



Yarning and appreciative inquiry: The use of culturally appropriate and respectful research methods when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in Australian prisons

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Abstract

With First Peoples and non-First Peoples scholars alike questioning the efficacy of research methods based solely upon accepted social science research paradigms with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations, innovative and ontologically inclusive alternatives require consideration. Research conducted with incarcerated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in the Northern Territory and Western Australia may provide such an opportunity, arguing for a method of ‘research at the interface’ that utilises appreciative inquiry with culturally appropriate conversations (yarning). Employed across four prisons, the interface research method was applied as an innovative solution to measuring prison performance. It highlighted the lived experience of incarceration while re-imagining the prison, as it exists when it functions at its best. The article begins with a snapshot of the research conducted with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in prisons across the Northern Territory and Western Australia; this provides a frame through which to consider the efficacy of interfacing First Peoples research paradigms with Western traditional modes of research. Furthermore, the innovative application of appreciative inquiry to the prison is discussed. Given that appreciative inquiry explores and privileges the narrative as a means of making sense of the prison experience, the authors suggest it complements the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tradition of ‘yarning’. A yarning style represents a way of ensuring cultural safety, respect and the utilisation of First Peoples ontology to research conducted with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. Overall, it is delineated how interfacing appreciative inquiry and yarning may provide a viable alternative to the deep colonising and perpetually oppressive use of Western modes of scholarship when engaging in research with First Peoples.

Keywords

Research methods, yarning, appreciative inquiry, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, First Peoples, indigenous, cultural respect, cultural safety, innovation, prison

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, in conjunction with other First Peoples around the globe, represent a significantly over-researched population (Rigney, 1999, 2006; Smith, 1999, 2012). Yet, so little of the academic scholarship conducted is invested in utilising First Peoples ontology (Cunneen and Rowe, 2014; Kendall et al., 2011; Rigney, 1999, 2006), instead privileging the modes of knowing, doing and understanding as envisaged by Western standards (Bessarab and Ng’andu, 2010; Cunneen and Rowe, 2014; Rigney, 1999, 2006; Smith, 1999, 2012). Despite the common propensity to overlay Western, often colonial, ideals of

traditional academic scholarship, commentators such as Blagg (2008a) have suggested that, in regard to understanding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experiences, Anglo-Australians

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... do not know or understand aspects of Aboriginal social reality and, more importantly, [they] ... cannot make sense of things from an Indigenous world view by simply extending [their] ... own brand of reason to cover the Indigenous world. (p. 57; see also Rigney, 1999, 2006; Smith, 1999, 2012)

Therefore, Blagg (2008a) and Weatherburn (2014), though both non-First Peoples scholars, suggest that a prerequisite for understanding not only life experiences but also the impact of colonising and deep colonising processes is consultation with First Peoples communities. Similarly, indigenous scholar Lester-Irabinna Rigney (1999) proposes an interrogation of Western academic 'ontologies (assumptions about the nature of reality), epistemologies (the ways of knowing that reality) and axiologies (the disputational contours of right and wrong or morality and values)' (p. 109; see also Moreton-Robinson, 2013: 337; Scheurich and Young, 1997: 6) in order to contribute to 'the self determination and liberation struggles as defined and controlled by [First Peoples] ... communities' (Rigney, 1999: 110).

Non-First Peoples often conduct both research and subsequent policy making with seemingly benevolent intentions under the guise of 'decolonisation'. According to Chilisa (2012), decolonisation is 'a process of [centring] the concerns and worldviews of the [colonised] Other so that they understand themselves through their own assumptions and perspectives' (p. 13). Decolonising research methods, conversely, means that 'the worldviews of those who have suffered a long history of oppression and [marginalisation] are given space to communicate from their frames of reference' (Chilisa, 2012: 14).

However, prima facie decolonising initiatives frequently have the opposite impact by embedding a deeper colonisation, perpetuating First Peoples repression (Marchetti, 2006; Rose, 1996). The Northern Territory Intervention and the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC) have been identified as two such processes (see Douglas and Finnane, 2012; Howard-Wagner and Kelly, 2011; Marchetti, 2006). For example, the RCIADIC identified and detailed multiple traumas suffered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in detention, both through formal incarceration and time served in police custody across Australia, and proposed a suite of recommendations based on the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Johnston, 1991a, 1991b, 1991c, 1991d, 1991e; see also Marchetti, 2006; Rynne and Cassematis, 2015). However, the RCIADIC ultimately, albeit inadvertently, adopted processes that aligned with the colonising agenda. According to Marchetti (2006), the RCIADIC represents a deep colonising initiative by virtue of 'its inability to understand and incorporate [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander] ... views and values' (p. 454). Nonetheless, the RCIADIC represents an important step in imagining the need to reduce to over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in correctional institutions across Australia.

The wider acceptance and application of First Peoples research methodologies may represent a more practical and culturally respectful means of re-imagining the way scholars understand the lived experience of First Peoples. Leaders in First Peoples scholarship such as Martin (2003, 2008), Moreton-Robinson (2000), Rigney (1999, 2006), Smith (1999, 2012) and Wilson (2008) have highlighted the importance of shifting from the ongoing repression of First Peoples research methods to improve First Peoples wellbeing. Where cultural knowledge, philosophies and practices are ignored and there is a lack of understanding of First Peoples knowledge on the part of the non-First Peoples researcher and/or research team, there is an inherent risk of further trauma and deep colonisation (National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC), 2003).

Therefore, it is suggested that to embed cultural safety in research involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, precedence must be given to prioritising First Peoples research methodologies. This article advocates *interfacing* as opposed to *integrating* two discrete modes of research: yarning and appreciative inquiry ('AI') (Durie, 2005; Rynne and Cassematis, 2015) in order to exemplify a way in which academic and cultural reciprocity may occur regarding First Peoples and non-First Peoples research methods. In particular, this dual approach was utilised in an attempt to understand the experience of incarceration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in the Northern Territory and Western Australia. This article, then, presents a rationale behind re-imagining the interface between First Peoples and non-First Peoples ontology.

