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# Post-disciplinary Responses to Positivism's Punitiveness

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# Post-disciplinary Responses to Positivism's Punitiveness

## **Abstract**

Abstract - paper forthcoming.

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This article posits a post-disciplinary framework to offer an alternative to the epistemological premise of positivist criminology. We seek to destabilise the punitive, deficit analysis of Indigenous people by Western, positivist Criminology. Instead, we look towards Indigenous strengths and resilience to counter deficit narratives about Indigenous people that have served to over-criminalise and over-incarcerate Indigenous peoples since colonisation. In doing so, we argue that positivist disciplinary knowledge is complicit in undermining Indigenous knowledges. We provide a case study that contrasts an institutional approach to researching 'grog trials' with the approach of the Tangentyere Research Hub, our ongoing research partner in Alice Springs (Central Australia). Our case study demonstrates the benefits of Tangentyere's reliance on local Indigenous knowledges and perspectives, rather than disciplinary assumptions, for empowering, strengthening and supporting Indigenous communities and self-governance. In attempting to decolonise criminology, we advance a post-disciplinary approach that highlights questions of Indigenous wellbeing and its relationship with Indigenous self-determination over inquiries into Indigenous crime and the punitive role of the state.

**Introduction**

Positivist criminology inscribes disciplinary boundaries that have the intention and effect of problematising colonised populations and legitimising the Western criminal justice system. Its discourses and practices are part of the Western tradition of land theft, primitive

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accumulation<sup>3</sup> and enclosure that displaces and exploits Indigenous people. Positivism is implicated in this article because of its dominance in criminological thought and the social sciences generally. It advances that knowledge can *only* be produced and verified through statistics and experiments ('rats and stats'). Although its inquiries have a narrow temporal and geographic location and are based on a pre-determined set of variables (including in relation to race), its conclusions profess universality to conceal its subjective standpoint. Māori scholar Juan Tauri (2016, p. 134) states that positivist criminology relies on the "veil of scientism" to highlight Indigenous deficits as risk factors (referring, for example, to Weatherburn 2010, p. 198). Tauri (2016, pp. 113, 123) explains that positivist criminology is based on "myth construction", that includes its own objectivity and neutrality, to conceal its role in maintaining the state's authority over Indigenous people with the effect of disempowerment, stigmatisation and segregation (see also Rynne 2015, p. 103).

The Indigenous research domain has responded to positivism by seeking to deconstruct Western disciplinary knowledge and assert Indigenous epistemologies. Leading proponent on decolonising methodologies, Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999), has identified the need for disciplines to further self-determination of Indigenous people, rather than Indigenous people being used to further the disciplines. She argues that knowledge has and is being used to 'discipline' the colonised in order to enforce "marginalisation, exclusion and denial" (1999, p. 68). Smith (1999, p. 44) seeks to advance Indigenous epistemologies as a challenge to Western disciplinary domains.

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<sup>3</sup> The Marxist concept of primitive accumulation is explained by Yellowknives Dene scholar Glen Coulthard (2014, p. 7) in terms of creating individual ownership of resources for the purpose of individual, private profit, and replacing non-classed societies (where resources are shared) with classed societies. Coulthard proffers a distinctly colonial version of this concept that highlights its ongoing character and multiple modalities of power.

This article highlights the disciplinary role of positivist criminology in upholding the state's dominant relationship with Indigenous peoples. It does this in both respects of the word 'discipline'. First, it contests positivist criminology's focus on 'disciplining' as the natural work of the state's *enforcement of rules*. By naturalising the role of the criminal justice system, it assumes crime is an objective construct rather than a product of the state's control. Its research inquiry affirms the role of police, courts, corrections and prisons by highlighting their procedures as rational, *al beit* with the occasional need for reform at the margins. Positivist criminology regard Aboriginality as a determinant of criminality and disciplining interventions a proportionate response (e.g. Bond & Jeffries 2011, p. 270, Bond & Jeffries 2012, Bond et al. 2011, p. 286, Snowball & Weatherburn 2006, Weatherburn 2014, pp. 51-52, see criticism of positivist methodology by Klein et al. 2016, p. 10).

Positivist findings that Indigenous people's criminal histories are substantial, and explain their over-imprisonment, justifies a culture of over-policing and over-punishment and fuels further law enforcement. Snowball and Weatherburn (2006, p. 5), for instance, rely on a narrow set of variables to conclude that criminal history is the most "important" determinant of their incarceration. This reveals collusion between criminology and the state's punitive agenda by making its processes appear rational and vital. According to Agozino (2010, p. vii), criminology works in partnership with the state in suppressing Indigenous people. It provides a logic for the framework of criminal wrongs and the state's ensuing management of deemed Indigenous offenders (Anghie 2004, p. 63).

