? Why, why didn't you decide that that was a a good target, for example? And so you learn a lot about offending by asking people about the times that they don't offend.

Volkan TOPALLI: So I'll give you an example. We were talking to some guys. We're kind of part of a carjacking crew and

Volkan TOPALLI: There were 2 or 3 of them. This is Atlanta. They were hanging out on the front porch. They woke up that morning, and so they they asked them a lot of questions about like, well, you know, what? What what did you do the night before. What time did you wake up? You know what what kinds of things were you doing when you hung out?

Volkan TOPALLI: And you know they're talking about. Yeah. You know, we had some weed, and we had a little bit of money, and you know we had a good time the night before was just kind of relaxing. And then this little Honda civic drives by

Volkan TOPALLI: the house that we were hanging out at, one of my friends said, Hey, let's go get that car.

Jose Sanchez: And the other 2 guys are like, no man. That that car is not shit. That's nothing. You don't. You want to get that car? Forget. We're not going to waste our time with that car.

Volkan TOPALLI: But then what happened was, they described the rest of their day, which was, they were hanging out. They kind of kept smoking. Then they ran out. Then they went and spent some more

money to smoke some more. Then they ran out of that. Then they were running out of money, and suddenly it was like

Volkan TOPALLI: the day was going on, and they were running out of the things that they had that sort of kept them in a more kind of same place, so to speak, and they start bickering and fighting with each other in the afternoon. They were like I told you we should have got that car, you know. I told you, was it? You know this is your fault and all this kind of stuff. Well, it just so happens like within an hour of them, really getting into these arguments. The same exact car

Volkan TOPALLI: is driving now back down the street the other direction, because somebody had been going to work in the morning. Now they're coming back home. They see the same car they went. They got it.

Volkan TOPALLI: so that car was not

Volkan TOPALLI: important to them, or important enough to them in the morning. But something about the car and something about their circumstances change throughout the day to suddenly make it a valuable target. So you can't look at these things in a static way. You can't say, well, that's a Honda civic, and it's a 19, you know, 98, and it's, you know, blah blah blah. And so every day that anybody looks at this, this is the chance it's going to get taken. It's like, no, it depends on who the individuals are, what time of day it is. But the circumstances are

Volkan TOPALLI: so what you're trying to do is you're trying to get to that foreground as close as you can. And when you talk to people

Volkan TOPALLI: who are incarcerated when you talk to people who are under supervision. Their mindset is that of a person who has been caught. Their mindset is that of a person who is.

Volkan TOPALLI: you know, regretting their decision right? And so now, if you start talking to them about this, and asking them what they were going through, what they were thinking why, what their motivations were. They're going to interpret their past behavior through the lens that they currently

Volkan TOPALLI: are seeing the world through. And you're gonna get a very different story from them. In the same way that you and I will tell different stories about academia

Volkan TOPALLI: on this podcast versus the kinds of stories that you might tell over the Thanksgiving table right? Or if you just got tenure, are you guys, can you get

Volkan TOPALLI: when you when you just get tenure? It's like the greatest thing in the world, but leading up to it. It's like all this nervousness. So if you ask somebody about the tenure process before you get tenure, you're gonna have a very different way of talking about it after you've gotten tenure, right? So you're when you're incarcerated when you're under supervision.

Volkan TOPALLI: You know. You look and see the world very, very differently. You know you're in a prison setting. You're wearing an orange jumpsuit. There's brick walls around your corrections, officers, you're living in a situation where your day to day life is completely controlled by other people. You're told when to wake up. You're told when to exercise, when to read, when to watch TV, when to go to bed. You know all these kinds of things. Well, that's a very different life

Volkan TOPALLI: from when you're out on the streets and just kind of live in large and doing what you want right. And you're gonna interpret those things very, very differently. As a result. they did a study. This was years and years ago.

Volkan TOPALLI: This was in the Uk. Where they asked people

Volkan TOPALLI: think back to the offense that landed you in prison today. And was it worth it

Volkan TOPALLI: right? And so

Volkan TOPALLI: 35 of them said it was worth it, which I think is crazy because you're in prison right? But supposedly so, 65% said, No, it wasn't worth it. Okay, fine. But and so at the time they committed the offense.

Volkan TOPALLI: 100% of them thought it was worth it because they did it

Volkan TOPALLI: so clearly. Their mindsets are different, so active, offender research. What it does is, it tries to get at the most authentic view that an individual has of their offending? They're not under any kind of control or supervision.

Volkan TOPALLI: They may have just committed an offense yesterday. you know, when you're talking to people who are incarcerated. It could be weeks, months, maybe even years. I mean, if I go to a prison now and say, give me all the guys have committed carjacking.

Volkan TOPALLI: You know you get arrested. You go to jail, you go to court sentence, you go to prison. It could be a year since you've done something so just just having the memory of of having committed the offense from yesterday or last week improves the quality of the data. But again, it's it's about that sort of where am I in my life right now? You know if I'm walking around a lot of money in my pocket, and I've gotten away with 7 or 8 different offenses. I'm feeling pretty good about being an offender. But if I'm

Volkan TOPALLI: in the orange jumpsuit, I'm like, damn it, why, I do this. So you get very different perspectives. As a result.

Jenn Tostlebe: Yeah.

Jenn Tostlebe: yeah, that's really interesting. I was thinking. I'm glad you brought up the memory component because that tied when you were telling the story about the people in Atlanta that I was like when they remember that 5 years later that in the morning they were like No, and then later, that's when they did it, or would they just remember that it happened? You know

Volkan TOPALLI: it's an excellent. It's an excellent point, and part of the strategy that we use when we do. The interviews is with the. I asked 2 questions. Always there, there, there's always these 2 major kind of orienting questions. The once we get through all the demographics and all that kind of stuff.

Volkan TOPALLI: the one the question I ask is, tell me about the most memorable blank that you've ever engaged in carjacking Barkley Rock, or whatever it is.

Volkan TOPALLI: And then the other question I always ask is, Tell me about the most recent one, and and it's for the reasons that you're referencing, which is, it has a lot of memory. So things that are memorable are going to be remembered better, and things that are recent are going to be remembered better. This is all the work by Elizabeth Loftus, for example, who's a big memory researcher? And so you know, you would think I think most people think oh, well, you know, if I committed a carjacking I'd remember every detail of it. It's like, well, you would.

Volkan TOPALLI: But have you done 200 carjackings with 300 car jackets whenever you do anything a lot, you know all the details just kind of run into each other. And so you need to, during these interviews, actually use very specific kinds of questions to make sure that you're getting at the most credible information you can. And it's a huge advantage of active offending research is that we don't have to wait 8 months or 9 months or a year before we? We talk about an event that took place previously.