First, the need to re-imagine prison performance is assessed in light of the dramatic over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in Northern Territory and Western Australian prisons. Statistics are identified that exemplify the breadth of the over-representation, along with a brief snapshot of the research being conducted with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in four correctional institutions: Darwin Correctional Centre, Alice Springs Correctional Centre, West Kimberly Regional Prison and Eastern Goldfields Regional Prison. Second, the relevance of the AI paradigm in reconceptualising the measurement of prison performance is highlighted, with particular attention to its potential advantages with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and in correctional institutions. Third, the utilisation and efficacy of yarning as a data collection method are outlined. In particular, attention is paid to how acceptance of yarning as a method of data collection can advance the First Peoples research agenda, along with the advancement of cultural respect and safety when researchers, both First Peoples and non-First Peoples alike, engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. Finally, how yarning can be used in conjunction with AI is explored. Issues such as tokenism and deep colonisation are critiqued, with the aim of developing a more appropriate method that embraces and privileges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

ontology while simultaneously utilising the established mores of Western academic scholarship.

The need to re-imagine the measurement of prison performance in Australia

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples constitute approximately 2.5% of the Australian population (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2013) yet encompass over 27% of the Australian prisoner population (ABS, 2014). The vast over-representation of First Peoples men and women in Australian prisons demands that developments be made in an attempt to quell the perpetuation of trauma, the continuation of colonisation and the removal of individuals not only from community but also from families, clans and skin groups. On average, 9940 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were incarcerated nationally in the June quarter of 2015 (ABS, 2015), with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women constituting 10.1% ($n=1002$) of the incarcerated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population (ABS, 2015). Additionally, approximately 39% of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women incarcerated nationally were located in Western Australia ($n=265$) and the Northern Territory ($n=123$), with Queensland ($n=229$) and New South Wales ($n=293$) constituting a further 52%.

Despite the dramatic over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in Queensland and New South Wales correctional institutions, the rate at which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are incarcerated in Western Australia and the Northern Territory signals a possible agenda of mass incarceration (Blagg, 2008a; Brown, 2010) or hyperincarceration (Cunneen et al., 2013) that requires immediate attention. While incarcerated at rates of 361.3 per 100,000 of the adult Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander female population in Queensland, and similarly 433.2 per 100,000 in New South Wales (ABS, 2015), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in Western Australia and the Northern Territory are imprisoned at rates of 901.4 per 100,000 and 522.4 per 100,000, respectively. Both rest above the national average of 450.7 per 100,000 (ABS, 2015), Western Australia in particular being of concern.

Over two-thirds (67.5%) of incarcerated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women nationally have served a prior term of imprisonment, with 70.3% and 53.1% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in Western Australia and the Northern Territory, respectively, returning to prison (ABS, 2014). By comparison, 40.4% of non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women nationally returned to prison (ABS, 2014), with 35.3% in Western Australia and 23.1% in the Northern Territory having served prior terms of imprisonment. Such a pattern of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander female re-incarceration raises questions concerning the efficacy of prison as a form of punishment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. As Rynne and Cassematis

(2015) recently maintained, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander views on punishment, particularly in those closely aligned with customary life, are largely divergent from the traditional Western conceptualisation of criminal justice (see also Law Reform Commission of Western Australia, 2005). Customary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander punishment processes are largely restorative, despite the physical ramifications of corporal punishments such as spearing, aimed at mending the bond between the offender and the victim and/or victim's family, as well as the wider community (Bell, 1998; Broome, 2010; Law Reform Commission of Western Australia, 2005; Rynne and Cassematis, 2015). Often, punishment, as understood by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and women, is not exacted for their wrongdoing until they have undergone traditional forms of punishment ('payback'), despite having been processed through the Australian Westminster system of criminal justice (i.e. incarceration).

The qualitative difference in the construction of punishment, especially given the high rate at which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are re-incarcerated, questions the prison's ability to deliver in its mission of deterrence and behaviour modification. However, this failure may be a symptom of wider justice-based policies regarding the way crime is 'managed'. There has been a marked shift in criminal justice policy from an agenda of penal welfarism, or rehabilitation, to that of population management (Anthony, 2013; Beck, 1992; Feeley and Simon, 1992; Garland, 2001; Hudson, 1987). Rather than attempting to reduce crime through behaviour management and policies of rehabilitation and deterrence in correctional institutions, prisoners are re-imagined as risky populations that require constant supervision (Beck, 1992; Feeley and Simon, 1992). Similarly, the plethora of coercive government policy regarding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the wake of colonisation earmarks Australia's First Peoples as in need of similar control. Such overlaying of political and historical action prioritises the urgency with which the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women must be addressed.

Rather than focusing upon the frontend administration of criminal justice policy by police and the courts, the authors and others have sought to understand the experience of incarceration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. A surfeit of research currently exists regarding net widening and the over-policing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (see Crime and Misconduct Commission, 2009; Cunneen, 1992; Sarre, 1999; Williams-Mozely, 2009). Similarly, a wealth of scholarship exists regarding the 'trivial' nature of the offences that bring the majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples into contact with the criminal justice system (see Fernandez and Loh, 2001; Ferrante et al., 2001; Gardiner and Takagaki, 2002; Loh et al., 2009; McRae et al., 1999; Payne, 1991). Moreover, there has been a multitude of research regarding the comparative harshness or leniency suffered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

peoples at the hands of judiciaries across Australia during sentencing (see (Bond et al., 2011; Bond and Jeffries, 2010, 2011a, 2011b; Jeffries and Bond, 2009, 2010). A gap, however, exists in the understanding of how the prison is lived and survived by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, made especially important by the acknowledgement of qualitative difference in the construction of punishment across culturally distinct populations. Furthermore, the relative neglect of women generally and First Nation's women specifically in the construction of items aimed at measuring prison performance (Belknap and Holsinger, 2006; Bloom et al., 2003; Morash, 2009; Reisig et al., 2006; Van Voorhis et al., 2010; Wright et al., 2007) identifies another oppression of qualitative difference requiring remedy.

