

Editorial: Knowledge Equity and Naming Names in Carceral Research

This special issue emerged as a sort of experiment to see if we could disrupt the knowledge inequities involved in doing carceral research. We have sought, in other words, to explore other ways of “knowing” about carceral spaces.

Social science research almost always involves a distinct power imbalance between the people doing research and the people being researched. This inequality is significantly prominent in prison research. People with lived experience of imprisonment are of great interest to researchers and the consumers of social research, and are frequently approached to contribute to research studies of one sort or another. Rarely do they have any meaningful participation in the design and operationalisation of this research or the questions being asked.

Despite the growth of co-produced research in recent years, people in prison rarely see the results of the research they contribute to and have no idea how their inputs were used or to what end. Who funded the research? Who was it for? Who benefited as a result of the research? Research participants may never know. If they try to chase down the research online once released from custody, they may find that the outputs are hidden behind paywalls, and only accessible to individuals with access to a university library. This is knowledge inequity.

In “The Convict as Researcher,” the legendary prisons researcher Hans Toch, confessed his unease at these power imbalances inherent in the criminological research:

During rare moments of honesty, we may admit that what we ask is unreasonable and unfair. ... After all, at best we are supplicants, and at worst, invaders demanding booty of captive audiences. In return for a vague promise or a modest remuneration we expect a fellow human being to bare his [or her] soul or to make controversial and potentially incriminating statements. The ‘communication’ is one way – the researcher maintains his [or her] position as an ‘objective’ recipient of non-reciprocated information. ...

I speak with considerable humility here, because I almost once again made the mistake of taking my Viennese accent and my parochial concerns into prison cells and police stations, expecting to secure frank answers to prying questions. I have done this sort of thing often in the past. This strategy strikes me now not only as naïve but offensive.¹

This special issue responds in a reparative manner to the “naivety” and “offensiveness” highlighted by Toch. Toch also points us to the multitude of deeper complexities inherent in contesting with his admissions. This includes our own understanding of knowledge production, our own morality and ethics in knowing, our understanding of exploitation, of ownership, of our purpose and intention and our own role as actors in the world of social injustice. All of the authors contributing to this special PSJ edition, whether they originate from academia or carceral spaces or straddle both, are grappling with these questions. In the nine papers presented, authors explore new attempts at co-production and collaboration as an attempt to transcend some of these power imbalances and honour a commitment to knowledge equity.

Knowledge equity has emerged conceptually against a backdrop which historically has valued one way of knowing over another and in so doing has applied valuations to knowledge and similarly to knowledge producers. We see this in the ranking of those deemed reliable as knowledge producers and defining reliable sites of knowledge production (e.g., ranking universities against one another for example, through mechanisms like the Research Excellence Framework, or valuing research over community consultation). Such regulation has created powerful tools for controlling what is researched, how it is researched, by whom it is researched, and what knowledge is deemed valid and platformed. These favoured methodologies invisibilise research participants as knowledge creators and assign ownership of knowledge to an expert class. In so doing, alternative ways of knowing through collaborative methodologies, like participatory action research, have been minimised

1. Toch, H. (1967). The Convict as Researcher. *Trans-action*, 4, 72–75.

and restricted. Criminological research has, to date, firmly placed the knower as the researcher and the prisoner as the researched. This edition seeks to disrupt such assumptions and bring those incarcerated or formerly incarcerated into the knowledge creation process fully as knowledge producers emancipating them in this instance from the confines of research objectification.

We hope that what emerges from these efforts might be seen as the emergence of “equitable epistemology” -- an approach to knowledge creation that incorporates academic inquiry and personal lived experiences, without hierarchical structure, to create inclusive and emancipatory ways of knowing. Through creating knowledge in this way, it is our ambition that the broader research community may come to recognise such practices as a significant mark of empirical quality and value.

An addendum on author names

The co-production of this special issue revealed some of the challenges of achieving knowledge equity. One issue will jump out immediately: readers will see that article authors are introduced by first name only (with a note at the end of each article on how to cite the publication when referencing). We understand this looks very strange, but it is an attempt at equity in the face of structural resistance to the naming of select

incarcerated authors. With fulsome support from the editorial leadership of the PSJ, we pursued this matter in this Special Issue. It was important to us that all authors receive full and equal credit for their contributions. In the end, HMPPS determined that although some co-authors could be named under the existing guidelines, a small number of co-authors could not be named due to their specific index offences.

As such, we were faced with the difficult position of being able to name some co-authors fully and then some co-authors would be identified only by their first name. This did not strike us as very equitable, especially in a special issue devoted to the concept of knowledge equity. As such, we decided that if some of our collaborators could not have surnames atop the article, then none of us would. Admittedly, this act of solidarity is symbolic; we do include a ‘how to cite’ note at the bottom of the articles, so our authors (many of whom are previously unpublished) can receive full credit for their contributions.

However, much more work is clearly needed on this important question, and we hope this Special Issue will help pry open a wider conversation about knowledge ownership and recognition. In fact, as a result of our experience as guest editors, the three of us have decided to initiate an interdisciplinary advisory commission to delve more deeply into the ethical, moral challenges associated with realising equitable epistemology. Watch this space.