
Marginalised voices in criminological teaching: the role of reading lists and how student learners engage with them.

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Much has been written on the inherent biases and power structures within criminology: there is acknowledgement that our discipline often reproduces the inequalities it seeks to overcome, and that the voices of historically marginalised scholars are still subjugated, repressed, and excluded across the discipline (Cunneen and Rowe, 2014; Carrington et al 2018). Whilst academic discussion seeks to explore what a postcolonial or counter-colonial criminology and criminal justice might involve (Agozino, 2013; Blagg and Anthony, 2019) we know little about the extent to which this has materialised within the criminology curriculum. Large-scale decolonising work is needed within universities and across Higher Education (HE). Whilst debates around how to decolonise the curriculum continue, within learning and teaching, content that addresses colonial structures or race within criminology and criminal justice is often only included in a patchwork fashion across a module or degree programme, or is excluded altogether (Phillips et al, 2020). One way to explore which material is presented to students is to examine whose voices feature on criminology reading lists. In HE in the United Kingdom (UK) there is no clear scrutiny mechanism regarding module content or reading list composition beyond the QAA benchmark statements for criminology: individual departments collate and validate the reading lists used on their criminology courses via an internal process, which we argue is prone to biases and the perpetuation of problematic gendered and racialised narratives.

Since 2019 we have conducted research to gain an understanding of the 'criminology curriculum' in the UK, with a specific focus on reading lists: both in terms of content and student interaction. Initial research focused on a new criminology

programme developed in 2016 at a 'new' University (awarded university status in 2006) in England. As a new criminology course this provided an exciting opportunity for research as it was not under the same restraints pre-existing courses may face (e.g., previous investment in certain books and journal articles, materials had not already been developed, students were enrolling as a fresh cohort). In total 105 readings put forward for validation were analysed, then additional analysis of the full reading lists for selected core modules took place (see Stockdale and Sweeney, 2019 and forthcoming). We also explored how students (n=20) engaged with and used their reading lists, developing an 'Intersectionality Matrix' as a means of visualising which authors students engaged with, and as a prompt for discussion (Stockdale & Sweeney 2019, Stockdale, Sweeney, & McCluskey Dean, forthcoming). The projects then developed further taking the research to a different university where we have now worked with four students in research/curator roles to co-produce reading list content (Stockdale et al, forthcoming; Stockdale, Casselden, & Sweeney, 2021) and with other faculties to understand if there are differences between how social science students and those in STEM subjects engage with reading lists via conducting focus groups with students (n=18). Key findings from across these projects are discussed in this article.

The role of reading lists & their pedagogical value

Reading lists are central to learning and teaching in HE yet their pedagogical value and importance is often neglected, both by academic staff and institutions (Brewerton, 2014). Freire (1970) highlights the importance of reading lists and set resources for students to support both the production of knowledge and in the creation of opportunities for transformation, whereby students can explore and understand new ideas and perspectives. Given their significance it is important to consider the development and governance (or lack thereof) of reading lists. Currently in the UK the only scrutiny and oversight is at programme validation, yet this process does not require specific consideration to the voices and perspectives included or excluded. By analysing reading lists we can gain some understanding of the scale and significance of the problem. Whilst reading lists are a small (and perhaps some would argue tokenistic) part of decolonising the curriculum we believe it is important to provide a holistic view of course material, to demonstrate how students read for

their degree, and for the discipline to see the patterns that exist in the way criminological thought is being taught.

Analysis of reading lists put forward for validation for a new BA (Hons) criminology course at an English university found white and male voices dominate across the curriculum. Where voices that have been historically excluded (female, colonised) are included it is in discrete areas i.e., specific modules, or weeks of teaching, that are focused on gender or race. Within these areas there is little attention paid to intersectionality (Crenshaw 1989; hooks 1981) and so it is white women's voices that dominate in relation to gender, and it is male academics of colour whose voices dominate in relation to race. The research highlights how issues of race and gender are not embedded within criminological teaching and publication biases impact on whose voices are heard. Further analysis into the full reading list for core first year modules found for 'Fundamental Theories' all white male authors are listed as the 'essential' readings unless specific weeks covering colonial criminology or feminism feature. In a 'Key Concepts' module the 'essential' reading contained only white, male authors.

McCluskey Dean (2021) argues reading list design is influenced by power and structures and we all have the responsibility to recognise the issues that exist, how students can be affected, and how students can be empowered. Too often literacy skills for students are conceived as practical skills for 'employability' or in relation to accessing library databases or formatting of references which can reinforce hegemonic knowledge and ignore the value of information literacy to social justice. Rather, critical information literacy skills need to be adopted - the central tenet of which is that students should understand "how information and knowledge are formed by unequal power relations based on class, race, gender, and sexuality" (Beilin, 2015: n.p). Staff and students should make balanced judgements about the sources of information used; it is by engaging in this critical way that citizens are empowered to "develop informed views and to fully engage with society" (Coonan et al. 2018: 3).