Second, and related to our first contention, we challenge positivist criminology as an *intellectual discipline*. The truths of positivist criminology are embedded in Western ways of assembling and testing knowledge, such as the need for expertise to be generated external to

those with lived experience, the abstraction of subjects and the predisposal to statistics *about* Indigenous offenders which lacks context. It stands apart from decolonising research that is led by Indigenous people with lived experience and responds to the self-identified needs of Indigenous communities. Positivist criminologists regard non-positivist ways of knowing and doing research as lacking scientific rigour. For instance, Weatherburn (2014, p. 2) claims that other research fails to undertake “a careful and dispassionate analysis of the facts”, whereas his positivist research is embedded in data. With his colleagues, Weatherburn criticises Cunneen and Blagg’s concept of systemic racism because he asserts that it defies measurement (Weatherburn & Fitzgerald 2006, p. 367, Weatherburn 2014, p. 53). This is typical of positivist knowledge that presumes its techniques produce “regimes of truth” and non-positivist methodologies generate “false statements” (Foucault 1984, p. 73).

Disciplines embed disciplinary precepts and norms even when claiming originality and innovation (see Osborne 2015, pp. 7-8). For instance, positivist criminology constructs questions on Indigenous crime as a given ‘truth’, even when it seeks to be novel in fixing this problem. It dismisses and very often silences alternative questions in relation to furthering Indigenous strengths, social resilience and wellbeing. Positivist criminologists self-police the borders of their discipline through peer-reviewing articles, nominating one another for awards, appointing one another to senior positions, and assessing one another’s impact. As Anderson-Gough and Hoskin (2005, pp. 1, 20) explain, doing disciplinary work makes us “walking talking records” of our discipline and gets our “hands so dirty”. Governments also validate the dominance and norms of positivist criminology through establishing agencies to conduct such research and using positivist findings to inform policy decisions (see Marchetti 2017). This “tribalism” makes it harder for Indigenous knowledges to penetrate the Western

boundaries of knowledge and thus impact on the governance of criminal justice decision-making (see Scheff 1995).

This article begins by detailing the disciplinary role of positivist criminology in maintaining power relations between the state and Indigenous people. It then identifies the need to engage a post-disciplinary approach that resists positivist criminology's characterisation of Indigenous people as a risk and criminal justice agencies as a neutral response. We use the term post-disciplinary to denote knowledges outside of established Western disciplines and not merely a cross-over or mingling of the disciplines. We are particularly concerned with Indigenous, or what has been referred to as 'subaltern', knowledges, that challenge Western ways of knowing, being and doing. In illustrating the possibilities for post-disciplinary research, we seek to decolonise criminology by drawing on invoke a different set of assumptions relating to Indigenous strengths rather than deficits, and the state's subjectivity rather than neutrality. We demonstrate, through the research model of Tangentyere Council, how empowering local Indigenous organisations in research can decolonise methodologies. We contrast its postdisciplinary research into liquor restrictions in Alice Springs (central Australia) with positivist research conducted by an agency operating outside of the Indigenous domain.

### **Positivist Criminology as a Disciplining Discipline**

Although the focus of this paper's critique is of positivist criminologists' analysis of Indigenous people in the criminal justice system, it would be wrong to conclude that they prioritise Indigenous issues in their inquiries. Positivists have historically been blind to how Indigenous people experience criminal justice interventions. Their tendency to universalise subjects and neutralise criminal processes has cast its shadow on contemporary studies (see

Curcio et al. 2017, Farrington & Welsh 2005, Butler et al 2005, Butler et al. 2003). They quantify offending patterns and analyse the causes of criminal behaviour based on statistical correlations with pre-determined variables. They identify 'fixes' for offending through abstract experiments with faceless prisoners.

Since positivists have turned their attention to the 'problem' of Indigenous people in the criminal justice system, as they perceive it, they also use abstract techniques for explaining Indigenous offending (see Doyle et al. 2015, Weatherburn et al. 2006, Hunter 2001). Positivists hone in on certain risk factors (e.g. alcohol and drugs) as "an important cause of Indigenous contact with the criminal justice system" (Weatherburn et al. 2006, see p. 11). Walter (2016, p. 103) criticises this approach because it would follow that Indigenous people across colonised nations are all predisposed to criminality, and neglects the common feature across these nations: they are all subject to an imposed colonising criminal justice system.