Jenn Tostlebe: All right. So in your paper, learning from criminals active offender research for criminology, you kind of go through this overview of active offender research. Starting with the earlier works like William Fo. White Street Corner Society, and Howard Beckers, outsiders, you also discuss more contemporary research, like Anderson's code of the street, which I'm guessing pretty much. Everyone that will listen to this podcast is reddit and academic area

Jenn Tostlebe: hopefully and Rios is punished policing the lives of black and latino voice.

Jenn Tostlebe: Yeah.

Jenn Tostlebe: without getting too much into the St. Louis School. We're going to get there in a second. Just how has contemporary active offender research departed or shifted from the earlier works in active under research?

Volkan TOPALLI: So not as much as you might think And I think a lot of the one thing that Richard's very fond of saying, and I am, too, is that there is really nothing new on the sun, and what we mean by that is,

there were people who pioneered this kind of work before we did. I mean, you can go back to all the technology folks in London and whatnot.

Volkan TOPALLI: you know, the the same basic processes are there identify a population of individuals

Jose Sanchez: who are like minded or engaging in a particular kind of behavior and engage with them on these things. Now.

Volkan TOPALLI: there are things that we know. There are ways in which we've improved qualitative interviewing and qualitative research since then.

Volkan TOPALLI: So the question is always well, if

Volkan TOPALLI: you know it would, would would the Jack Roller be written exactly the same way? You know today as it was back then.

Volkan TOPALLI: and you always have to take into account what the you know, what the kind of the surrounding historical cultural context is when you're thinking about these things. So you might read the book and say, Well, why is he asking that question or There were no computers back then. So you know, they're just these very, very kind, those kinds of things. But in terms of the actual process, you know, the biggest issue is usually sort of your

Volkan TOPALLI: positionality and standing and your ability to empathize with

Volkan TOPALLI: the individual that you're you're talking to and understanding what the differences are between you and them, and sort of guarding against that, I think, taking advantage of it, but also guarding against it overly influencing the the interview process. So so we've learned a lot about how to do better interviewing. We've learned a lot about how to structure interviews and interview protocols.

Volkan TOPALLI: coding of interviews. but I think that the the basic process is is still pretty solid, and the motivation is still really solid. I think you know, if you went back and you asked these individuals, why did you decide to talk to these people rather than go into prison? They they would have said the same kinds of things that we're saying today, which is that you get a much more authentic experience out of it. So I don't think much about

Volkan TOPALLI: the the actual interviews has changed the content and the motivation for doing this change. I would say that the techniques have improved. You know, we we've learned about different kinds of of techniques as we move forward. and there are certain ways of coding now that we we we use that we didn't use back then, but for the most part actually hasn't changed as much as you might think. So. Those old, old texts and books are fantastic, and they're great, and should still read them for for sure, for sure.

Jose Sanchez: okay, so you know, Jen, just mentioned the St Louis so

Jose Sanchez: that's that's getting to st louis, a little bit so one of the things you know is that

Jose Sanchez: active of under research was loosely formalized through the research being done at the University of Missouri, Saint Louis, or Hamza for short. In the early 19 nineties, however.

Jose Sanchez: someone that you mentioned earlier kind of started doing it in the Uk first, Richard, right

Jose Sanchez: And so he had a few projects where he sort of used this method and know you mentioned

Jose Sanchez: done with with the drug users. but can you tell us more about some of the other projects that he had going on where he employed

Volkan TOPALLI: active offender? research methods? Sure. Sure. And actually, it's another great example of serendipity right? because he happened to be at the right university at the right time, with the right connections to make some of this work happen in a way that you might not have if he went to say Irvine or Maryland, or something like that.

Volkan TOPALLI: So when Richard got to St. Louis, you know. He's kind of a young kind of hot up and coming. assistant professor. He'd been doing this work. He' he had 2 streams of research in the Uk. One was on sexual assault, and that was a lot of that was kind of archival data. He went to every police department in the United Kingdom, believe it or not, and collected all of their arrest records related to sexual assault, and

Volkan TOPALLI: analyzed all that. Then he started doing the research where he was interviewing drug users. When he brought that to St. Louis, he met Dietrich, who was the student in this class. That sort of, you know, kind of challenged him on the veracity and the and the usefulness of the research that he was discussing in class. He is kind of teaching out of a textbook and saying, Hey, here's what these people think. And here's what these people think. But you know, teacher said, well, we want to know what you think, and we don't want to know what you think unless you're talking to the right people.

Volkan TOPALLI: And so he said, well, I did this with with drug users, and I know that drug users

Volkan TOPALLI: sometimes get desperate and end up engaging in burglary. So maybe this is an opportunity for us to talk to burglar. So he had been talking to drug users in St. Louis, kind of replicating what he had already done in London. but that drew in some individuals, because he would always ask the question, well, where do you get your money? You know you don't have a job where you're getting your money for your drugs by break into houses. So that turned into a project on on verbal.

Volkan TOPALLI: And then he started asking the burglars. You know it's burglar, the only thing you do. Well, no man. Sometimes I do a robbery here. Oh, okay. Well, why? Well, sometimes I can't get a new

house, or sometimes the houses don't have enough money, or I got tired of going to houses, because I don't know if there's any one in the house. If there's an alarm, but with a robbery, you know you're in control. You have the gun. You can tell the person you know what time it is, let me get the money.

Volkan TOPALLI: So then, that turned into a a research project on on robbery. Now.

Volkan TOPALLI: around the time that he started studying robbery, he began working more closely with Scott Decker, And so Scott and he wrote, you know, 2 seminal kind of books that use the active offender approach burglars on burglar and and arm robbers in action.

Volkan TOPALLI: and also around this time they hired Bruce Jacobs, and Bruce was at Umsel for I think, about 10 years, and and, you know, came from California and had just just dove into the research to be, you know, to be really honest. And he was just. He was, like all, all, all for it, and as a matter of fact, he took a kind of an odd approach. Richard said to him, Oh, well, you know we we have a recruiter, and this is how it works. And and Bruce said, What do we do if we don't have? The recruiter said, well, I guess we'd have to go out the street

Volkan TOPALLI: and do our own work. And then Bruce just went off like went into the worst neighborhood on a lark and just walked up to a bunch of guys and said, Can I talk to you about drug dealing? And he didn't get killed. And you know, he ended up writing some some pretty amazing research himself.

