Special Edition: Interrogating Methodologies

Abstract
It is with great excitement and anticipation that I present this special edition of Aussie Criminology, ‘interrogating methodologies’. In this edition we invite scholars to reflect and critically appraise the methodologies, theories, concepts and assumptions implicit in their research design and approach. The purpose of this special edition is to generate candid discussion and debate on some of the methodological approaches commonly adopted within criminological inquiry. In the interests of deeper understanding, we invited scholars to reflect critically, candidly and honestly—without fear of judgement or ridicule—on some of the underlying assumptions implicit in their approaches to studies of crime, criminalisation and criminal justice, most especially in relation to Aboriginal peoples. It is in this spirit of mutual learning and freedom from judgement, that we ask you too, dear reader, to approach the articles of this satirical (and entirely fictitious) special edition.

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Special Edition: Interrogating Methodologies

Introduction to the Special Edition

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* Editor’s note: As the author John Le Carré wrote in The Constant Gardener: “Nobody in this story, and no outfit or corporation, thank God, is based upon an actual person or outfit in the real world.”
and confusing times for studies of Australian criminal ‘justice’—times of mass incarceration, racial law and order politics, neoliberal crime control, neo-colonialism, neo-paternalism, increasing disparities in wealth and inequality and despotic populism. These are times of skyrocketing imprisonment of Australia’s most disadvantaged and marginalised communities: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, asylum seekers, young people, the mentally ill, children in out of home care, among many other populations. The exposure of the mistreatment of Aboriginal young people in Don Dale Youth Correction Centre and the mounting evidence of mistreatment of those in detention is a source of national shame and embarrassment. These are dark times indeed. Times such as these call for compassion and honesty, though perhaps most importantly of all, they call for understanding. This includes, of course, an appreciation and awareness of our own (in)advertent complicity in these confusing times of ‘fake news’, political spin, vested interests, Twitter soundbites, propaganda, ‘research impact’ and disciplinary knowledge production. It is in this spirit of openness and critical engagement that we offer this special edition on criminological research methodologies and approaches. Let’s see what these guys have to say!

Amanda Porter
Juvenile Delinquency in New South Wales: A Perennial Problem

Joe Bloggs†

Key words: youth offending, delinquency, prison reform.

This paper adopts a quantitative approach to the study of ‘youth offending’, by which I mean changes in levels of recorded crime rates (you know, the official ones recorded by the police and private security agencies). In this paper I adopt a ‘positivist methodological approach’. By this I simply mean that I approach the central problematic—that of youth offending—from the starting point that ‘crime’ and ‘criminality’ can be studied scientifically.

‘Criminology’ is the study of crime, criminality and criminogenic behaviour. It is a social science after all, let’s not forget that. And so, accordingly, our role as criminologists really ought to be to approach such kinds of questions objectively. (All that sociology of crime and ‘crime as a social construct’ we learnt about at

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university, I mean, what a bunch of bolshy baloney! Frankly that place had far too many latte-sipping lefties for my liking. Those folk are simply too passionate about things to see matters rationally and as they really are, as one ought to. I was so glad to get out of that place and into the real world and start making the big $$$.)

Anyway, as I was saying: in this study I want to study juvenile offending patterns in South Australia. As part of this, I will explore a set of related questions which extend seemingly rationally and naturally from this central approach. I adopt a quantitative approach using official statistics and Qi Squares.

An implicit assumption underlying this methodological approach—one which I may or may not openly discuss—is that ‘delinquent juveniles’ (ah, the youf these days! What with all their Instagram, sexting, graffiti, spraying graffiti all over my negatively-geared property portfolio and other delinquent behaviour. What a nuisance. All that smashed avocado is eating their brains out. What they really need to do is stop gallivanting around with their hooligan protests and occupy movements and get a job!) are a ‘problem population’ when it comes to crime.

As I was saying, I adopt this methodology because I think criminology is only of use in so far as it can contribute objectivity, rationality and reason to criminal policy and penal reform. And as criminologists we really ought to focus on practical things like policy and recommendations—not all this postmodern mumbo jumbo and ivory tower philosophising about ‘governmentality’, ‘intersectionality’ (I don’t know what either of these terms actually mean but they certainly don’t sound very scientific to me) and the like.
Indeed, there is a growing body of criminological literature on the problem of delinquent youth and an urgent, corresponding need for penal reform‡ (Perez et al 2016; Intravia et al 2016).§

And while I have your attention, let’s not rule out privatisation of prisons as a potential solution in this regard. Let’s approach these issues objectively and weigh up the available information and impartial sources. For example, David Biles (2009:322) notes that ‘…possibly the most important gain from the introduction of private prisons, in addition to a considerable saving of public money, is the impact they have had on the running of government prisons, which have significantly improved in the past two decades’. And he’s not just any criminologist, he was the founder of the Australian and New Zealand Society of Criminology! So, you know, the bloke knows what he’s talking about! Ah, now I come to recall: I remember reading Biles’ (2009) research in a submission to an inquiry on private prisons in Australia (Hall 2009: 2). That research was most useful. Yes, practical policy-oriented research and recommendations that are developed to influence reform and have real life ‘impact’. Ah, impact, now that’s what we want! Impact, impact, impact! Apparently that’s what governments and the universities think is important too.

