

Higgins, M. & Lenette, C. (2024). *Disrupting The Academy With Lived Experience-Led Knowledge*. Policy Press. 194 pp. USD 45.95 (pbk), USD 120.00 (hbk). ISBN: 978-1447366331.

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*Disrupting The Academy With Lived Experience-Led Knowledge*, edited by Marie Higgins and Caroline Lenette, is a bold and timely call to centre emancipatory and decolonial lived experience-led scholarship. The editors display no regard for traditional anthropology and its decades of radical struggle and eventual triumph over scientific racism during the twentieth century. The book challenges traditional anthropological and sociological research methods for being performative, tokenistic, and exploitative, arguing that such approaches fail to address cultural logics and everyday injustices rooted in colonialism. Instead, the editors advocate for methodologies that are emancipatory, decolonial, and grounded in the knowledge of people with direct lived experience of systemic injustice.

In the preface, the editors critically reflect on their positionality and their own problematic use of research methodologies. The editors critique the tokenistic use of the co-research model, arguing that it does not resolve inherent power imbalances in colonial structures. As non-Indigenous researchers, they could not be the sole authors due to their position, reality, and privileges, as that would go against the very problem they sought to address. The editors' choice of key social justice issues for an edited book was based on their knowledge of disciplines where the literature on co-research production and participatory research is growing, but does not sufficiently privilege lived-experience-led perspectives in collaborative research and methodologies. The editors clearly describe four disruptive methodologies

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platformed in this volume: Indigenous nation building, *talanoa* or culturally safe synthesis of the emotion, information, and stories to discuss social justice issues in Pasifika communities, autoethnography, and collaborative autoethnography.

The book opens with an introduction, where editors Higgins and Lennette discuss disruptive methodologies, arguing that changing academic writing styles is crucial to redefining valid knowledge. They emphasise the need for lived-experience-led scholarship while not completely disregarding existing literature. Without shifting toward such discourses, social justice research will not progress meaningfully. The introduction also previews discussions on Indigenous knowledge renewal (chapter 2) and critiques of lived experience engagement (chapter 3).

The remainder of the book is then divided into three parts. Part I, Theoretical Grounding and Underpinning Values, sets the context. In Chapter 2, Examining for the Purpose of Knowing: Ngagbibi Winhangagigu, the authors explore Wiridyuri research concepts: ngaabinya (examining, testing, evaluating) and winhagagigu (thinking, remembering, knowing). Uncle Stan Grant (Senior) et al. highlight the centrality of Indigenous positioning in decolonising knowledge production. They stress Indigenous nation-building as a means of cultural renewal and identity formation, demonstrating how community-led work revives Wiridyuri ways of thinking. Chapter 3, Towards a Scholarship of Critical Lived Experience Engagement, sees Rebecca Moran questioning engagement with lived experience expertise, an issue often overlooked. Using an ethnographic approach, she critiques current engagement methods and introduces a framework for critical lived experience-led scholarship.

Part II, Scrutinizing Lived Experience Research Processes through Leadership and Collaboration, examines power dynamics in co-design research. Chapter 4, Lived Experience Perspectives on a Co-Design Process, critiques participatory research for failing to fully integrate complex lived experiences. Stephen Lake and his colleagues analyse co-design practices through creative narratives, reflecting on mental health struggles and experiences of attempted suicide. They discuss the importance of recognising intersectional identities rather than imposing artificial research structures. The authors find that documenting their experiences offers connection and validation, prompting some to choose anonymous authorship for safety. Chapter 5, Co-Researching



with Persons with Disabilities, by Chrysant Lily Kusumowardoyo et al., explores the intersectional nature of disability research in Indonesia. The authors problematise co-production practices, highlighting how entrenched privilege and power imbalances hinder full participation. Using reflective dialogue, they examine challenges and achievements in conducting community-led research.

Part III, Decolonizing Lived Experience Research, illustrates how an intersectional perspective enriches social justice research and decolonises research relationships. Chapter 6, Ethical and Decolonial Considerations of Co-Research in Refugee Studies, questions the ethics of relationship-building and witnessing in refugee studies. The authors critique colonising tendencies in research and share personal vignettes that highlight ethical dilemmas. In Chapter 7, Combating Colonial Pathologization: A Trans Woman's Indo-Australian Lived Experience, Ramaswamy challenges the universalisation of gender and sexual diversity. She critiques the lack of majority-world perspectives on trans and gender-diverse experiences, noting that much of the literature fails to reflect these realities. Chapter 8, Responding Collaboratively to COVID-19 in Our Health Needs Across Pasifika Communities, critiques the vague classification of communities as 'culturally and linguistically diverse' rather than centring Pasifika knowledge systems. Using the *Talanoa* process, the authors describe community-led responses to COVID-19 in Australia. They stress the role of Pasifika elders and emphasise the need for culturally safe spaces fostered through whole-community and whole-government approaches. Chapter 9, written by the book's editors, concludes the volume by reinforcing the potential of lived-experience-led scholarship to disrupt academic structures and advance social justice research. Here, Lenette and Higgins reiterate the decolonial possibilities of prioritising lived experience, emphasising its transformative impact within and beyond the academy.

This edited volume critiques the privileging of certain types of knowledge in academia while marginalising others, particularly lived experiences and diverse epistemologies. It argues that academic institutions have historically upheld Eurocentric, colonial, patriarchal, and white supremacist perspectives as the dominant forms of knowledge, dismissing alternative ways of knowing as unscientific or irrational. This has resulted in epistemic injustice, where voices and experiences that do not fit within these norms are silenced or devalued.

The chapter authors and editors challenge this status quo by centring lived experience as a legitimate and valuable source of knowledge. The authors assert their perspectives based on personal and sociocultural realities, offering fresh insights into social justice issues. This stands in contrast to rigid, outdated academic frameworks that often perpetuate harmful or exclusionary practices. While changing these entrenched systems is challenging, the editors believe that with commitment and collaboration, progress is possible.

The editors and contributors aim to dismantle restrictive academic norms and promote more inclusive, intersectional approaches to knowledge production. They also acknowledge that no single lived experience can represent all perspectives on an issue. Instead, the book seeks to open pathways for more lived-experience-led research, ensuring that academia engages with a broader range of voices and stories. This approach ultimately fosters decolonisation of criminology and justice while generating a richer and more nuanced understanding.

Understandably, the editors required all authors to include positionality statements in their chapters to highlight their intersectional standpoints. However, discussions with Indonesian collaborators (for Chapter 5) revealed that positionality was not a universally recognised concept, leading to an exchange that deepened understandings of reflexivity in academic writing. While a recommended addition to curriculum studies collections on decolonisation of academic research, university libraries, and especially course reading lists, this volume is accessible to non-specialist general readers in addition to students and academia.