Volkan TOPALLI: And Jody Miller was there at the same time. And so Jody Miller, you know, up it up, and and girls and gangs and all this kind of work that's active offender research. Those are connections she made from working with Richard. And so so this this kind of really neat kind of expansion of the work started taking place. Bruce's research on retaliation has been really, really important. Obviously, Jodie's stuff

Volkan TOPALLI: on on gender and violence and gangs has been really important. And so and then I came along as a post off kind of near on the tail end of that And I was very interested in retaliation and sort of the psychological and emotional processes involved

Volkan TOPALLI: in violence and couldn't do it with experiments. So you know, he sort of taught me how to do that process. And I I did street work there for 2 years as a result. So so St. Louis School is really this kind of you know the it germinated with Richard's initial work with burglars. But then you can kind of see how it just sort of spread out

Volkan TOPALLI: through the power of serendipity, you know, to do doing work with Scott Decker and Jody Miller and and Bruce Jacobs and and me, and then also Scott Jakes later on with his work on middle class drug dealers, which people hadn't really studied very much before. Then. Tim Dickinson, who does a lot of stuff on how offenders think about money, and how they think about time. And so there are all these other in the Mike sherbinos and other guys studies car theft like, you can kind of see the

Volkan TOPALLI: the the tendrils of this research kind of reaching out and sort of being adopted. And now I have students

Volkan TOPALLI: that are doing work on graffiti writers. child, sex groomers, online romance scammers online. I'm doing a lot of online offender decision making work right now. we've we've got guys who do a dance fee fraud, scamming research. crystalline Caraballo, who's now a faculty member at Arizona State University. She and I have written a couple of papers about how street offenders target

Volkan TOPALLI: undocumented immigrants and why they're especially vulnerable. And so all this stuff kind of comes out of that. That tradition. Basically. Yeah.

Volkan TOPALLI: I don't know if that answers your question. But

Jenn Tostlebe: and all of these scholars and researchers kind of use what's called the St. Louis Approach, which you know in your paper that there's like 3 core elements to this? Can you just run through the 3 different elements and kind of what makes? I guess you've already done this. But what makes this approach unique compared to other approaches taken in active offender research.

Volkan TOPALLI: Are you referring to the the kind of the processual model that that kind of yeah. So the professional model is actually this really simple way of thinking about things? one thing about this is this is a methodology, but it's a methodology that strongly connected to the rational choice paradigm

Volkan TOPALLI: and so it's it's always good, I think, for if you're if you're just getting started in academia and you're doing social science research to sort of think about. Don't think of yourself as a methodology, person, or or just a theory person, but sort of think about which methodologies and theories kind of

Volkan TOPALLI: overlap nicely, and mix together well and rational choice, which I don't think of as a theory so much as a kind of a perspective is a good mesh with This this approach, and and what we do in the approach is we ask questions about the

Volkan TOPALLI: execution of the offense in a way that allows us to parse out the offense over time, and is readily explainable through rational choice paradigms right? And then you can layer other theories on top of that. So the processual model is. And it's also for the purposes of communicating this to people. Because you're trying to remember if you're producing research and no one's reading it, you know

Volkan TOPALLI: it. It's it's it's nothing but just sort of, you know, naval gazing. You've got it. You gotta put it in a in a format that other academics and students, most importantly you know, and the media and all that can can absorb. You can't be kind of opaque about these things. So the processual model is slowing the offense down, slowing the event down

Volkan TOPALLI: so that you can look at each of its components in succession. and the thing to remember is that an offense like carjacking.

Volkan TOPALLI: which is the fastest kind of offense that take place takes place in moments right? And so the think of this, the perceptual model, as a way of slowing the offense down so that you can look at it frame by frame by frame. And what's the procession of a of an offense? How do you get from not being motivated right to being

Volkan TOPALLI: putting it done to someone's head right? How do you go from one to the other? That's really important. because we're really, really interested

Volkan TOPALLI: in the same little school. We're very interested in understanding motivation for doing these things. but I kind of kind of this granular level. So you know you wake up in the morning. Did you wake up in the morning and think I'm going to go Carjack somebody today, or did you wake up in the morning without that thought? But then suddenly it kind of hit, not suddenly, but over time it came to you, or maybe suddenly it came to you.

Volkan TOPALLI: So I've had guys who've said things like woke up in the morning. I didn't know what I was gonna do, but as time went by during the day I started running out of money, and I started thinking about ways to get money, and then the idea popped into my head. Maybe I'll go do a car jacking.

Volkan TOPALLI: Other times I've had guys tell me I've been walking down the street. It started to rain. I was miserable. I saw a car, and I said, I'm gonna take the car.

Volkan TOPALLI: you know, totally on the humbug, so to speak. So the procession is that you have these stages. Okay? And you have a kind of a

Volkan TOPALLI: motivation stage that's like the first time the idea got into your head. I'm going to do this offense. Then there is planning

Volkan TOPALLI: which includes targeting.

Volkan TOPALLI: and then there's execution, and then there's the aftermath. And this is just.

Volkan TOPALLI: you know, a timeline of an offense. But when you take that model and you use it as the basis for doing the interviews, and then you use it as the basis for communicating the results. You get this very nice, smooth kind of

Volkan TOPALLI: well articulated structure for communicating science to people. And so if you look at Richard's books, and if you look at some of the papers that we've written, that's how we? We break things down. We say, Okay, let's talk to them about when the idea came in their head. Let's talk about planning this talking about the execution and the aftermath. Now, sometimes, although all those things happen

almost simultaneously, I was walking down the street. It started to rain like hell. I saw a car. And I took it. Okay, well.

Volkan TOPALLI: that's not much. Okay. If you if you write a paper based on that sentence, you know, it's not going to get into criminology. It's not going to get into Jq. What what I want to know is.

Volkan TOPALLI: you know, why did that happen at that moment? And so then what you do is you interview the individual

Volkan TOPALLI: and ask them to slow everything down you go back and said, Whoa! Whoa! Whoa! Whoa! Wait! Wait! Wait! Wait. You were walking down, and it was raining. Tell me how you felt.

Volkan TOPALLI: Why was the rain a problem? How far from me were you from home? How quickly did you make the decision?

Volkan TOPALLI: in some cases what they originally think of as a simultaneous experience, right like deciding to take the car and then putting the gun to the window.

Volkan TOPALLI: they they don't. They say I didn't plan it at all, but then, when you slow it down they go. Well, I did make sure that I walked up to the driver side window, and I did make sure I peaked in to make sure there wasn't more than one guy in the car, and I did take a quick look around and make sure there were no cop cars. So then you start realizing like, Oh, there was actually some stuff going on. It's just that human beings make decisions so quickly and everything flows so quickly that we forget that there are all these micro decision making points there. So

Volkan TOPALLI: you get them to slow it down and you get them to break it down to these little pieces. And then you sort of say, okay, this is the planning phase. This is the execution phase

Volkan TOPALLI: and then the aftermath is kind of this forgotten phase that people don't think about as much, but which they really should, because what happens after you commit the offense right?