The repression of the experiences of women is especially important given commentary by Moreton-Robinson (2013) on the need to develop an Indigenous women's standpoint theory that 'challenges the Cartesian mind/body split through a gendered conceptualization of embodiment ... [that] generates problematics informed by [Australian First Peoples] knowledges and experiences' (p. 332) and Rigney's (1999) framing of feminist rationales as an epistemology of liberation, contesting the social construction of knowledge and instead seeking emancipation from oppressive conditions meant to subjugate, in this instance, women (see feminist commentary by Adler, 1975; Box, 1983; Canter, 1982; Carlen, 1983; Chesney-Lind, 1989, 2006; Chesney-Lind and Sheldon, 1992; Lather, 1991, 1992; Mies, 1983; Morris, 1987; Naffine, 1987; Rigney, 1999; Simon, 1975; Smart, 1975; Stanley and Wise, 1983). Knowledge is a product of social power relationships, ownership and creation, rather than a value neutral space devoid of competing interests (Rigney, 1999; Waldby, 1995). Moreover, feminist rationales seek to reposition the female experience of inequality at the heart of the research paradigm, privileging the experiences of patriarchal oppression and the struggle for recognition and liberation experienced by women (Adler, 1975; Box, 1983; Canter, 1982; Carlen, 1983; Chesney-Lind and Sheldon, 1992; Leonard, 1982; Morris, 1987; Naffine, 1987; Rigney, 1999; Simon, 1975; Smart, 1975).

Although some feminist literature regarding the female experience of criminal justice exists (see Baskin et al., 1989; Carlen, 1983; Dodge, [1999] 2005; Hannah-Moffat, [2000] 2005; Leonard, 1983; Morash et al., 1994; Ross and Fabiano, 1986), 'Aboriginal feminists'¹ often highlight the colonising process of criminal justice when critiquing Western systems (Lucashenko, 1994) and the harms of employing feminist rationales in explaining the experiences of First Peoples women (Fredericks, 2010; Houle, 2012; Lucashenko, 1994; Phillips, 2012; Wilson, 1996). Although feminists argue that the movement against patriarchy champions change for minority women, 'Aboriginal feminists' criticise feminist commentary for perpetuating the oppression of First Peoples women by assuming the ubiquitous sisterhood and the homogeneous nature of women (Grande, 2003; Grey, 2003–2004;

Morgan, 1970; Udel, 2001). Feminist thought prioritises those circumstances impacting non-First Peoples women, drawing on the problematic of masculinity and class privilege (Wilson, 1996) while ignoring the complicity of non-First Peoples women in the oppression of their First Peoples counterparts (Lucashenko, 1994). Thus, any project aiming to consider the experience of incarceration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women must be cognisant of such dual oppression: as First Peoples and as First Peoples *women*.

Re-imagining prison performance assessment in Australia

The aim of the present project is to begin addressing some of the weaknesses previously identified. Four prisons across Western Australia (Eastern Goldfields Regional Prison and West Kimberly Regional Prison) and the Northern Territory (Darwin Correctional Centre and Alice Springs Correctional Centre) provided the basis for re-imagining an assessment tool that not only captured the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women but also provided an assessment of prison performance that looked beyond the easily measureable and instead focused on the intangible aspects of incarceration that delineates a prison's subjective quality. Inspiration is drawn from the prison quality instrument developed in the United Kingdom (Liebling, 2004), built on a tradition of prison climate research that prioritises the lived experience of incarceration (Moos, 1975; Ross et al., 2008; Rynne and Cassematis, 2015).

The *Measuring the Quality of Prison Life* ('MQPL') instrument establishes those aspects of a prison sentence that makes the experience of incarceration less dehumanising (Liebling, 2004), privileging the impressions of those living imprisonment rather than narrow key performance indicators that fail to capture how a prison 'feels'. As noted by Rynne and Cassematis (2015), despite variances in subjective labels, factors representative of prison quality appear to hold cross-jurisdictional consistency, as indicated by research in the United Kingdom and the United States (see Moos, 1975; Ross et al., 2008). Moreover, the wide acceptance and utilisation of the MQPL across the United Kingdom and the interest of departments of corrections across Australia indicate a pattern of institutional investment for bettering prison conditions.

Despite the promise the MQPL holds in reflecting the lived experience of incarceration, there may be some limitations relevant to its application in Australia. The transportation and blind adoption of the MQPL in its current form to Australian prisons, and thus incidentally to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by virtue of criminal justice processes that perpetuate agendas of mass- or hyperincarceration (see Blagg, 2008a; Brown, 2010; Cunneen et al., 2013), may ultimately constitute a process of deep colonisation – another benevolent means of attempting to better conditions while unilaterally imposing the values and ideals of

the Anglophone conqueror (see Feeley and Simon, 1992; Hannah-Moffat, 2013). Thus, simply implementing this innovative means of assessing prison performance ultimately de-privileges the experience of incarceration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Moreover, the MQPL was developed based on values identified by male prisoners in conjunction with both male and female correctional staff. In the development of the first-generation² MQPL, Liebling (2004) expressly excluded female prisoners, noting the propensity for research to suggest that women may 'evaluate the prison in a significantly different way' (p. 172; see also Liebling et al., 1997; Toch, 1992). Therefore, the MQPL in its current form may not reflect the specific needs and values of women generally, and First Peoples women specifically, identifying a need to understand the intersectional differences in gendered and racial and/or ethnic experiences of incarceration.

Given the projected qualitative difference in the experience of incarceration not just for women but racialised women in particular, it is argued that a re-imagining of the MQPL is both necessary and timely. To inform such a re-imagining, 60 purposive conversations have been conducted across the four aforementioned institutions with correctional staff and both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander female prisoners. Participants were recruited using a mixture of snowball and purposive sampling identified from the target population of available subjects, namely, correctional staff and female prisoners (Babbie, 2010; Sarantakos, 2005). Sessions ranged from 15 minutes to 2 hours either with individuals or small groups, depending upon rapport, established as compared to establishing relationships, and the demands of busy prison regimes. Sessions with correctional staff were more likely to include only one or two participants, capturing the impressions of 20 individuals. Yarning sessions with female prisoners, however, tended to include a mix of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ($n=64$) and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women ($n=12$), with three to six participants in each session.