‡ Editor’s note: The rise of private prisons and security firms have been a feature of Australia’s booming crime control industry, absorbs a massive chunk of Australian taxpayer dollars every year. These multinational corporations hold lucrative contracts in a rapidly expanding crime control industry including corrections, off-shore detention, corrections, juvenile detention centers and prison transportation services. Regrettably, the Editors of this Special Edition received no submissions on this topic.

§ Editor’s note: I have included two examples by way of illustration. But, if you’re interested, why not try this experiment? First, go online to any of the major criminology research databases and type in ‘G4S’, ‘GLS’, ‘Serc’, ‘GEO Group’, ‘KBR’ or any of the private prison or security firms. As you scan through the list, observe the quantity of research being conducted on this issue. Observe also the nature of the research being conducted, the kinds of research questions being asked, and, importantly, the affiliations of the researcher. As an interesting additional experiment: now look back over that list and see how many Australian criminologists are currently writing on this topic.
I know that some criminologists see things differently (like those rabid lefties who keep shouting at me about someone called ‘Mr Ward’, something called ‘Black Lives Matter’, and all these deaths in detention centres around the globe, and the whole ‘Paradise Papers’ debacle). Ah, those bleeding-heart types! Too emblazoned with rage and self-righteousness to see past the prejudice of their own convictions. Besides, haven’t they heard of vicarious responsibility? It’s not as though I’m personally responsible for those unspeakable tragedies. It’s not as though the company committed any crimes or anything.

Oh, how I really do wish those chardonnay socialist types could just accept that we have a difference of opinion and leave it all to the ‘marketplace of ideas’. Moreover I wish they’d stop pester ing me at the International Conference of the Society of Criminology so I can enjoy my canapés in peace like everybody else!); for we mustn’t let passion interfere with our rational and objective assessment of the problem, nor must we let emotion outweigh our rational sensibilities.

References


**Editor’s note: Mr Ward was an Aboriginal Elder and Ngaanyatjarra Traditional Owner from Warburton, Western Australia. He died on 26 January 2008—a day many still call ‘Australia Day’—while being escorted by GSL Pty Ltd in the desert in the searing heat. You can read more about the circumstances of this death in custody, as well as GSL Pty Ltd’s involvement, here: <http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/who-killed-mr-ward/1711330>**


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Offending Patterns Among Aborigines: A Positivist Criminological Approach

 Frederic Smith III‡‡

Key words: Aboriginality, violent crime, crime statistics, policy reform.

This paper is concerned with the nature and extent of ‘Aboriginal offending’. I’m not going to explicitly discuss or expand upon my rationale for focusing on ‘Aboriginal offending’ because I don’t think that I need to and because I don’t think criminologists really ought to do this. As the eminent criminologist Don Weatherburn (2014: 8) recently acknowledged, ‘contact with the criminal justice system appears to be criminogenic’. And he’s not just any criminologist, he’s the Director of the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research. He’s an expert and, we really ought to trust the experts. In order to examine the issue of Indigenous offending, I am going to look at official statistics across several towns with high Aboriginal populations. In this study I will employ a comparative analysis of statistical data across jurisdictions. From the data I will make a set of conclusions and recommendations (sure, there might be a

few sweeping claims and generalisations but hopefully none of those pesky intellectuals will pick up on them!) about penal reform. These recommendations will then be circulated and read by government advisors and high-ranking bureaucrats who oversee decision-making on penal policy and reform (the proper role of research).

For the sake of this special edition, I will say a few words about myself. Hmmm, I’ve never had to think about my identity relates to power or research before, how novel! Well, I guess I’m just your average white dude really. I grew up in an affluent suburb of Sydney, I completed my LLB at Sydney University and I have enjoyed a fairly comfortable middleclass existence. Sure, I’ve spent my life inside the comforts of my air-conditioned office and sure, I have never stepped foot in an Aboriginal community—but I have a few Aboriginal friends (ah, if only they could be more like those good Aborigines: now that’s the problem! If they could just stay off the grog, stop their criminal behaviour and get a job!). In all honesty though, I don’t really get what all this has to do with criminology and the study of crime.

References

An Evaluation of the Cashless Welfare Card: A Very Objective Study

Anne Elk§§

Key words: Welfare dependency, evaluation, policy reform.

This paper is concerned with evaluating the effectiveness of the cashless welfare card recently introduced by the Commonwealth Government. As a team of researchers we are concerned, above all else, with the process of evaluation being a neutral and objective endeavour. We will seek to evaluate the Cashless Welfare Card trial in strict accordance with a set of criteria provided by the Commonwealth Government (who we would like to thank for generously supporting this research—thank you for all your $$$$).

For the sake of expediency, we will conveniently ignore the socio-political context of these contentious trials (and the significant body of work by respected researchers and advocates who have been investigating this important social justice for the past

§§ Research Officer, ORIMA Private Research Pty Ltd.
decade. Let’s hope and pray they don’t notice!). Even though this project is involving human subjects, we will be able to avoid all the hassle of thinking about questions of ethics and going through pesky Human Research Ethics Committees and the like, because we are a private research firm and not affiliated with any university. In this project, we will deploy a set of anonymous Internet surveys of the participants in the welfare trial most of whom are Indigenous.