Volkan TOPALLI: you know you've got the money, you know you. You did you party with it, did you? So I always say that you know the end of every offense is the beginning of the next one. Basically right? and and there are things that change about your thinking as you move forward in time when you talk to these guys and you and women. By the way.

Volkan TOPALLI: And you ask them to slow the offense down. You start realizing that some of them plan a lot more than others. Do. Some of them think about future consequences, and some of them don't. One of the things that we know is that the as you approach the offending moment, your consideration of things that happen after the offending moment goes down.

Volkan TOPALLI: So today we're talking. And I might be thinking about what I'm going to do next week or next month. But as I get closer and closer to robbing you, I'm thinking less and less about what happens after the robbery, and more and more about the robbery itself to the point where once that moment happens. I'm not thinking about the aftermath anymore. It's almost an inevitability. So it's like being sucked into a world pool kind of.

Volkan TOPALLI: and so breaking the offense down that way is great from an interview standpoint, right? Because you can create a whole interview protocol around those 4,

Volkan TOPALLI: you know phases or 3 free phases. If you're thinking about motivation and planning is the same face. and then you can break the the data down for coding later on, according to those phases and then code within those

Volkan TOPALLI: and then, when you're when you're writing about it, you put it into those phases right? And you're explaining it that way. And then what you do in the discussion section is, you speed everything back up again

Volkan TOPALLI: right? And you let the reader know that. Yes, we broke this offense down into these 3 or 4 distinct components, but they actually do all flow into each other. We just did this for explanatory purposes, so that you understand what's going on. And so I think that for the reader and you do want to tell a story right? And you know the best stories are the ones where people think they they see something, and then you kind of go back and say, No, let's take a look at it again.

Volkan TOPALLI: You know. Lots of crime capers and and magic trick kind of movies and things like that we'll we'll do that. They'll slow things down at least frame. And so it's kind of a cinematic way of looking at offending sort of a storyline from the beginning to the end of the offense. The offense itself is the story

Jose Sanchez: alright. Now we want to get into some of the challenges that come with them in this kind of research.

Jose Sanchez: I am.

Jose Sanchez: you know. I think if it all of the information you've given us, I'm sure some people have started to wonder. Well, this one's

Jose Sanchez: kind of hard like this doesn't necessarily sound like the easiest way

Jose Sanchez: to do research, and this is something that you yourself acknowledge. And so, though

Jose Sanchez: first question that we want to ask you regarding some of the challenges comes with something that you know, researchers have to deal with before they even get

Jose Sanchez: their studies off the ground which is getting approval from the Irb or the Institutional Review Board or Human Subjects Board. can you tell us some of the challenges that maybe you've run into, and sort of how you would advise us younger researchers on navigating some of those irb challenges.

Volkan TOPALLI: So lots of wine

Volkan TOPALLI: it. So this is interesting. It's interesting. I'll I'll say one thing

Volkan TOPALLI: that you know, the Irb is is the bane of many people's existence, and we all get that. So let's not turn this into a complaint fest

Volkan TOPALLI: about the irb, and acknowledged that they're there, and they have to be dealt with. and you can go the easy way or the hard way. Now.

Volkan TOPALLI: Sometimes the hard way is the right way to do it. I will I. There have been times when I've pushed back and and

Volkan TOPALLI: and you have to know when

Volkan TOPALLI: and it, and it is important to push back, because every time you complete an irb and get it approved, and conduct the research, you've now set a precedent for the kind of process that's going to follow.

Volkan TOPALLI: and that pro that precedent can either help you along the way, or it can start to really slow you down so.

Volkan TOPALLI: There are lots of things to take into account here, but

Volkan TOPALLI: that's the first thing I would say.

Volkan TOPALLI: I think that the there are lots of informal things that you need to do when you're working with the Irb things that will not be on the website and that people will not tell you to do so. Part of the secret sauce is

Volkan TOPALLI: contacting the Irb folks and talking to them about your proposal before you start filling it out.

Volkan TOPALLI: and just say, Hey, can I just take a few minutes here? I'm I'm new to this. I don't, you know. I think I've got some examples of how to do this properly, but I just want to make sure that I'm not wasting my time in your time. So you want to put them at ease.

Volkan TOPALLI: And it's kind of like interviewing, you know. people, too. You want to put them at these as well. And so you, you know. Give a description of what you're doing and say, look, is there anything that you need me to really focus on, or be careful about as I move forward with this and see if you can get some preemptive kind of

Volkan TOPALLI: You know golden nuggets of wisdom that Will could cut a week or 2 weeks or 3 weeks off of the process, and plenty of times. I've seen people just barrel head first in, and they they they write up stuff, and they use the wrong language. It's not even that. They, you know, they weren't trying to pull the wool over anyone's eyes, but just using a wrong word here or there suddenly can make everything grind to a hold.

Volkan TOPALLI: The nature of this and the other thing I'll say, is, it depends on your institution. So some institutions are very, very

Volkan TOPALLI: nervous about this kind of work. It tends not to garner a huge amount of grant dollars. So you get less leeway, you know, if you're the the Biomedical Institute research guy bringing in 10 million dollars a year the you know, the the Irb and some of these other grant pro grant offices. They're there at your back and call. They're there to help you.

Volkan TOPALLI: But if you're the guy or the woman who is doing research on a a, a population like this. And the Grants are only a few \$100,000 or something they might just say, wow! There's a lot of.

Volkan TOPALLI: you know, liability here. And

Volkan TOPALLI: we're gonna just really, really, you know, tighten down on this. And so just keep that in mind that that everyone's equal. But some people are more equal than others when it comes to dealing with university administrations. The the other thing is, when I say it depends on your institution. Some institutions have recently gone through

Volkan TOPALLI: a problem. For example, like, for example, Nsf. Might shut down their research because they've screwed up on reporting or something, so they may be extra over over oversensitive to some things, and that May. That's something that's out of your control. Nothing you can do about

Volkan TOPALLI: other institutions, the advantages that they've never seen research like this. And so they're really relying on you to tell them, hey, this is how this research goes. And oh, by the way, you know, lots of people do this work. You can. And then site to poly and site, you know right, and all these other people, and it kind of put their mind to these. So when I was at University of Missouri, St. Louis, Richard

Volkan TOPALLI: was that guy. You know, he was the first guy to do this kind of stuff. They'd never seen anything like it at the time. They weren't a big research university. So you know, they just sort of said,

Sure, okay, if you say so, sounds good. When I got to. And so I had a very easy experience during my post talking. I'm so when I got to Gsu it was like, Oh, no.