The data were collected in as naturalistic a manner as possible to enhance the comfort of the participants in an already challenging context. Rather than utilising enclosed spaces such as interview rooms, the purposive conversations were largely conducted in those areas of the prison allocated for visitation, or other open, less overtly regulated spaces that were available. Informed consent was established by explaining in appropriate language who the researcher(s) were and the purpose of the research, in conjunction with the anonymity of the participants. Confidentiality was insured insofar that any information provided could not be identified as having been conveyed by any one participant, but that the words, stories and experiences of those who chose to be involved would inform the creation of a measure of prison performance that reflected the needs of Australian First Peoples women. Furthermore, assurances were made

that any recordings, tapes and field notes would be de-identified and not passed on to prison staff or managers in their raw form. A recording device was utilised to ensure accuracy in later transcription of the experiences shared with the researcher(s), which could be, and was, turned off at any point the participants so indicated.

In conjunction with the longer, more robust interactions between the researchers and the participants, impressions and thoughts on the experience of incarceration were gleaned from conversations held with individual Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women 'in the yard' or in small groups of three to six. The use of a more sensitive, naturalist approach is informed by the need to utilise more culturally appropriate methods in the collection of data concerning First Peoples issues, and the widely over-researched status of First Peoples (Rigney, 1999, 2006; Smith, 1999, 2012). Such processes also allowed for rapport building, for the satiation of natural suspicion and curiosity regarding the researcher(s) and the research on behalf of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, and provided a space through which to privilege the words and experiences of those women who chose to participate.

AI was used as a research paradigm to frame the purpose of the engagement, given its prior use in the construction of the MQPL and its proposed suitability for use with First Peoples. Importantly, inspiration was also drawn from traditional yarning processes developed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, with yarning representing a form of purposive and culturally appropriate conversation (Bessarab and Ng'andu, 2010; see also Dean, 2010; Fredericks et al., 2011; Walker et al., 2014), creating a space of mutual reciprocity, cultural safety and respect. Yarning and AI, used in concert, constitute a means of 'research at the interface' (Durie, 2005: 306), a concept discussed in greater detail later in the article. Such a framework, it is argued, compliments the First Peoples scholarly agenda on the prioritisation of methods and methodologies that are aimed to empower rather than oppress First Peoples' experiences (Bessarab and Ng'andu, 2010; Rigney, 1999, 2006; Smith, 1999, 2012).

AI, incarceration and First Peoples women

Given its utility in the building and development of the MQPL (Liebling, 2004; see also Liebling et al., 1999, 2012), it is arguably important in terms of symmetry and consistency to include AI in the production of a qualitative understanding of the prison experience for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. AI was developed primarily as a tool for organisational change (Cooperrider, 1990, 1998; Cooperrider and Whitney, 2001; Elliott, 1999), encouraging participants to reflect upon their most positive experiences (Liebling et al., 1999) in an attempt to generate an image of the institution or other space at its current best so that a collaborative interpretation of 'what might be' can be achieved

(Bushe, 1999; Liebling et al., 1999; Michael, 2005). Fundamentally, AI seeks to understand ‘what works’ and ‘what matters’ within the institution or space, subverting the usual problem-based text of research (Elliott, 1999; Liebling et al., 1999) to identify, for current purposes, how individuals survive incarceration and what in particular is valued most (Liebling et al., 2012). Such identification of values is founded in memories and narratives of individual’s experiences (Elliott, 1999; Liebling, 2004), less concerned with the predictive validity of generated theories and instead prioritising the transformation of organisations and/or individuals (Liebling, 2004; Liebling et al., 2012).

It is, however, important to note that AI is not simply concerned with the identification and romanticisation of the positive. As identified by Bushe (2007), transformational change is not guaranteed simply by the identification of peak experiences and positives of an institution or individual (see also Bushe and Kassam, 2005). AI, utilised as a collective problem-solving exercise, may ultimately leave the organisational culture intact (Bushe, 2007). Instead, emphasis must be placed upon the generative nature of this research paradigm, and on the cultivation of an appreciative mindset (Bushe, 2001a, 2001b, 2007), whereby positive intent is primarily the focus, as opposed to positive feelings (Bushe, 2007). Individuals, through the utilisation of an appreciative mindset, need to identify the granules of what they want more of in the current system or environment and extrapolate from this to create the motivation for change (Bushe, 2007).

Moreover, it can be argued that AI does not simply accentuate the positive and deprioritise the negative experiences of individuals (Elliott, 1999; Michael, 2005). Instead, AI interrogates the negative experience and seeks to identify the value or need that is being denied, reframing the negative experience to recognise other instances where the denied value has been experienced either within the institution or elsewhere (Elliott, 1999). Such reframing, it may be argued, supports the cultivation of Bushe’s (2007) appreciative mindset while simultaneously acknowledging the validity of the negative experience while perpetuating an environment conducive to organisational or individual change.