Positivists rule out discrimination in the criminal justice system because it cannot be measured, as alluded to above. They inquire into the neutrality of the legal system by drawing on the system's own framework to measure its fairness (see Anthony 2013, p. 69). While Indigenous people are imprisoned at higher rates, positivists find that decisions to imprison are fair because they account for the greater criminal histories and seriousness of crimes of Indigenous people (Weatherburn 2014, p. 52, Weatherburn & Fitzgerald 2006, p. 366, Snowball & Weatherburn 2006). They do not interrogate the decisions throughout the system that contribute to Indigenous people acquiring such records, instead also assuming the neutrality of such decisions. Cunneen (2006, p. 339) identifies that we can only know offending from what is recorded by law enforcement agencies and therefore criminal records



are a product of institutional practices and legal frameworks that criminalise Indigenous peoples.

As discussed in the foregoing section, positivists rule-out racism as a cause of over-incarceration (see Weatherburn & Fitzgerald 2006, p. 367, Weatherburn 2014, p. 53). In doing so, positivism renounces non-Indigenous peoples' responsibility, and instead places the onus on Indigenous people to be "less deficit and problematic" (Walter 2016, p. 101). The research is based on abstract statistical inquiries into offending causation that relies on typecasts of Indigenous people (such as consumers of alcohol) or narrow notions of Indigenous communities (such as products of economic disadvantage alone) (e.g. see Jeffries & Stenning 2014, p. 458, Snowball & Weatherburn 2006, p. 15). According to positivists, disadvantage increases the risk that Indigenous parents will "neglect or reject their children or and treat them in ways that are harsh, erratic or inconsistent" (Snowball & Weatherburn 2006, p. 15). This in turn "substantially increase[s] the risk of juvenile involvement in crime" (2006, p. 15). Walter (2016, p. 102) fights fire with fire, stating that positivist criminology is flawed in its uncritical acceptance that Indigenous economic disadvantage is a cause of criminality. She claims that we need to identify the whole "landscape of inequality", which features in both the socio-economic *and* criminal justice systems (2016, p. 103). The process of criminalisation is another aspect of systemic inequality and discrimination against Indigenous people. Criminal justice perpetuates the overall inequality and structural injustice of settler colonialism (O'Brien 2017).

Moreover, by ruling out systemic racism, positivists imply that racism can only exist when it is seen (and measured) by Western observers. They look through a different lens to Indigenous people who have experienced dispossession, exclusion and genocide. Positivism

is supported by a methodology that favours universal data sets over Indigenous accounts of their experiences. Porter (2017, p. 40) regards “desktop knowledge” as standing apart from the expertise of local Indigenous people. The consequence is, according to Sherwood (2015, p. 1), that positivists fail to see racism unless it occurs in overt and measurable acts. For instance, Weatherburn (2014, pp. 53, 150) rejects systemic or institutional racism because it cannot be quantified. Positivists identify racism where there is explicit evidence of its existence, such as evidence of deliberate vetting of Indigenous jurors, but not where it is implicit or indirect (see critique by Anthony and Longman 2017, Ruparelia 2013). Positivists neglect the legacy of colonial policies in contemporary laws and practices. They fail to see how inter-generational trauma has underlying consequences for Indigenous peoples’ engagement with the criminal justice system (Sherwood 2015, p. 2). Positivists also narrowly focus on the determinants for the success of Indigenous-owned programs and services, including Aboriginal legal services, based on recidivism rates (Weatherburn 2014, Fitzgerald 2008). They overlook the perspectives of Indigenous users and Elders and neglect their role in changing offender behaviours and strengthening Indigenous communities (see Marchetti 2017, Anthony & Crawford 2014, pp. 91-92, Klein et al. 2016).

Notwithstanding the influence of positivist criminology in criminal justice policy and practice,<sup>4</sup> it is offset by alternative knowledges. While Foucault’s (1977, p. 170) indictment of the menacing power of disciplinary knowledge provides a useful framework to understand its role in regulating social relations, his Western gaze does not see alternative Indigenous truths. Foucault claims that disciplinary power is reproduced even in resistance. However, Indigenous truths counter pose the Western worldview and provide a different set of epistemologies that offset the “worlding” of positivism (Spivak 1985, p. 235). This

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<sup>4</sup> For instance, BOCSAR’s research was cited by the Government in Victorian parliamentary debates on a bill to restrict parole access and tighten conditions (Victoria 2013, p. 401) and in New South Wales parliamentary debates on a bill to abolish suspended sentences (Clarke 2017).

dichotomy was evident in the Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory, where the views of government officers and institutional experts about incarceration and state-controlled programs were offset by the views of Indigenous witnesses.