Volkan TOPALLI: no, no, no, no, no! This is what what are you talking to? Why are you talking to them? When are you talking to them? and so and I mean it. It got to the point where the I was going back and forth with the irb so much it was partly, I think, it was that they didn't understand the research, partly, I think they were worried about safety issues. And then there was also, and I think, legitimately, there were questions about, here's a white

Volkan TOPALLI: researcher conducting research on a population of color. And are these individuals going to be mischaracterized in the, in the research? Are they going to be at some in some sort of danger. My

Volkan TOPALLI: interviewees are not a protected population, as you know, like people are in prison. Some people think mistakenly. Think that's the case. They're not. but I treat them as though they are, because they're

Volkan TOPALLI: in danger, you know, if they're seen talking to the wrong guy, or if they, if someone over hears them saying the wrong thing, they could be in danger sometimes the irb is concerned about that. I've had the irb say things like, well, you're going to bring them on to campus. Are you going to be.

Volkan TOPALLI: you know, talking them on the streets? And I said, You know, mostly in the streets, but every once in a while would bring someone on the campus if they don't want

Volkan TOPALLI: people to see them talking to me in the street, and I've had 2 kinds of comments. One is, how are we going to guarantee the safety of people on campus? If you're bringing these guys here

Volkan TOPALLI: and the other one is, how are we going to guarantee their safety?

Volkan TOPALLI: So the first question is kind of a stereotype that. Well, they're crazy violent, you know, drug dealers. And so they're gonna just come to campus and shoot campus up. And it's ridiculous when they come onto campus. They're actually kind of intimidated because it's you know it's this kind of

Volkan TOPALLI: you know, educational institution. They're not used to their the surroundings. They really actually very cool when they're here.

Volkan TOPALLI: so that's just stereotype. I was dispensed that when you pretty quickly. The other question was kind of odd at first, and I thought, Well, maybe they got there a point there, which was, they show up on campus. What about the campus police? Aren't they going to stop them and search them and all that? My response is, it's an open public campus. They have every right to be here. They're my guest, and so if the police are pulling them over or stopping them. Then that's something to complain to the police about.

Volkan TOPALLI: So so these are this kind of these issues that would come up. And I actually at 1 point for a project

Volkan TOPALLI: I had submitted and resubmitted

Volkan TOPALLI: for review 6 times in a row the same protocol, and it just kept coming back with these questions.

Volkan TOPALLI: and I, as it was like I was about to lose a grant over it. So I finally said, I can't do this anymore. And I contact them? And I said, Can I just come to the meeting? Can I just

Volkan TOPALLI: sit there and just answer questions, and then I'll but I don't want to keep doing this back and forth very inefficient. and they said, Well, we don't usually do that kind of thing. But sure, and I spent 2 h answering

Volkan TOPALLI: questions, and some of them were great, and some of them were just ridiculous, like

Volkan TOPALLI: Can we convince you to wear a bulletproof vest when you go out and do the. And I was like, well, I don't think they're gonna really. That's not really a good way to build trust. you know just there were some of those. I think they just had to get some questions off their chest

Volkan TOPALLI: that you know, just because, you know, we're talking about people who are from the community, too. Right? So we're on. We had a a minister. We had a medical doctor. We had a lawyer, we had a nurse. We had a we had a housewife, you know, so we have people there that not only did they not understand criminology, they just didn't understand research in general, right? They're sort of there to sort of say, Hey, this is what the community thinks of this. So I think this is kind of having a good relationship and going back and forth.

Volkan TOPALLI: That is really important. It is a population of individuals where there's a lack of stability where there is violence where they do carry guns, where you're sometimes doing the research in areas that are would not be considered safe for people who don't come from those neighborhoods. 2 things I would remind people. One is.

Volkan TOPALLI: these are neighborhoods. They're not war zones, and that stereotyping of place is is really a problematic. I think so. When I go to these places I just see a neighborhood. Now. Is there more graffiti? Is there, you know, or is the infrastructure a little bit more worn down. Is there maybe some open air

Volkan TOPALLI: drug markets, and maybe some, you know some of these? Yes, there is some of that kind of stuff. But then the the stereotype people have is that you go there, and it's just gunfire everywhere, and everybody is a criminal. And it's not. These are communities.

Volkan TOPALLI: you know. The the other thing I would say is that

Volkan TOPALLI: you know I don't want to sort of exaggerate like the dangerousness of my job like, I'm not out to show people how cool it is that you know I can an anthropologists. They're the real heroes, those guys, those women.

Volkan TOPALLI: They are the ones that die on a regular basis. They go into the most dangerous places. They live in places for months, years, they catch diseases. they they disappear like.

Volkan TOPALLI: if you want to talk to somebody who's really in danger, talk to them. A criminologists who do this kind of work, maybe a little bit more at risk than someone who's sitting in their office just doing another meta analysis. But but overall, I say that the work is, it sounds more dangerous than it actually is, and I think demystifying it to some extent is really important, especially for the irb. The last thing you want to do is, make the irb think that

Volkan TOPALLI: you know that this is some kind of you know, movie where you're you're always in danger. I think that's a mistake.

Right?

Jenn Tostlebe: Okay? So in addition to Irv, there are also a number of challenges associated just with the active offenders themselves.

Jenn Tostlebe: such as recruitment issues the spontaneity, or maybe impulsiveness, of some of these people. And just you know what you mentioned the possibility of being in danger as the researcher.

Jenn Tostlebe: Can you elaborate on some of these, and then maybe tell us you know how to try and prevent some of these issues from happening.

Volkan TOPALLI: Okay, so I'll give you some general guidelines, and then one or 2 stories. the general guideline is to and I. And I think this is actually much more difficult than people think it is.

Volkan TOPALLI: But my, my, my best advice is that when you're interacting with these individuals as you would interact with absolutely anybody else in any other situation

Volkan TOPALLI: there. It's really critical to be sort of respectful.

Volkan TOPALLI: and also to some extent kind of separate from them. One of the mistakes I see people engage in. And I've I've worked with some people. This really comes out during the interviews

Volkan TOPALLI: is that they quit very quickly, get sucked into the idea of hey? You and I really get it. You know.

Jose Sanchez: we we know we're, you know, on my time, you know, this sort of like

Volkan TOPALLI: what I call a criminogenic tourism, which is you? You kind of say. Oh, you know, I know what it's like out of the streets, man, and all this kind of stuff. No, you do not know what it is like out on the streets. I I

Volkan TOPALLI: grew up poor, and I don't know what it's like to grow up on the streets that they're going go on. So the very first thing you have to do is disabuse yourself of the notion

Volkan TOPALLI: that you understand it at a core level. The way they do what you, what you're able to do is interpret

Volkan TOPALLI: by being respectful, by understanding who they are and where they're coming from.