The advantage of utilising AI in the current research is vested in not only its prior use in prisons across the United Kingdom in the development of the MQPL (Liebling, 2004) but also in its successful application with various marginalised communities, and minority and First Peoples on an international level (Blagg, 2008b; Elliott, 1999; Murphy et al., 2004). For instance, Elliott (1999) discussed in detail his utilisation of AI in the evaluation of an African programme for street children, along with a suite of other populations and settings. Blagg (2008b), similarly, applied the transformative tool to appraise the performance of Red Dust Role Models, a programme working with young people in remote communities in the Northern Territory. Murphy et al. (2004) employed the technique to assess the impact of the Indigenous Youth Arts and Culture Project in Fremantle,

Victoria, which linked young people with Elders and professional artists to re-imagine local Dreamtime stories in a contemporary way, aiming to promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. The versatility of AI, and its prior use with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations across Australia, earmarks the research paradigm as arguably suitable for implementation in the appreciation of qualitative difference in the experience of incarceration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

Perhaps most important when considering AI’s use with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women is that the strengths-based focus of the transformative tool negates the usual propensity to employ ‘vocabularies of deficit’ (Blagg, 2008b: 8), a common problem of research concerning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and other First Peoples (Blagg, 2008b; Murphy et al., 2004; Smith, 2012). Often, resilience and strength among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are denied in the completion of scholarly research (Blagg, 2008b), problematising populations through the erection of barriers and the attention paid to a project, situation, individual, or population’s deficits (Murphy et al., 2004). Thus, the inherent privileging of positive experiences, along with the inclusive and empowering possibilities of the research paradigm, uniquely positions AI as an arguably decolonising agent.

AI and First Peoples knowledges

The overarching advantage of AI for use with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, arguably, is its investment in the inherent storytelling associated with image generation and the conveyance of the narrative (see Bell, 1998; Broome, 2010; Stanner, 1979). Rigney (1999) and Martin (2003) argue that emphasising and privileging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices and social mores are essential when engaging in research with or on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experiences. Moreover, the constructivist recognition that a difference exists in the ontology of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander worldview, in conjunction with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander epistemology and axiology, is vital for the integrity of this research (Cunneen and Rowe, 2014; Martin, 2003). Furthermore, the importance of historical, social and cultural contexts in understanding the lives, positions and futures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is key (Martin, 2003). AI’s emphasis upon the development of individual narratives, and the acknowledgement of the importance of emotion in the reflection upon memories of what it means for someone, or something, to be at its ‘best’, uniquely positions it alongside traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander modes of knowing, doing and understanding.

AI is informed by both symbolic interactionism and grounded theory, although it further departs from these constructs in various ways (Liebling, 2004). As noted above, AI is less concerned with the predictive validity of generated

theories, instead privileging the transformative process for individuals and/or organisations and communities (Elliott, 1999; Liebling, 2004). Intrinsically, AI concerns an appreciation of the 'lived experience' of an institution or setting, gathering the narrative and meaning through a creative qualitative process concerned with theory generation that is relevant to the individual(s) and/or organisation(s) concerned (Liebling, 2004; see also Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Matza, 1969; Rock, 1979). As AI constructs an understanding of the social world and an appreciation of individual experience through the memories and stories of individuals (Cooperrider, 1990, 1998; Cooperrider and Whitney, 2001; Elliott, 1999), it is uniquely suited for use with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations. Yarning, as described below, represents an established First Peoples method of knowledge sharing and acquisition based on relationships, country, culture and memories (Dean, 2010).

Yarning as a form of data collection

Non-First Peoples complete a wealth of the research conducted about First Peoples. However, First Peoples scholars are widely critical of the blind application of traditional social science research paradigms that privilege Western epistemologies, axiologies and ontologies (Bessarab and Ng'andu, 2010; Martin, 2003, 2008; Moreton-Robinson, 2000, Rigney, 1999, 2006; Smith, 1999, 2012). Despite such criticism, Rigney (1999) notes that the above should not be taken to suggest that non-First Peoples refrain from completing critical research that serves to support and inform the struggles of First Peoples for self-determination. Therefore, ensuring such research is conducted in a culturally appropriate and non-exploitative way is of primary concern (Bessarab and Ng'andu, 2010; Blagg, 2008a; Donovan and Spark, 1997; Henderson et al., 2002; Maher, 1999; Moreton-Robinson, 2000; O'Donoghue, 1999; Rigney, 1999, 2006; Smith, 2012; Weatherburn, 2014; Wilson, 2008).

A common challenge to the ability of non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander scholars conducting research about First Peoples is the lack of investment in the use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ontologies, despite the focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Kendall et al., 2011; Martin, 2003; NHMRC, 2003). Moreover, often the methods used by non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers are inappropriate for long-term change due to this de-prioritisation of First Peoples knowledges (Kendall et al., 2011). Advances in the First Peoples research agenda, however, has re-prioritised the need to utilise appropriate First Peoples methodologies in the completion of research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Martin, 2003; Rigney, 1999, 2006; Smith, 1999, 2012).

The utilisation of 'yarning' as a data collection tool constitutes a means through which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ontology, epistemology and axiology can be prioritised in the completion of research. Although inherent

difficulties exist in the demarcation of 'yarning' as a research tool (Dean, 2010; Walker et al., 2014), the term can be loosely defined as a form of First Peoples' cultural conversation (Bessarab and Ng'andu, 2010), suited to the processes of research generation and development and further, data collection (Bessarab and Ng'andu, 2010; Dean, 2010; Fredericks et al., 2011; Walker et al., 2014). Dean (2010) argues that identifying yarning as an 'informal' process (see Bessarab and Ng'andu, 2010; Powers, 2004) ultimately undermines its strength, appropriateness and veracity, denying the intentional purpose and negotiation intrinsic in the yarns development. Therefore, yarning 'reflects a formal process of sharing knowledge that is reliant upon relationships, expected outcomes, responsibility and accountability between the participants, country and culture' (Dean, 2010: 6; see also Bessarab and Ng'andu, 2010).

Yarning has been widely utilised in health-based research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, its employment in the appreciation of lived experiences creating a 'telling space' (Williams, 2007: 115) through which cultural safety and respect may be imparted (Dean, 2010). Ethical guidelines such as those delineated by the NHMRC (2003) place a greater emphasis upon cultural safety, moving past standard ethical protocols to ensure requirements including reciprocity, respect, equality, responsibility, survival and protection, and spirit and integrity (see also Bin-Sallik, 2003; Dean, 2010; Rynne and Cassematis, 2015). Yarning creates a space through which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples can voice and infuse traditional cultural knowledge in the creation and completion of research (Bessarab and Ng'andu, 2010; Dean, 2010), moreover providing an arena through which to contribute to research in culturally appropriate ways (Dean, 2010). While in this context primarily concerned with the framing and generation of research, yarning provides ownership of the process to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants, and power over what information is ultimately divulged (Dean, 2010), locating the researcher in a position to learn (Bessarab and Ng'andu, 2010; Dean, 2010).