The Indigenous witnesses before the Royal Commission spoke about the strengths of Indigenous laws, community relationships and programs in reconceiving Indigenous youth justice (see Puruntatameri 2017, pp. 2403-2405, Dowardi 2017, pp. 4543, 4557, 4567, 4577, Dixon 2017, p. 4549, Bamblett 2016, p. 200, Havnen 2016, p. 1589, Wala Wala 2017, p. 4544, Jangala 2017, p. 4548, Robertson 2017, pp. 3808-9, 3811). Pat Anderson (2016, pp. 146-151) told the Commission that Indigenous communities know the answers for promoting their wellbeing, and need to be respectfully engaged in research and policy to advance the work they are already doing in their communities. With reference to examples of Indigenous epistemologies and methodologies, the following section discusses the prospects for a post-disciplinary research approach that defies the disciplinary boundaries of positivist criminology and creates new spaces for researching Indigenous injury-prevention and wellbeing.

### **Post-Disciplinarity: A Parting of Positivist Knowledges**

The disciplinary boundaries of positivist criminology blinker its research questions. They insulate researchers from questions that fall outside of Indigenous criminality and a focus that is premised on Indigenous strengths. There may be approaches from other disciplines (such as political economy, media, languages, culture and education) that adopt more relevant inquiries into the needs of Indigenous people around injury-prevention and wellbeing. The disregard for disciplinary demarcations is evident in the formation of multi-disciplinary

Indigenous research units at universities, such as The Jumbunna Institute of Education and Research (University of Technology Sydney), the Forum for Indigenous Research Excellence (University of Wollongong) and the Rangahau me ngā Whakatinanatanga (University of Waikato). These units close the silos imposed by Western knowledges, and instead focus on developing the capacity of Indigenous staff and students to conduct research that is responsive to the priorities and needs of Indigenous nations, and invoke Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing.

But engaging other disciplines through inter-, multi- or trans-disciplinary approaches to research does not ensure a departure from positivism. Western positivism is embedded in interdisciplinary knowledges as much as in individual “established disciplines” (Foucault 1972 pp. 179–80, see also Smith 1999). Interdisciplinary knowledges can reproduce the disciplines that they “stand between, multiply or cross” (Osborne 2015, p. 27). We can see this reproduction when positivist criminologists address the health needs of Indigenous offenders (Snowball & Weatherburn 2006, p. 15, Weatherburn 2014), or when health researchers seek to identify the criminogenic needs of Indigenous prisoners (see Doyle et al. 2015). They equally disregard the context of colonisation and neglect Indigenous strengths and knowledges. For example, Weatherburn (2014, pp. 120, 132) proffers, without reference to Indigenous-led health research, the need for Indigenous people to receive ante-natal care and alcohol and substance abuse treatment by non-Indigenous professionals to break offending cycles.

A post-disciplinary approach, which is adopted by the abovementioned Indigenous research units, is defined by its disruption of disciplinary knowledges and elevation of Indigenous epistemologies, ontologies and methodologies (see Munar et al. 2016, p. 345, Hollinshead

2016). It regards Indigenous standpoints as providing a repository of counter-truth that is capable of identifying the needs and solutions for wellbeing and injury preventions. In outlining some of its features below, we draw on the research by others in this field, which has been consolidated at regular conferences on post-disciplinary research (see Munar et al. 2016).

First, a post-disciplinary approach fosters a strengths-based analysis of Indigenous peoples' capacities to manage their own affairs and identify their needs and research priorities in relation to injury prevention and wellbeing. Second, a post-disciplinary approach recognises the limits of disciplinary knowledge and the deficits of the criminal justice system. In terms of the latter, this includes the threat that punitiveness poses to Indigenous peoples' sense of safety. In these ways, post-disciplinary analysis moves outside of the parameters of the inquiries set down by positivists: it assumes partiality of the state rather than neutrality; it identifies the problems caused by the state rather than its capacity to fix Indigenous people; and it challenges institutional determination of what is best for Indigenous people.

By looking outside of the punitive and risk concepts of the criminal justice system, a post-disciplinary approach creates a different set of questions, which are outlined and compared in Table 1. Rather than seeing Indigenous people through a policing or carceral lens, post-disciplinary approaches engage Indigenous concepts of injury prevention, self-determination, and social, emotional and cultural wellbeing to identify sources of trauma, including the criminal justice system and its processes. It decolonises criminology by rejecting the dominant approaches, that reinforce disciplinary concepts of state control and law enforcement, and instead empowers Indigenous communities in research. Below we discuss our partnership with Indigenous researchers in the Tangentyere Research Hub.