Volkan TOPALLI: So that's one

Volkan TOPALLI: kind of pitfall that people have the other one is. It is hard for some people to interview these individuals and not feel

Volkan TOPALLI: judgmental or disgusted by their behavior. and then want to sort of challenge them about the things that they've done as a huge mistake, because the fastest way to shut one of these individuals down is to make them think that you're judging them in some way right, because you have to remember you're coming at them as a person who comes from that other world. Right? You've got a Phd. And you know you're educated, and all these kinds of things. They're on there, you know. They're kind of

Volkan TOPALLI: on notice. they put themselves on. Notice that, you know they're not gonna let you disrespect them in any way. And there's already this kind of an imbalance. So I always come to these interviews. and one of the first things I say to them is, you are the expert.

Volkan TOPALLI: I'm I'm trying to learn from you. I'm here for you to teach me something. This is really important, that I want you to teach me something. I don't understand these things. I'm going to ask you questions, and I want you to tell me. That's a bad question. I want you to tell me. That's a bad question. I want you to tell me that that's an irrelevant question.

Volkan TOPALLI: so it's very, very important. That's that's a you can respect these individuals without condoning their their behavior and their activities. And I think once they sense that that's where you're coming from. If they open up, you know they're much, much more likely to be honest with you. One of the other advantages of doing active, offending research is

Volkan TOPALLI: that when you're in prison and you're interviewing them. they're worried about. Are they going to tell on themselves, are you? Gonna you know? Get them caught up in something

Volkan TOPALLI: Most of them are in for one offense, but they committed a hundred, so I'd like to talk to them about the other 100 offenses. They're not going to talk to me about that in prison. When I'm out on the street

Volkan TOPALLI: we can talk about any of those things right, but we can only do it if they feel comfortable, if they feel like. Not that they're in control, because you don't want to let them think they're in control. But you don't want them to think you're controlling the situation, either. You're sort of coming to this as kind of differential equals. In a way. You know, I have something to do here. I'm respecting you. I'm trying to learn from you, and they understand at the same time. So so I think

Volkan TOPALLI: you know, the the trick is to make sure that you've you've set that up now

Volkan TOPALLI: they're unpredictable. They

Volkan TOPALLI: they have their own schedules, they have their own lives, they have their own way of talking. They have their own. There are things that

Volkan TOPALLI: insult them that wouldn't insult you. There are things that make them nervous that wouldn't make you nervous 1. One of the things I've learned is when you're you're having these discussions with these individuals, the wrong look

Volkan TOPALLI: or the you know the wrong tone. They they pick up on it super fast, right? And if they feel like you're

Volkan TOPALLI: condescending, or you're asking a question that's disrespectful. In some way.

Volkan TOPALLI: The the best thing that can happen is that the interview gets shut down. The worst thing that can happen is that they decide that they're gonna kick your ass or something like that. And so so some of this is It really does take a long time to learn how to do the work and how to have these conversations. I have students to train under me.

Volkan TOPALLI: I never send a student out to go and do interviews on their own. So as you guys sit in, you gotta listen. You gotta be quiet. You know. Actually, when I when the training, what we really do is first we start off with. Just you have to transcribe, just transcribe.

Volkan TOPALLI: and you have to co cocoa cocoa. Now you can sit in. Now you can ask a question, you know. Now you can ask some questions, and I'll ask most of the questions. Now you'll ask most of the questions. I'll ask some, and then eventually they're in charge of whatever they're doing. But then doing street work is like this whole other level of, we gotta go out together. We gotta find the right spots, etc.

Volkan TOPALLI: They you know they're they're not on the kind of an academic timeline. So, hey, I have to see you at 30'clock. Maybe, you know, if I have a watch, maybe I'll see you at 30'clock. Maybe I'll see you at 2, 30, maybe I'll see you at 4,

Volkan TOPALLI: and they don't care if I have to meet with a student at 4, 45, or something like that. They're gonna just show up when they show up. So there are all these frustrations that accrue from that kind of stuff.

Volkan TOPALLI: the

Volkan TOPALLI: when they come on to campus they're a little bit more difficult to to have discussions with, because they feel like they're in an institutionalized setting. On the other hand, when you're out where they are, it can be a lot more chaotic, you know. They can just get up and walk away and leave you. Stop there with nothing to do. So I've had

Volkan TOPALLI: And and then the other thing is that at least half to 75% of the guys that we talk to are on something when we're talking to them. That's normative. you know they

Volkan TOPALLI: you know that they they smoke a little all that you know. Each day they drink a little each day, so you should expect to be there to be that kind of issue. they can be kind of chaotic affairs. They may decide to bring 4 or 5 of their friends. and then you're having to figure out like, Okay, what am I going to do with these other 4 guys while I'm talking to this person?

Volkan TOPALLI: and so and we have had guys that take took things the wrong way. I've had.

Volkan TOPALLI: you know. I I went to do an interview with a guy. I have a recruiter that helps me. I went to do an interview with a guy to a

Volkan TOPALLI: the park. He sat down. I sat down at the bench and he sat down with me. And

Volkan TOPALLI: I said, are you ready to do this interview? I was about to read the you know the protocol to him, and he just took a huge gun and put it right down on the table. He's like I'm not doing shit with you. You're just gonna give me your money.

Volkan TOPALLI: and I was like.

Volkan TOPALLI: sure. I said, I only have the money I brought

Volkan TOPALLI: with me for you to do this interview because I pay we pay for an interview. So I said, You can have it. Well, we could do the interview, and you could still have it.

Volkan TOPALLI: And he paused for about 10 s. He's like, okay, all right, I'll do the interview with you. That was not my best interview. It wasn't a gun pointed at your chest, but you know we did go through the interview, and and it was, you know, kind of worked out

Volkan TOPALLI: We've had offenders who have come to campus and you leave them in their office, and they go through all your stuff. They use your phone. They take things.

Volkan TOPALLI: I've been abandoned by. I was abandoned by an offender in a

Volkan TOPALLI: and then there was a building that used to be a kind of a motel, and they had turned it into what they call bunk house, which is where people can go to smoke, crack, and and deal drugs and stuff, and I went there to do observational stuff. And the guy who took me there is was like, Okay, we're taking there. For an hour I talked to the guy who runs the bunk house. He let me cool with it. Just sit in the corner. Don't talk to people. Well, I'll sit in the corner, and then all of a sudden he gets a phone call and he's like, Yeah, I gotta go.