Such collegial understanding of the research process is further imparted in the utilisation of yarning as a tool for data collection. Albeit less concerned with the mutual negotiation of the research topic, yarning provides a mechanism through which appropriate knowledge may be shared and transferred between the participant and researcher (Bessarab and Ng'andu, 2010; Dean, 2010). Given its fluidity, yarning and its focus on relationships demand reciprocity on behalf of the researcher, unable to sit outside of the data as an objective observer. To do so would ultimately undermine the data collected, fashioning the researcher as the owner and 'knower' of knowledge while typecasting the participant as an object through which information may be extracted. Instead, data collected through the use of yarning requires the researcher to largely situate themselves as 'learners', journeying with the participant through story and memory to places aligned with

the topic or purpose of the research (Bessarab and Ng'andu, 2010; Dean, 2010). The positioning of researchers as listeners or learners in the data collection process constructs Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the authority of their knowledge (Dean, 2010; Smith, 2012), strengthening the development of the First Peoples research paradigm.

Yarning as a data collection tool, therefore, is useful in developing an understanding of the experience of incarceration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. It is inherently invested in the strength of First Peoples culture (Bessarab and Ng'andu, 2010; Dean, 2010) and shows respect for traditional cultural practices and philosophies by not merely superimposing the core values and beliefs of Western academic scholarship. Moreover, it encourages the engagement of incarcerated First Peoples women by creating a secure space based on agreed rules and boundaries, marking the participants as the knowers of knowledge as opposed to the objects through which knowledge can be extracted (see Bessarab and Ng'andu, 2010; Dean, 2010).

The above, however, should not be taken to suggest that yarning, as a data collection tool, exists in a single state. Indeed, Bessarab and Ng'andu (2010) identified four discrete yarning types in the completion of their research: social, research topic, therapeutic and collaborative yarning. Social yarning creates a space through which rapport and relationships can be developed between those engaging in the yarn, predicated on the negotiation of a comfortable dialogue that may include gossip, news, humour, advice or other non-research-related information (Bessarab and Ng'andu, 2010). Largely, the social yarn can be used to evoke trust, making the researcher accountable to the participant (Bessarab and Ng'andu, 2010). Subsequently, purposeful conversation through research topic yarning takes place by being grounded in stories relayed by the participant and guided or facilitated by the researcher (Bessarab and Ng'andu, 2010). The research topic yarn is a means through which information is gathered, a 'conversation with a purpose' aimed at addressing the fundamental questions of the project (Bessarab and Ng'andu, 2010: 40).

Collaborative and therapeutic yarning both flow from the research topic yarn. The therapeutic yarn refers to conversations that evolve through the relation of stories and memories that are intensely personal, emotional and/or traumatic for the participant (Bessarab and Ng'andu, 2010). Such disclosure demands a reframing of the researcher from a guided facilitator of the research topic yarn to a listener, supporting the participant in voicing their story and providing assistance either through affirmation of the experience or making sense of the relayed story (Bessarab and Ng'andu, 2010). While not to be construed as a counselling yarn, the therapeutic yarn may allow for the creation of meaning and the empowerment of the participant, supporting them in the re-imagining of their experience (Bessarab and Ng'andu, 2010). The collaborative yarn, on the other hand, encompasses contexts in which information regarding the research project and/or a discussion of

ideas is shared, and can involve the exploration of similar ideas and/or the explanation of new concepts (Bessarab and Ng'andu, 2010: 40). Often, new discoveries and understandings can be developed through the sharing of research findings and the process of the collaborative yarn (Bessarab and Ng'andu, 2010), more often concerned with the reflections of the researcher after the completion of the yarning session. For instance, Bessarab and Ng'andu (2010) noted that the collaborative yarn aided in their understanding of the use of yarning as a data collection tool and the role of social worldview in the completion of research.

All four modes of yarning – social, research topic, therapeutic and collaborative (Bessarab and Ng'andu, 2010) – were instrumental in appreciating the experiences of incarcerated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. The social yarn allowed for the establishing of rapport and the construction of accountability between the researcher(s) and the participant(s), creating a space of reciprocity and mutual respect to support the collation of rich data in a culturally safe and appropriate way. The research topic yarn identified key memories, thoughts, beliefs and stories on behalf of the participants, privileging their experiences while conveying meaningful data to the researcher(s). The therapeutic yarn, where necessary, created a safe space to explore painful, and sometimes traumatic, experiences for participant(s). Finally, the collaborative yarn allowed the researcher(s) to revisit the data, and the implications contained therein, in a bid to understand and develop the stories conveyed for use in the operationalisation of a measure of prison performance that reflected the needs of the participants – incarcerated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

Bessarab and Ng'andu's (2010) research highlights the complex nature of understanding yarning and the role of yarning in the data collection process. However, it does tend to support the relaxed use of conversation as a means to empower the participants of the yarn to engage with the subject matter of the research topic and their personal experiences. While conversation as a research tool has been discussed by non-First Peoples scholars such as Fieldman (2000) and Kvale (1996), Fieldman (2000) was largely critical of its utilisation, noting the lack of clarity and citing problems with how such a means would achieve the purpose of the research and answer research questions (see also Bessarab and Ng'andu, 2010). However, yarning constitutes an established approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pedagogy (Bessarab and Ng'andu, 2010; Martin, 2008), a traditional mechanism through which values, meaning and understanding are imparted. Moreover, Bessarab and Ng'andu's (2010) delineation of types and forms of yarning, as stated above, strengthens the foundation upon which yarning as a data collection tool can be operationalised for use in the meaningful collection of rich and detailed qualitative data.