	<b>Positivist criminology's inquiry into Indigenous Crime</b>	<b>Post-disciplinary analysis</b>
<b>Research assumptions</b>	The objective and scientific nature of positivist research and the neutral role of criminal laws and procedures in the lives of Indigenous people, which can be measured according to standard variables	The partial nature of positivist inquiries into Indigenous crime; the subjective role of criminal justice interventions; the value of engaging alternative standpoints in developing knowledge on injury-prevention
<b>Research Questions</b>	<p>What risks do Indigenous people present to the social order?</p> <p>Why do Indigenous people offend?</p> <p>How does the state prevent their risk and fix Indigenous offenders?</p>	<p>What risks do criminal justice interventions pose for Indigenous wellbeing?</p> <p>How can Indigenous nations improve injury prevention, safety and wellbeing for their people?</p> <p>How does self-determination prevent injury?</p>
<b>Research</b>	A deficit-based profile of the	A holistic understanding of Indigenous

<b>focus</b>	Indigenous person, and measures the criminal justice system can adopt to reduce Indigenous risk	needs and a strengths-based analysis of community-based measures in relation to injury-prevention
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**Table 1: Epistemological differences – positivism and post-disciplinary criminology**

**Post-disciplinary Methodologies: Decolonising the Discipline**

A post-disciplinary approach not only shifts epistemologies but also methodologies in order to decentre the researcher and recentre Indigenous communities and organisations in conducting research. It recognises that Indigenous people with lived experiences possess the ontological position and expertise to enable them to identify relevant research questions, processes and outputs. It challenges the exclusivity of disciplinary methods conducted by institutions. Indigenous community control of research enables research to be conducted in ways that are safe, meaningful and empowering. The research is directed towards benefiting communities and organisations, including through building the capacity of local Indigenous people to continue to undertake relevant research.

By contrast, the methodologies of positivist criminology are oblivious to the repercussions of its research on Indigenous people. Walter (2016, pp. 100-102) points out that positivist criminology is devoid of: *respect* for the strengths of Indigenous people; *reciprocal obligations* to Indigenous people by the research (including sharing the research process and findings with those affected by it); *responsibility or accountability* for the harm caused by its research (including by othering Indigenous people and criticising their programs and demands); or *recognition* of Indigenous sovereignty, the right to culture and the spirit and

integrity of Indigenous peoples (2016, p. 102).

As researchers in privileged institutional positions, we need to take responsibility for the effect of criminology research on Indigenous communities and how we allocate resources to buttress institutional ways of doing business. We continually make decisions about how to allocate our research labour and disperse funding for university research assistants, travel and reference group meetings. Often, little of this goes back to the Indigenous community and little of its allocation is decided by community, even though we burden Indigenous communities with our need for research participants or with discourses and reforms that arise from our research and affect Indigenous communities. In this way, our allocation of resources reinforces disciplinary research methodologies and our place in that discipline.

We have sought to buck this trend by respecting Indigenous knowledge and by building the capacity of Indigenous people to conduct research within their own communities and for their communities. Sherwood's (2010, pp. 261-264) framework for researching with Indigenous communities enables local Indigenous organisations and people with lived experience to direct the research in their interests. She states that a decolonising framework requires that outsider researchers adopt the research skills of local Indigenous people. This framework also requires that outsider researchers critically reflect on their own behaviours and consider the following principles when collaborating with Indigenous people:

*Demonstrate respect* through a deep acknowledgement that we as outsiders are not all-knowing.



*Listen deeply* through sitting quietly so we can hear. We should avoid interrupting the flow of knowledge being shared because it redirects the knowledge base to the outsider and their set of questions and observations.

*Comprehend and reflect* on an ongoing basis, and undertake follow-up discussions to fill gaps in knowledge to get the story right.

*Build a communicative connection and collaboration* to honour all world views.

*Develop an ongoing relationship* rather than maintaining a distance during and after the research, so the community can retain control of the process. Creating distance retains the researcher's position of power rather than their accountability.

*Carrying out responsibilities as part of the relationship*, including respect for protocols and performing reciprocity, such as keeping data with the community, recognition and publications, building capacity to conduct research, providing payment for research assistance and responding to needs in the course of research and beyond.

Some differences between positivist and post-disciplinary methodologies are outlined in Table 2 below:

	<b>Positivist criminology's inquiry into Indigenous Crime</b>	<b>Post-disciplinary analysis</b>
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<p><b>Location and identity of researchers</b></p>	<p>University-trained criminology researchers in universities and institutions</p>	<p>Researchers from local Indigenous organisations and communities affected by research <i>alongside</i> university-trained researchers from various relevant disciplines (of which criminology is one)</p>
<p><b>Research design</b></p>	<p>Reproduces disciplinary methodologies</p>	<p>Informed by Indigenous organisations and their knowledge of local participants and their needs</p>
<p><b>Research capacity building</b></p>	<p>Builds capacity of positivist criminologists and ultimately builds capacity of criminal justice system</p>	<p>Builds capacity of the Indigenous organisation and community through developing research skills and enhancing evidence-base for community advocacy</p>
<p><b>Ethics process</b></p>	<p>Ethical obligations to Indigenous communities are only likely to be addressed where research involves qualitative research with</p>	<p>Ethical obligations to Indigenous communities are a primary consideration in any research that affects or involves Indigenous people.</p>