Volkan TOPALLI: And I said, I'll come with you and you can't come with me because I got some drama with my kids, mom, and stuff. But I'll I'll come back for you. Don't worry.

Volkan TOPALLI: And I said, Are you sure? And he said, Yeah, I'm sure no problem. Well, he never came back.

Volkan TOPALLI: and I ended up spending the entire night in that place, and I ended up having to walk home.

Volkan TOPALLI: Yeah, it was amazing. And I learned a lot. But it was. It was very tense night, I mean, there's no doubt about it. So so you do get get these kinds of situations.

Volkan TOPALLI: We have recruiters that are former offenders. Some of them are very reliable. Some of them are not reliable at all. I've had recruiters who, when they run out of people for us to talk to because they want to get the recruitment fee, they'll go back, and they'll bring back the same guy again, and then tell us that it's somebody else. and we usually figure it out and and then there's a question like, What do you do? Do you confront them about it? And we found that no.

Volkan TOPALLI: we just go through the interview. It's a junk interview. We toss it out, but we retain the relationship with the recruiter, which is more important because they're bringing us other people, and we don't want to burn our reputation on the streets. So

Volkan TOPALLI: tidbits. Yeah.

Jenn Tostlebe: thanks for all those tips.

Volkan TOPALLI: Your, the research sounds really interesting, challenging, and sometimes frustrating. But I suppose that can be said for most research, but in different ways. but yeah, definitely, not the kind of research that to do. If you want to publish like 10 or 15 papers a year, because you got to put a lot of work in to get the data. And there's a kind of a stereotype that I'll qualitative research isn't serious, because.

Volkan TOPALLI: you know, you're only talking to 25 or 30 people. And I always like to say that you know, quantitative data is kind of a mile wide and an inch deep and quantitative and qualitative data is a mile deep in an inch wide. Right? So you know, you think that I've talked to 25 guys, and that's all that N is so small they're thinking about in terms of power and stuff. But then I realize is that over 25 interviews I've got almost 1,000 pages

Volkan TOPALLI: of data that all has to be coded. And it's really really deep, rich data that takes a long time to look at and there are things that we've learned how to do very recently to speed some of that process up. But it is a different kind of animal in that respect.

For sure.

Jose Sanchez: Yeah, it well, actually, I think that this is nicely into our next question, which is sort of expanding this type of research that you know, you just talking about qualitative methods. And you know, for anyone that's So I've been paying attention which you should. That's why you're listening to this to this. Podcast they

Jose Sanchez: probably notice that

Jose Sanchez: this research method seems to lend itself pretty nicely to qualitative methods. But we also know that that's not everyone's jam. And no, there are people that, like you mentioned are critical of qualitative research.

Jose Sanchez: so this question is kind of twofold. First.

Jose Sanchez: those, this type of research lend itself in any way to quantitative methods.

Jose Sanchez: and

Jose Sanchez: so with advancements in technology.

Jose Sanchez: how can that start coming into play with this type of research?

Volkan TOPALLI: That's an awesome question. It's one of my favorite questions

Volkan TOPALLI: to get lately.

Volkan TOPALLI: so you so for 2 things or a few things, I should say. you don't have to be a qualitative researcher to work with active offenders. That's number one really important thing. What you do have to have is a connection with somebody who has access to to offenders. So I wouldn't recommend that. Just go out and do it on your own, but kind of connect with somebody.

Volkan TOPALLI: Now, what can you do if you're not a qualitative researcher, but you want to work with active offenders. So I do a lot of mixed methods. Research. one of the projects I did a while ago. We brought in active offenders.

Volkan TOPALLI: But instead of doing interviews with them, we had them watch these computerized video displays of people interacting in very, very simple ways, and then asked them to describe what they were seeing on these video displays. So this is almost kind of like.

Volkan TOPALLI: you know, sort of the the research you see with people when they're using like, little storyboards and things like that. Right? except that this is actual video. And we coded that those videos. And so you get qualitative data out of it. But then we

Volkan TOPALLI: we numerous it essentially by having people rate the the statements. They came up, and we ended up getting quantitative data out of that. So that's one example. Another one is.

Volkan TOPALLI: I've done research projects where I've interviewed these guys. But then I also get. Give them a bunch of standardized questionnaires on impulsivity control on future thinking on emotional and things like that. So you can, you can mix in quantitative data with the qualitative data.

Volkan TOPALLI: I think that that's actually the strongest kind of research. When you have one group of individuals that you're getting qualitative data and quantitative data from your sort of

Volkan TOPALLI: bridging the gap between internal validity and external ability. Right qualitative data interviews have high high external validity, but low internal validity. Experiments and and other quantitative approaches have high internal validity, but low external ability for run an experiment. It's kind of an artificial kind of a situation where it's not kind of low external validity. So putting both of those things together in a research project can be really really helpful.

Volkan TOPALLI: Tim Brazena, and and I did that in a crim piece that we wrote. I think it was 2,009 where we interviewed young offenders about their thoughts about their you know how long they would live, and their

Volkan TOPALLI: future future life consequences anticipated early death. But we also had the add health data set, and we're able to conduct a, you know, a number of really sophisticated different diff analyses to sort of merge those 2 kinds of data sets together. So the quantitative data told us that there was a significant relationship. And the qualitative data told us what that relationship was about.

Volkan TOPALLI: I have brought in guys to talk, and then had other researchers piggyback on what I'm doing. So Francis Chen, who's in my department, is a great example of that. She's a bio psycho, social criminologist. She she collects saliva samples, and she measures heart rate and and and galvanic skin responses and things like that.

Volkan TOPALLI: And she said to me, can I,

Volkan TOPALLI: when you're done with these guys? Do you think they would do like a 15 min little thing with me? And I said, Sure! And so she ended writing a whole paper which appeared in a The journal that's not even a criminology journal period in like a neuro endocrinology journal. where she collected actual biological data from active

Volkan TOPALLI: offenders, which is just mind blowing to think about. I mean, that's active offender biology research, right and very quantitative. Obviously

Volkan TOPALLI: the the other direction, I would say so. It so, other than partnering up with people who have access to these kinds of populations and thinking about ways to combine quantitative and qualitative approaches. The the other aspect of this is to look at what are the advancements in technology that allow us to collect data in very different kinds of ways. And there are a few few ways to think about this. The first is, there's a wonderful program of research right now taking place at Portsmouth University University of Portsmouth, and the United Kingdom, and the Max Planck Institute in Freiburg.

Volkan TOPALLI: And that's Clamy in Portsmouth, and Jean-louis Val Van Gelder, who is the head of Max Planck in Freiburg. And what they're doing is they're using virtual reality environments.