We will use $100 Bunnings™ and Woolworths™ vouchers as incentives to increase the survey participation rate. As for the dissemination of our research data, we usually don’t have to bother with the process of getting our findings published in peer-reviewed journals such as this one (we have our own arsenal of contacts with editors at The Australian, Ministers, high-ranking policy officials and right wing think tanks who take care of all that!!).
Policing Rural Communities: A Colour-blind Imperialist

Methodology

Charles Mountbatton-Windsor***

Vincent Manningham-Buller†††

Key words: Policing, public safety, community policing, police reform.

In this project we are concerned with the policing of rural communities. By this we mean, we are interested in learning about policing in rural communities, including ‘the challenges that police face’ in policing these communities and efforts to develop community policing. We believe such questions are important and that it is equally important to study such things scientifically.

Our research approach is practical and policy-oriented—we believe our publications will be most useful for the police in this regard. In this study we will look adopt a comparative approach, looking at the nature of policing in six rural communities.

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These are just six rural Australian communities: two mining communities, two agriculture communities and two Aboriginal communities (you know, where the authentic *full-blooded Aborigines* live, not these half-breeds or—worse still—those fair-skinned Aborigines that Andrew Bolt talks about. Ah, god bless that brave soul of a man for having the courage to speak truth to *power* in this era of microaggressions and political correctness which is stifling talk on the real issues. Ah, now *that’s* the problem. If only those unauthentic assimilated ones would keep out of it, and if only the authentic Aborigines would just lay off the grog, stop committing crime, *and get a job*!).

Let us emphasise that this project is about *policing*, it most certainly *not* about policing Aboriginal communities (As we keep having to remind people: these *aren’t* Aboriginal communities you see. Well yes sure, three are former reservation sites, two have very significant Aboriginal populations, and the other is home to a proud yet humble Aboriginal community—though we don’t see why this matters much). As this project is about *policing* we must, above all else, approach such problematics objectively.

This project has been riddled with offsets and difficulties from the outset, let me tell you! For starters, the Human Research Ethics Committee pointed out several problems with my methodological approach. They say we need to read the *AIATSIS Guidelines* or something because the communities that we’re looking at have significant Aboriginal populations. All this bureaucratic red tape and uppity others trying to control and interfere with the research process!
In our examination of the policing of rural communities, we are going to hang out with the Western Australian Police Service (‘WAPS’) and interview some key individuals (mainly police officers and a few other middleclass folk—don’t want to hang around too long or speak with any of those angry, violent Blacks) about policing and the ‘challenges’ the police face in policing Indigenous communities.

Sure, there have been a few deaths in custody and there are a few other signs of issues that might be simmering under the surface—best not to pay this too much mind. Let’s focus our attention on producing a report which will be of use and which will really be valuable for the state police.

Ah, it’s really such a shame really. If only they could be more educated like us, or have the good sense to listen to experts on this one. We’ve been avid readers of (whatever conservative propaganda The Australian publishes on) Aboriginal affairs for the past 50 years and we’re Professors of Criminology!
Decolonising Criminology: A Non-Indigenous Perspective

*Em Power*††

**Key words:** criminology, Indigeneity, post-coloniality.

This paper is concerned with the decolonisation of experiences of Indigenous Australians and the criminal justice system and of criminology as a discipline. I’m a non-Indigenous academic, but I really care about Indigenous social justice and, above all, I want to *give voice* to Aborigines. My work mainly examines sentencing remarks and jurisprudence. I haven’t done much fieldwork or had many experiences in Aboriginal communities (don’t ask me too many questions about that). Having said that, I have employed several Aboriginal research assistants over the years (the writing of some of these research assistants appears throughout my own publications, gosh I feel bad about that! I hope their experiences didn’t turn either of them off a career in academia and *above all* I hope none of my non-Indigenous colleagues find out—that would be *so* embarrassing!) and I’m very grateful for their *insights* on Indigenous justice issues.

†† Lecturer, Faculty of Criminology.
I am interested in post-colonial theory, critical race theory and Indigenous studies generally—I might even cite an Aboriginal scholar occasionally! (it’s just that, you know, Henry Reynolds, Judith Butler and Nancy Fraser just put it so much more eloquently!). I have read Decolonizing Methodologies (Smith 1999) and Indigenous Criminology (Cunneen and Tauri 2016). These were really eye-opening and interesting, I guess—but if I’m honest, I’m not sure if I fully understood the implications of these manifestos and how they relate to my own work and position of power as a non-Indigenous scholar. (God I wish my Indigenous research assistants were still around to help me make sense of all this complexity! Perhaps if I throw in a few references to ‘interstitial spaces’, ‘hybridity’ and ‘liminality’ it might deflect attention away from the fact I have no idea what I’m talking about). Deep down, however, I do really care about justice (for the sake of my own shameless self-promoting career trajectory) and I do have important contributions to make.

References