	<p>Indigenous participants, and not when analysing statistics provided by the criminal justice system. Ethics centres on addressing the institutional needs for risk-minimisation</p>	<p>Ethical obligations are met through reciprocity, fostering strengths, minimising harm and addressing needs of Indigenous organisations and people. Ethics approval is sought not only from institutions but also relevant Indigenous organisations</p>
<p><b>Data analysis</b></p>	<p>Selective analysis of data that is strictly relevant to criminal justice research questions</p>	<p>Holistic analysis of issues deemed relevant by participants and Indigenous organisations</p>
<p><b>Outputs</b></p>	<p>Reports for institutions, academic books, journal articles and conference presentations</p>	<p>Production of findings that are accessible for Indigenous people, organisations and communities and useful for their advocacy <i>as well as</i> academic publications with ongoing permission from communities</p>
<p><b>Desired impacts</b></p>	<p>Generating criminology knowledge; criminal justice reform</p>	<p>Enhancing self-determination for Indigenous communities through research outcomes that reflect their</p>

		needs and research processes that build their capacity
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**Table 2: Methodological differences - positivism and post-disciplinary criminology**

**Post-disciplinary Research in Action: Tangentyere Research Hub**

The research of Tangentyere Council’s Research Hub provides an example of how criminology may be decolonised by adopting post-disciplinary approaches. Tangentyere Council (hereafter ‘Tangentyere’) is an Indigenous-controlled organisation in Central Australia. Tangentyere was established in 1974 to fight for the basic rights of Aboriginal people in Central Australia, especially Aboriginal people in Town Camps on the perimeter of Alice Springs (Mparntwe) and their rights to land, housing, power and water, services, garbage collection and employment (Tangentyere 2008a, Foster et al. 2006, p. 213). Tangentyere continues to support the 18 Town Camps in Alice Springs (which house up to 2000 Aboriginal residents) and other communities in Central Australia through advocacy, services, programs and research (Tangentyere 2008b, Foster et al. 2005, p. 8).

In the early 2000s, Tangentyere set up a team of researchers to include the voices of Aboriginal people in Town Camps in research on grog trials. The research that Tangentyere conducted on these trials in 2002-2003 took place concurrently with the research conducted by Market Equity (a Northern Territory government contractor). The different approaches signify how post-disciplinary methodologies can decolonise research on the one hand, and how positivist methodologies can reinforce the validity of white perceptions on the other. The inception of the one-year grog trials in 2002 resulted from Alice Springs Town Camp residents campaigning the Northern Territory Liquor Commission for alcohol restrictions in

order to minimise the harm from high-level alcohol consumption. The trials, which were administered by the Liquor Commission, restricted the supply of alcohol in Alice Springs in a measured and non-discriminatory manner, including by controlling the times in which take-away alcohol could be purchased and the amounts of certain alcohol purchases. Tangentyere therefore regarded it as appropriate that it undertake the research to assess the effectiveness of the trials, and do so by eliciting the views of Town Camp residents. The evaluation would be critical to the continuation of the trials and as Tangentyere had concerns with the research approach of Market Equity, it established its research as a counterpoint to the model pursued by Market Equity.

The development of Tangentyere's Research Hub and its unique position in researching the grog trials is well-documented (Foster et al. 2006, Gray 2003, Sherwood 2010). Tangentyere researchers describe the hub as "researching ourselves back to life" (Foster et al. 2006). We discuss it here to elucidate the differences between Tangentyere's post-disciplinary research methodology that stands outside of traditional disciplinary boundaries and Market Equity's positivist approach that stands squarely within them. We believe the approaches varied across all criteria in Tables 1 and 2. At the time of its genesis, Juanita Sherwood facilitated its establishment through providing training and support for the research team (Foster et al. 2006, p. 214). Juanita worked particularly closely with Vanessa Davis and Denise Foster to build their research capacity as researchers at Tangentyere, and in turn Juanita was able to learn from Vanessa and Denise about doing research in community. We continue to collaborate with Tangentyere in our research, and support its advocacy for Indigenous people in Central Australia.