Volkan TOPALLI: And they are standardizing the environments. But and then, having people go through those environments and commit offenses. And so literally, they're having people who are in prison who are in prison for burglary. Go through a virtual

Volkan TOPALLI: burglary environment. it. It's a it's a it's a neighborhood, and then you can break into a house in the neighborhood, and you can go through each of the rooms, and you can check drawers, and you can take decide what to take and what not to take, and what they're doing is they're comparing the offenders to non offenders to police officers.

Volkan TOPALLI: So police officers know a lot about burglar because they investigate it right? And what you find is that the burglars and the police officers? They have some things in common, but they also have some differences, right? So this is getting it expertise. You know. What is the expertise? And I know a lot of people think, oh, you know, how much expertise do you need to like Rob? Somebody burglarize something. Actually, a lot.

Volkan TOPALLI: These individuals have such amazing

Volkan TOPALLI: powers of perception when it comes to which houses to target which ones not the target. We had hints of this 2030 years ago, when Richard was doing some of this work in St. Louis, he would drive around with burglars.

Volkan TOPALLI: and he would sort of say, would you burglarize that house? Would you popularize that house? And they would pick up things that you and I would never think of, they would say, Oh! And and they do it in 10 s, hey? That! No, that's got a double lock on the bottom of the door, and also see that fence. There's wire mesh under the fence, so it might be harder to get out over it, so I can't. I wouldn't be able to do that you and I would have no clue.

Volkan TOPALLI: In some cases they actually pointed to houses. They had actually Berkeley. And so they would sit there in the car and sort of say, Well, why did you burglarize that house? And he would remember, you know the context was important. So the person that will say, oh, I remember jumping the fence. There was a dog, but the chain didn't go all the way. I was able to sneak around

Volkan TOPALLI: But now, with this technology, you can create these environments and it, the imagery is just getting better and better and better and better. And so you're getting closer and closer and closer to that authentic kind of environment. Now, is it the same as actually burglarizing a home? No.

Volkan TOPALLI: but you know it's it's a lot better than reading You know a short paragraph about it, or writing a short paragraph about it. Right? And so so I think that technology holds a lot of promise. The the last 2 things I'll talk about. One is the use of agent-based modeling

Volkan TOPALLI: which you have to do. A lot of you have to understand python and all those kinds of things to do. But this is essentially creating environments. And then you sort of program offenders, computerized offenders within the environments with information. And let them kind of go through the environment and see what they do in terms of do they? You know, rob people, do they burglarize people? What nobody has done is they they've not taken the qualitative data that we have

Volkan TOPALLI: to use to as an to to feed the algorithm. Essentially. So right now, the algorithms have been fed by criminologists who think they understand

Volkan TOPALLI: crime. I'd rather have the algorithm fed by the actual vendors through the interview. So you can code the interviews, feed them in the algorithm, and then have these models kind of run. And you can run them thousands of times and get patterns of behavior. And that could maybe help a policy. the final frontier, I think, is all the online crime that's taking place right now is dwarfing the amount of street crime. It just is. And we have an exponential

Volkan TOPALLI: increase in technology. We have a huge increase in online crime. the amount of street crime, traditional crime is basically stayed the same, the amount of crime that's taking place outside that is massive. But we don't have data on it, because it's not in the.

Volkan TOPALLI: you know, neighbors or anything like that. And so this is fertile ground for people. I'm doing interviews right now with online drug dealers. I'm doing interviews with advanced fee fraud scammers. We're collect. We're scraping data to learn about romance fraud, child sex grooming and these all rely on that active

Volkan TOPALLI: offender, you know. Sort of approach, you know. It's still it still boils down to motivation, planning enactment in the aftermath, and we still use those same methods. We're just talking to them in a different environment. You know, we were talking to the offenders out on the streets. We're talking to the cyber offenders on the cyber streets, so to speak.

Jenn Tostlebe: so many cool, exciting projects coming up. I know the online environment that is becoming a much bigger. You know point of discussion, I think for a lot of people.

Volkan TOPALLI: So that's really cool that you're doing some work in that area. You know, people think you can just take the theories and processes that we use to study traditional crime and just transfer them over to online. But, Leo, the online world is totally different. You can look the way you want. You can change your voice, you can doing romance fraud instead of talking one on one to somebody. You can send 20,000 emails out. You can use

Volkan TOPALLI: you know, voice recognition software, deep fakes. so it's a. It's a very different world. And I don't know that the traditional chronological theories are all, not. I don't know. All of them are going to be applicable anymore to this new environment. So there's definitely a good place to do qualitative research grounded theory work, because that's where the ideas come to actually test. And so I want to see more people doing that kind of qualitative work in these environments. For sure.

Jenn Tostlebe: All right. Well, thank you so much, Vulcan, that those are all the questions that we have for you. It was a pleasure to have you on today.

Jenn Tostlebe: Is there anything before we wrap up? Is there anything that you would like to plug, anything that you want to announce or share with people?

Volkan TOPALLI: No other than Now, I don't want to plug anything. I'm I'm I'm not a plugger. But I do want to also just make it make sure everyone remember serendipity. Serendipity is like the okay. So just keep that month.

Jenn Tostlebe: and then where can people find you? If they want to reach out, ask questions to get some information?

Volkan TOPALLI: Well, you can. You can go to my university website, and my email is listed there I am. I'm on what used to be called Twitter, and is now unfortunately called. I've had a long discussion on this X. Oh, man, it's painful! It's really painful. I gotta say But you still tweet

Volkan TOPALLI: I I I see, or whatever. Well, I mean he's destroying the platform. But It still exists, and people still engage with it, and as long as they do I'll continue to tweak. I would say. I am probably not the best example.

Volkan TOPALLI: for people to emulate when it comes to tweeting, because I put personal stuff on there and professional stuff, and then I can't keep my mouth shut about my politics. And so that's probably not a great mix for for someone who's up and coming, but I don't care about those things, so I still do, and I find it. It is a good way to communicate

Volkan TOPALLI: especially to, you know younger generations. We put out the announcement that we were going to do research notes and criminology, for example, and all the, you know, 20 and 30 year olds were excited and knew about it, and none of the 40, 50, and 60 year olds had a clue that this was happening until I had to send them an actual email and say, by the way, you it like this, now. So yeah, I still see tweak, whatever you want to call it. Yeah, I was telling Jen I should just be musking

Volkan TOPALLI: what they should just be musking.

Jose Sanchez: Bye

Volkan TOPALLI: we that that's what he wants. He wants his name out there, you know. Let's give him what he wants exactly for sure.

Volkan TOPALLI: It was so nice to see you guys, this is a great podcast I love. It. It's great! It was great having you.