An emerging discourse on First Peoples research and research methodologies is emphasising the need to reconsider the operation of oppressive Western scholarship that

dictates the appropriateness of bona fide research based upon traditional ‘objective’ research agendas (Walker et al., 2014). As noted by First Peoples scholars, Western academia is widely critical of the use of research methods such as yarning, vested in collectivist worldviews that prioritise the influence of culture in the construction of identity and social worldview (see Bessarab and Ng’andu, 2010; Rigney, 1999, 2006; Smith, 1999, 2012; Walker et al., 2014). Acceptance of yarning and other First Peoples–related methods and methodologies arguably formulates a decolonising space in which the First Peoples research agenda may be strengthened, acknowledging the importance of conducting research with and on First Peoples that constructs an understanding of the subjective reality from a First Peoples perspective (Walker et al., 2014).

Utilising research methods and methodologies founded within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander epistemology, axiology and ontology arguably reduces the risk of further trauma and devises a space of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ownership and empowerment, whereby Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are positioned as the ‘knowers’ of knowledge rather than the objects of knowledge. The prioritisation and privileging of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research methods and methodologies must, however, be conducted in good faith with a genuine intent to understand the difference in social reality where First Peoples’ processes such as yarning are employed by non–First Peoples researchers. Moreover, formulated with the spirit of constructivist grounded theory (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007; Charmaz, 2011; Mills et al., 2006), the use of traditional Western methods may be understood as culturally inappropriate and a form of deep colonisation where data are collected without reference or understanding of the histories and policies of oppression that may impact the way research is understood, collected and analysed.

Research at the interface: creating a ‘telling space’ with AI and yarning

Given the focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experience, the (non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) researchers decided that adopting Western research methods and methodologies was largely inappropriate if not informed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges and had the potential to inflict further trauma on the participants. The researchers instead sought to identify a means through which cultural safety may be emphasised while collecting high-quality meaningful data. Although one might argue that AI alone is suited to the collection of such data, given the prominence of the narrative and the extrapolation of meaning based upon memory and subjective constructions of ‘reality’ and ‘truth’ (Cooperrider, 1990, 1998; Cooperrider and Whitney, 2001; Elliott, 1999), it does not capture and represent the complex nature of Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander culture, nor does it specifically represent a traditional form of cultural communication.

AI was identified as a suitable research paradigm to frame the collection of data, the researchers proposing to interface the organisational tool with yarning, as an example of a traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander form of knowledge acquisition and sharing (see Rynne and Cassematis, 2015). As noted by Durie (2005), a well known First Peoples scholar,

Essentially, ‘research at the interface’ aims to harness the energy from two systems of understanding in order to create new knowledge that can then be used to advance understanding in two worlds. (p. 306)

Thus, AI and yarning may constitute a viable interface through which scholarly credibility may be inferred while simultaneously prioritising cultural safety and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander epistemologies, axiologies and ontologies. Such practice does not assume the subsumption of yarning as simply another tool in the researcher’s repertoire (Rynne and Cassematis, 2015); instead, yarning is utilised with the consent and advice of Elders, Respected Persons and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues and scholars who were consulted during the course of the research.

The unique ‘energy’ of AI rests in its transformative nature, a mechanism through which positive and negative experiences are unpacked to identify core values and belief structures within an institution or other setting (Cooperrider, 1990, 1998; Cooperrider and Whitney, 2001; Elliott, 1999; Michael, 2005). Such identified values and beliefs are utilised to re-imagine the location at its pinnacle of performance, attempting to move policies and practices towards that higher standard of achievement (Cooperrider, 1990, 1998; Cooperrider and Whitney, 2001; Elliott, 1999; Michael, 2005). If utilised simply as a collaborative problem-solving exercise, as opposed to a catalyst for organisational reinvigoration and fundamental change of organisational dynamics, the problematic culture of the institution may ultimately be left intact (Bushe, 2007). Instead, the motivation for change must be located in examples of peak performance identifiable in the current system or environment (Bushe, 2007). Thus, the ‘energy’ of AI is inherently located in its facilitation of organisational change through the values, needs and beliefs of those embedded within such systems.

On the other hand, yarning embodies an ‘energy’ that is intrinsically concerned with the acquisition and sharing of cultural knowledge, memory, experience, narrative and understanding (Bessarab and Ng’andu, 2010; Dean, 2010). Yarning constitutes a formal conversational process founded upon ‘relationships, expected outcomes, responsibility and accountability between the participants, country and culture’ (Dean, 2010: 6; see also Battiste, 2009; Bessarab and Ng’andu, 2010; Walker et al., 2014). The investment in yarning as a method of

data collection moves the research on a pathway towards decolonising practices (Walker et al., 2014), centring traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge systems (Dean, 2010) and supporting and repositioning First Peoples methods and methodologies (Rigney, 1999, 2006; Smith, 1999, 2012) while simultaneously cultivating partnerships, cooperation and respect (Fredericks et al., 2011; Walker et al., 2014). Therefore, yarning's 'energy' is invested in the richness of contemporary and traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, prioritising country and interpersonal (and ancestral) relationships in a bid to cultivate respect in the transmission and acceptance of knowledge.

Yarning provides a method through which values, needs and beliefs are shared in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural communication, and therefore it is arguably appropriate to interface this First Peoples method with AI. Such alignment of principles allows for the collection of data in a culturally safe and appropriate way while simultaneously framing the research within a paradigm accepted by Western scholarship. The utilisation of yarning negates arguments suggesting that AI in and of itself does not constitute a data collection method, while the suggested positioning of AI provides an actionable framework relatable to Western scholarship and Anglophone prison administrators.