As part of our research, we developed an 'Intersectionality Matrix' as a tool for considering text authorship. It can be used by staff when designing their reading lists,

to facilitate discussion around whose voices are prioritised in reading lists, and as a pedagogical tool to develop student's critical information literacy skills (Stockdale & Sweeney, 2019; Stockdale, Sweeney, & McCluskey Dean, forthcoming). Our research showed students discomfort when they were able to visualise the power structures within their reading and were confronted with huge gaps on the matrix as they struggled to name criminologists who were not white and male. Discussion revealed that students care about the background of the author, they want to know more, and they understand the relevance of this knowledge to their studies. As the following quote from our research shows, students were shocked, saddened, and disappointed their reading lists were not inclusive:

Well, it's ... all white people, which is quite sad really. Cos these are all the most prominent, in my mind, academics. So, I'd say most of them are relatively well known. But I can't think of any well-known female or BME, so it's a bit disappointing ... Yeah, it's really not good. (Second Year Criminology Student)

Student Involvement

Further projects sought to involve students to co-create more diverse material that could be used in teaching and learning with an aim to create 'bottom-up change'. Student curators were recruited to explore and recommend reading to their peers to educate and empower the student population as well as to strengthen and develop areas of our curriculum. The student employed in this role described the experience as being useful; that they were able to develop their skills, learning more effective ways to research and recognised ways in which they might have overlooked communities when writing their assessments. For them it was important:

Being a person of colour, race is something I always see, so I already knew that the reading lists and the module topics themselves weren't diverse enough. I always felt like racial issues and topics were left to the last few lectures in the semester ... and voluntary modules. In terms of reading lists I felt like I saw a lot of repeated names ... year after year on my reading lists ... So, more books need to be added to the library, and reading lists should

always be made with diversity in mind (Rajvir, Student Curator. In Stockdale *et al*, 2021:14-15)

How does criminology fare compare to other disciplines?

Often in the social sciences there is an assumption that students are inherently taught to think critically and consider power and structures and issues in relation to class, gender, race. Yet if these issues are being taught in discrete and specific modules or weeks, as our previous research showed, and if critical information literacy is not expressly taught then how does criminology fare compared to other disciplines? We explored differences between social science and STEM disciplines, by conducting the same research using the Intersectionality Matrix with both criminology and computer and information science (CIS) students. Findings evidenced that, largely, the difference is minimal - both subject areas neglect to substantively include and promote the work and perspectives of scholars who identify as female, BME¹, nonbinary, and/or LGBTQ+ (and intersections of these). Students from both subject areas were mainly aware of white male authors through their studies. Following engagement with the Intersectionality Matrix students recognised the disparity and how their knowledge and awareness of topics in their discipline had inherent biases within it and their reading was from limited viewpoints. The only noticeable difference for CIS students was in relation to class: students expressed having “no thoughts on that whatsoever” or “I would have absolutely no way of knowing”. Whereas criminology students, interestingly, perceived academics whose work was published and used on their courses as being upper class - academics who might have been born working class held this higher status due to their ideas being published. This is worthy of further research and again indicates a need for critical information literacy whereby we are aware of the meaning-making students do and how we connect our daily work to larger ideological questions about who belongs in HE and how to make HE accessible to everyone (Elmborg, 2012: 94).

¹ We have used the term BME across our research as an umbrella term to override racist discourse and terminology. However, we fully recognise that ethnic identity is a “social, political, historical and symbolic event” (Hall and Schwartz 2017: 6) and that the development of terminology in relation to race in the UK, including the term BME, has been, and continues to be, “complex and troubled” (2017: 194).

Concluding thoughts

Twyman-Ghoshal and Lacorazza (2021) call for criminologists to examine the role HE has in oppression and provide a teaching and learning framework for criminologists to embrace and deliver an antiracist and decolonised curriculum and teaching experience. This includes the need for us to recognise biases and privileges, revise courses and curricula to ensure that social and racial inequalities are not re/produced, to amplify marginalised voices, and to engage students in high impact learning activities that “allow students to recognize the historical biases that remain inherent in research, development, practices, programs, and policies” (Twyman-Ghoshal and Lacorazza 2021: n.p).

Criminology is a rapidly growing area in the UK; thus, courses have the potential to develop, and reimagine, subject content as well as enable the development of criminological awareness and understanding to a larger number of individuals. This is in part due to movements across academic institutions to widen participation, resulting in increased numbers of criminology students, and staff, from a diverse range of backgrounds (Watts and Bridges, 2006). Yet, similar inclusivity and representation is arguably not mirrored in the curriculum. While it appears that the character of contemporary criminology, being increasingly popular and wide ranging in subject scope, should provide the ideal scenario for the criminological canon to be diverse and representative – this opportunity is arguably not being harnessed and reflected in our teaching. In relation to reading lists we need to rethink whose voices are prioritised, marginalised, and excluded. Critical information literacy skills need to be embedded and students empowered, with a potential to work with students to co-produce reading material. Whilst overarching scrutiny mechanisms are lacking there are opportunities within internal and external review processes to consider diversity. Finally, international societies such as the British Society of Criminology and its members could and should proactively work together to create and share content and resources to redress the balance and ensure that voices which have been historically marginalised are meaningfully included, and embedded.

Call for Participants: We are hoping to develop this work further in 2022 to explore how staff develop their curriculum and the role of reading lists within this. If you are interested in sharing your experiences of decolonising the criminology curriculum (no matter what stage you are in this process) and would like to be involved please do get in contact kelly.stockdale@northumbria.ac.uk

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