In establishing its team to research the grog trials, Tangentyere recruited ten Aboriginal researchers who came from various Town Camps in Alice Springs. This enabled their research questions to respond to their diverse needs. The majority of Tangentyere's researchers had lived experience in "dealing with the day-to-day issues" on Town Camps and were positioned to do the work of "researching our own people" (Foster et al. 2006, p. 214). University-educated researchers, Juanita Sherwood and Dennis Gray, sought to build the capacity of Indigenous researchers at Tangentyere by training them in institutional research methods (in relation to data sampling, collecting and coding and presentation of results), which they could pair with their invaluable local knowledge and skills (such as knowledge of cultural protocols and communicating with participants, respecting relationships among participants and identifying participants' needs) (Foster 2006, pp. 214-215). There was also horizontal training among the group where they shared information on "their language and cultural skills", insights on local circumstances and knowledge and their kinship and family relationships (Foster et al. 2006, p. 214). By contrast, the research team contracted by the government comprised exclusively non-Indigenous researchers who had no accountability to local Indigenous people or organisations and lacked insight into the needs of Town Camp residents that the grog trials sought to address.

Tangentyere's research questions sought to ascertain the feedback and concerns of Aboriginal residents of Town Camps relating to the grog trials as well as alcohol and injury prevention in Town Camps generally. The questions were open and invited a general discussion, rather than being closed-ended. Tangentyere's researchers spoke in the local Aboriginal language, had the skills to guide discussion in a way that made participants feel comfortable and they knew when to avoid questions that "made people feel ashamed or offended" (Foster et al. 2006, p. 215). As a result, almost all of the 270 households in Town Camps participated in

the face-to-face qualitative, interactive survey on their perceptions of the grog trials. The research highlighted and validated local Indigenous peoples' expertise in informing harm minimisation strategies that related to their communities.

In comparison, Market Equity's questioning was directed to the "general" population and confined to the success of the grog trials. The research design involved telephone surveys with direct questions of random households in Alice Springs, generally acquiring 'yes'/'no' responses. This had the effect of excluding people without a household telephone (including over 90% of Aboriginal people in Town Camps) and people with limited English comprehension (Crundall & Moon 2003, p. 8). It evoked a limited range of responses: either validating or diminishing the decision of the Liquor Commission in relation to the grog trials. The failure to tap into the concerns of the community meant there was a high refusal rate in responding to the survey (Sherwood 2010, p. 317). Market Equity's research model validated white peoples' perceptions and reinforced assumptions that "Town Campers do not care about the grog problems" and do not have worthy opinions (Foster et al. 2006, p. 214).

Although both research projects acquired ethics approval from the Central Australian Human Research Ethics Committee, concerns were raised that the government contracted research had not accounted for the needs of Aboriginal residents. The peak health organisation, Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, and Tangentyere raised objections that the two-week telephone survey conducted by Market Equity would exclude Aboriginal people (Gray 2003, p. 23). Market Equity had no accountability to Aboriginal people, including Town Campers, who would be affected by its research. Tangentyere on the other hand prioritised reciprocity in its research design. First, there was an emphasis on producing results that would help Town Campers and Tangentyere advocate for their needs, by demonstrating them

through a research-base. Second, there was a focus on addressing concerns raised by participants, rather than listening for the sake of documenting alone. As former Tangentyere Council Executive Director William Tilmouth articulated, there should be “no survey without service” (quoted in Foster et al. 2006, p. 216). Researchers were tasked with discussing issues that may arise during Tangentyere’s discursive survey (such as with housing maintenance or services) and provide follow-up assistance. In this way, Tangentyere researchers stepped outside the typical roles of researchers because they were not solely focused on meeting the objectives of their discipline. This is something that university researchers could consider more carefully and consistently ask: what capacity do we have to link participants to supports, services and Indigenous organisations; to make phone calls and arrange meetings; to advocate, and to problem-solve on their behalf?

It follows from the divergent methodologies, the findings and outputs from each project were presented in significantly different ways. Tangentyere’s findings demonstrated a holistic engagement with the issue of alcohol restrictions. It found support among Town Camp residents for extending the trial restrictions and including other types of liquor, as well as for other policy changes, including empowering Town Camps to address issues underlying excessive alcohol consumption (Foster et al. 2006, p. 216). The results were categorised according to age, gender and place of Town Camp, which provided an understanding of the differential impacts of the grog trials, the various perspectives and the diverse needs around reducing alcohol consumption. In terms of outputs, Tangentyere provided its research findings to both the Liquor Commission and to Town Camps in Plain English form, and held meetings at Town Camps to discuss the findings. University researchers also helped to write a response to Market Equity’s research for the Liquor Commission (see Gray 2003).



Tangentyere was focussed on ensuring that the research was controlled and owned by the Aboriginal community and accountable to its people (Foster et al. 2006, p. 214).