Challenges to interfacing AI and yarning

The above should not be taken to suggest that there are no dangers present in the construction of research at the interface, where First Peoples logics such as yarning are constructed in concert with traditional Western scholarship. Indeed, two particular items should be considered here: tokenism and deep colonisation. Tokenism, according to Long Laws (1975), is likely to manifest in environments where 'a dominant group is under pressure to share privilege, power, or other desirable commodities with a group which is excluded' (p. 51), an advertisement of mobility that ultimately remains restricted in quantity and quality (Long Laws, 1975). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples often suffer from acts of tokenism (Australian Law Reform Commission, 1986; Browne and Fiske, 2001; Expert Panel on Constitutional Recognition of Indigenous Australians, 2012; NHMRC, 2003; Williams, 2007), with Browne and Fiske (2001) noting in particular the frustrations felt by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples when they are unable to bring about meaningful change, despite inclusion in mechanisms of the dominant Anglophone culture. Although speaking specifically to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation on health boards, Browne and Fiske's (2001) assertions are supported by other scholars and organisations that note the damaging effects that acts of tokenism can have on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander relationships (Australian Law Reform Commission, 1986; Expert Panel

on Constitutional Recognition of Indigenous Australians, 2012; NHMRC, 2003; Williams, 2007). Thus, it is important to ensure that the interfacing of yarning with AI does not merely constitute a token attempt to capture initial Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander support for the project. Instead, a genuine attempt to reflect the energy of yarning in the collection of data with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander female prisoners must be present, to ensure the agenda of cultural safety and the limiting of further trauma are realised.

Moreover, given the possibility for AI and yarning to constitute a decolonising method, it is imperative that the mechanism devised from such data does not simply perpetuate the oppression of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through the adoption of colonising processes (Marchetti, 2006; Rose, 1996). Noted above, the RCIADIC provides an exemplum of an institution or process heralded as a decolonising initiative that was subsequently identified as deep colonising (Marchetti, 2006). Marchetti (2006) argued that the RCIADIC perpetuated the colonisation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through its inability to capture, understand and incorporate meanings, values and the beliefs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (see also Cowlishaw, 1991; Purdy, 1994; Sackett, 1993; Wearing, 1991 for further criticisms of the RCIADIC). Therefore, to ensure that the interface of AI and yarning does not simply represent a deep colonising process, its utilisation and the use of the data subsequent to its collection must be crafted in such a way that it reflects the subjective truth of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants, their beliefs, and the core values identified. Such an aim may best be achieved through enduring relationships with Elders and Respected Persons, in conjunction with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues and scholars, who may help in reflection upon the data collected and its synthesis into a meaningful and useful understanding of the carceral experience.

Conclusion

The over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in Australian correctional institutions identifies a need to re-imagine criminal justice processes and how they impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Given the plethora of research available concerning frontend criminal justice initiatives and Australian First Peoples (see Bond et al., 2011; Bond and Jeffries, 2010, 2011a, 2011b; Crime and Misconduct Commission, 2009; Cunneen, 1992; Fernandez and Loh, 2001; Ferrante et al., 2001; Gardiner and Takagaki, 2002; Jeffries and Bond, 2009, 2010; Loh et al., 2009; McRae et al., 1999; Payne, 1991; Sarre, 1999; Williams-Mozely, 2009), a gap is identified in understanding the experience of incarceration. Therefore, the authors argue that a new means of measuring prison performance is required to better reflect the needs and values of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

generally, and women specifically. To do so, prison quality is proposed as an alternative means of measuring prison performance.

Developed in the United Kingdom, prison quality represents a means of assessing carceral institutions based upon the intangible aspects of the lived experience that make imprisonment less dehumanising (Liebling, 2004; Liebling et al., 2012). However, the authors suggest that prison quality in its current form may require amendment so that it may reflect the needs, beliefs and structures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, especially given the express exclusion of female prisoners from the original development of prison quality (see Liebling, 2004). To construct an understanding of prison quality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, prisoners and custodial staff from four prisons across Western Australia and the Northern Territory were interviewed using an interface of AI and yarning. Each gathering utilised the spirit of AI to frame the generative conversations while utilising yarning to provide a telling space that imparted cultural safety and respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants.

Often, non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers utilise oppressive Western research principles in researching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues (Kendall et al., 2011; Martin, 2003; NHMRC, 2003) that are inappropriate for facilitating long-term change (Kendall et al., 2011). The proposed construction of method and methodology arguably prioritises ‘research at the interface’ (see Durie, 2005), situating AI as a research paradigm to create guidance and direction, while yarning privileges the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. Thus, interfacing AI and yarning allows for the culturally safe collection of data while framing the research within a paradigm accepted by Western scholarship. Although dangers exist in the form of tokenism (Australian Law Reform Commission, 1986; Browne and Fiske, 2001; Expert Panel on Constitutional Recognition of Indigenous Australians, 2012; Long Laws, 1975; NHMRC, 2003; Williams, 2007) and deep colonisation (Marchetti, 2006; Rose, 1996) in the completion of research on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues by non-First Peoples, the genuine attempt to reflect the energy of yarning in the collection of data ensures cultural safety and limits the possibility for further trauma. Furthermore, enduring relationships with Elders, Respected Persons, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues and scholars, aid in reflections upon the data collected and its amalgamation into a meaningful and useful measure of prison performance.

It is not enough to overlay Western understandings of the social world in attempting to re-imagine the measurement of prison performance (Blagg, 2008a; Cunneen and Rowe, 2014; Rigney, 1999, 2006; Smith, 1999, 2012; Weatherburn, 2014). Research that interfaces the energies from an appropriate Western research paradigm with a culturally relevant means of knowledge sharing and acquisition may be capable of destabilising the deep colonisation of knowledge (Durie,

2005). Such practice arguably forwards the First Peoples research agenda while simultaneously engaging in decolonising practices that aim to reflect the meanings, values and beliefs identified by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women held in correctional institutions across Western Australia and the Northern Territory.

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Notes

1. Female First Peoples have resisted identifications as ‘feminists’, self-identifying as variants of pseudo-feminist concepts founded upon such roles as woman, mother, sister, aunt or daughter (see Collins, 1994; Grande, 2003; Huggins, 1994; Jaimes*Guerrero, 2003; Snitow, 1990).
2. The *Measuring the Quality of Prison Life* (MQPL) is presently in its third iteration.

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