Market Equity produced quantitative data on the support for the grog trials (identifying ‘mixed results’). The outcomes from the research reflected researchers’ pre-existing questions (Sherwood 2010, pp. 319-320). Its generic data did not reflect how the perspectives on the trials were related to age, gender, background or place of residence. This presumed a one-size-fits-all approach to policy-making, which, as Tangentyere’s research highlighted, is in itself insufficient to address the varying requirements among the demographics. Market Equity’s data was presented to government and they did not follow-up with their participants to provide feedback. Despite the Town Camp survey that demonstrated support for extending and expanding the trials, the Liquor Commission cited the findings of Market Equity in its decision to rein-in the alcohol restrictions (Foster et al. 2006, p. 216, Sherwood 2010, p. 222).

The evaluation of the grog trials highlighted to Tangentyere the importance of Aboriginal-owned research. It demonstrated the valuable skills and knowledge that its researchers brought to bear on the project (including vis-à-vis the institutional researchers) and the need for ongoing development of Aboriginal expertise in the area of research (Tangentyere 2008c). Tangentyere went on to establish an ongoing Research Hub to conduct research explicitly to “improve life for Town Campers” and inform Tangentyere’s service delivery (Foster et al. 2006, p. 214, Tangentyere 2008c). It has undertaken studies *inter alia* of Aboriginal mobility between Town Camps and remote communities, and the impact of the Northern Territory Intervention (see Tangentyere 2008c).

We are currently working with the Research Hub as part of our Australian Research Council project (with Harry Blagg) on the Federal Government's regulation of Indigenous safety strategies and community patrols in Central Australia. This includes researching Tangentyere's own night and youth patrols (Tangentyere 2008d) to improve its services and evaluation methodologies. Our work with Tangentyere impresses upon us that as university-based researchers we will never have the skills, standpoint or experience to enable us to replicate Tangentyere's methodologies or epistemologies. However, we can seek to contribute to the strength of its Research Hub through working with its researchers and stepping outside the regimes of the truth that shape our disciplines.

### **Conclusion: The Perils of Positivism and Prospects for Post-disciplinary Criminology**

Post-disciplinary approaches to criminology promote place-based, Indigenous-centred and culturally and historically contextual understandings of social harm for Indigenous people and social resilience. They draw on the post-disciplinary developments in other disciplines that reject "universalistic, positivist ... [and] reductionist approaches" to disciplinary knowledge (Jessop & Sum 2001, p. 94). Rather than simply relying on disciplinary expertise, post-disciplinary research highlights the value of Indigenous perspectives to issues affecting Indigenous people. Just as critical, it brings into sharp relief the subjectivity of positivist research, with its narrow lines of inquiry that either problematise or exclude Indigenous people.

The distinct approaches to researching the grog trials by Tangentyere and Market Equity signal distinctions between positivist criminology and post-disciplinary research. On the one hand, Market Equity produces globalised data based on pre-existing questions that are formulated without local consultation, with no accountability to Indigenous people or

reciprocation to its participants. Tangentyere does not presume objectivity but deliberately seek to represent the interests and needs of Indigenous people living on Town Camps. The questions were formulated by Indigenous researchers and organisations, and the results convey a richness of perspectives based on holistic needs around wellbeing that underpin alcohol issues. The results do not proclaim universality, but accurately represent the views of Town Camp residents by virtue of their broad coverage. By contrast, Market Equity's research has very low levels of survey take-up despite its claim to impartiality and neutrality.

Positivist criminology upholds Western values, methods and power structures that serve to disempower and punish Indigenous people. It serves the interest of a criminal justice system embedded in the penal colonial system that was imposed on Indigenous people from its outset, and continues to over-incarcerate Indigenous people with devastating effects to their wellbeing. Far from being a rational system, it imposes significant risks to Indigenous communities. Through its claim to universal expertise, positivism disavows Indigenous epistemologies, methodologies and ontologies. Asking post-disciplinary questions is therefore necessary to resist the disciplining of Indigenous people, while employing post-disciplinary practices enables Indigenous self-governance in research. By thinking outside of our discipline we can unsettle assumptions about Indigenous people being a risk, which are repetitively confirmed in positivist research, and redirect attention to the risk that the state has presented to Indigenous people and its legacy of intergenerational trauma. It enables Indigenous people to be drivers and not merely subjects of research by seeking to further Indigenous research leadership notwithstanding its tensions with disciplinary truths.

As Wolmark and Gates-Stuart (2004, p. 4) state, we must work towards shifting relations of power in our disciplinary space and creating new cultural narratives that are “inherently

transgressive”. This includes being self-critical of our role in reproducing disciplinary knowledge and practices, and being open to the critical potential of post-disciplinary approaches that include relinquishing some of our power as researchers to Indigenous organisations by supporting and sustaining local Indigenous-owned research. Through transforming and decolonising disciplinary knowledge and methods, we can begin to shift the focus from Indigenous criminality to Indigenous justice.

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