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The influence of curricula content on sociology students' transformations: the case of feminist knowledge.

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Abstract

Previous research identifies the importance of feminist knowledge for improving gender equity, economic prosperity and social justice. However, there are difficulties in embedding feminist knowledge in higher education curricula. Sociology departments are important for learning feminist knowledge in UK society. Bernstein's theoretical concepts and Arnot's notion of gender codes helps us to explore why strongly framed feminist knowledge embedded in four first year sociology-based undergraduate curricula seems to mainly engage women with feminist knowledge. An analysis of interviews with third year students suggested that women have a more personal relationship with feminist knowledge than men. Curricula, pedagogy and gender codes are all possible contributors to unequal engagement between men and women. We need more understanding of how academic disciplines can contribute to the betterment of society.

Key words: gender codes, curriculum, pedagogy, qualitative analysis, academic disciplines.

Introduction

This paper explores the role that feminist knowledge, embedded in sociology curricula in four English universities, plays in transforming undergraduate students so that they have the potential to contribute to developing a more gender equal society. Research into curricula explores what those attending universities are encouraged and enabled to think about and can contribute to society (Coates, 2006; McLean, 2006; Young and Muller 2016). Governments and policy makers have renewed interest in higher education curricula but there is danger that their narrowly focused economic concerns might undermine opportunities for transformations which enhance democracy and global well-being (Nussbaum, 1998, 2010; Small, 2013). There is little research internationally that explores, in an overarching way, the “dynamics of inequalities” that are created through curricula and pedagogic processes that have been generated by the globalization of higher education (Unterhalter and Carpentier, 2010, p.19). Whilst there is a body of work critiquing the economisation of higher education regarding the economic and social contributions that the arts and social sciences make (e.g. Nussbaum, 2010; Small, 2013), less is understood about how specific curricula do (not) achieve this (notable exceptions include Amsler, 2015; Langan, Sheese and Davidson 2009; Lather, 1991; Morley, 2007). A clearer map and broader understanding of what different university disciplines and their specific curricula can and do contribute to society, is needed. This paper begins to engage with some of the challenges of that task.

Gender inequalities of wealth, status, recognition, power and participation remain intransigent globally including in the UK where this study is set (David, 2014; Leathwood and Read, 2009). Feminist authors and activists have long argued that gender inequities will not be addressed adequately until university curricula have been transformed (Harding, 1986, 1991; Minnich, 2005). The task is to counter the impact of malestream knowledge, which is represented as universal but provides partial perspectives on the world’s problems, creating and maintaining women’s disadvantages. By way of example, Burke (2012) discusses the term ‘battered wives syndrome’ to demonstrate the negative effects of the non-feminist framing of domestic violence. This terminology attributes the problem of male violence to the victim and misdirects efforts to tackle it. Malestream framings of knowledge and the social and economic solutions they develop to the world problems are harmful to national economies and the lives of children.

Feminist perspectives of this nature suggest that diverse groups of women, should be involved in creating knowledge that is used to identify and solve the world’s problems; and, these female generated perspectives should be represented in universities curricula (Leathwood and Read, 2009; Morley, 2007). It has become more widely accepted that what counts as objective truth is shaped by individual subjectivities and the power relations that inform them (Leathwood and Read, 2009). As can be seen on the European Commission’s website in 2015 the High Level Group on Gender Mainstreaming is clear that feminist knowledge should be central to all higher learning). However, Morley (2007) noted, in this journal, that most gender policy in low-income countries is about giving women access to universities, and she revealed how attempts to work towards deeper changes in university curricula, in a sample of low-income countries, were frustrated by a lack of resources including feminist knowledge. It is often taken

for granted that in countries like the UK, particularly in the social sciences, the situation will be considerably advanced.

The analysis presented here builds on earlier work in this same project, where Bernstein's (2000) theoretical framework was used to conceptualise findings regarding the quality of university undergraduate education in four sociology departments in English universities (Economic and Social Research Council RES-062-23-1438). We found that students' transformations during their time at university are greatly affected by the disciplinary knowledge they encountered, something we argued is often ignored in evaluations of the quality of undergraduate degrees (McLean, Abbas and Ashwin, 2013). We concluded that students in all four universities accessed knowledge which could grant access to pedagogic rights (Bernstein, 2000). There are three pedagogic rights operating at the individual, the social and the political levels. Individual pedagogic rights are gained by learning the discipline and acquiring the specialised disciplinary identity of a sociologist which gives confidence and the ability to envisage different possible futures, for example, a society that has greater gender equity (McLean, Abbas and Ashwin, 2015). The social element involves accessing a context in which disciplinary knowledge, dispositions and skills can be used in a social role, for instance, one in which feminist analysis is helpful. The political aspect of pedagogic rights involves being able to intervene to change society. These are nested concepts and the first pedagogic right (achieving the specialised disciplinary identity) underpins the other two. If students do not acquire this they cannot gain access to pedagogic rights via sociology.

In line with much feminist thinking this conceptualisation suggests that the form of pedagogic rights students gain access to will be affected by the specific knowledge and curricula they encounter: and they may be more or less equipped to identify and challenge gender inequity (Unterhalter, 1999). For students to gain access to pedagogic rights they also need to acquire the three aspects of the specialised disciplinary identity (McLean, Abbas and Ashwin, 2013). Firstly, students need to understand the relevant theoretical, conceptual and empirical knowledge. However, sociology is a collection code, as the structure of the discipline is such that there is a host of theoretical perspectives claiming to explain the same phenomena (Bernstein, 2000). The selection and recontextualisation of theoretical perspectives into curricula affects what sociological theories students gain access to and consequently whether the specific form of pedagogic rights is shaped by feminist knowledge. Secondly, students need to be able to apply this knowledge to current or future events and circumstances to gain something akin to Bernstein's prospective pedagogic identity. This involves being able to apply feminist theory to current or novel social contexts and gain significant insights: a skill which most students need to be supported to develop. Thirdly they need to gain specific skills and dispositions (being critical, writing skills, speaking skills and so forth). If students acquire this specialised disciplinary identity they have access to powerful knowledge, which in relation to feminist knowledge would allow them to envisage the possibility of a world where there is greater gender equity and to identify factors that inhibit or promote that (Young, 2008). They would have the potential to intervene in the world as opposed to simply being involved in reproduction.

In this paper we build on our over-arching findings to explore the degree to which this process is affected by feminist knowledge in the four universities. This allows us to evaluate sociology's current and potential contribution for ameliorating gender equality across society and to explore factors which may increase or inhibit it. In order to focus on gender equalities we purposefully ignore other forms of inequality that create the intersecting advantages and disadvantages that shape curricula and students experience. Other conference papers and planned outputs from the project explore further aspects of difference and their intersecting effects. In this endeavour we draw upon on Arnot's (2002) adaptation of Bernstein's concepts to explore the gender codes embedded in curricula and the pedagogies and wider contexts which affect them.

Context

Sociology is important to improving gender relations in the UK because it is one of the key disciplines where undergraduate students encounter feminist perspectives and knowledges. A search of the University and College Admission Service in 2015 revealed that only three undergraduate courses that overtly specialise in gender are offered in the UK. However, the degree to which sociology currently does serve the purpose of propagating feminist knowledge is not easy to understand. Not all sociology curricula contain the same amount of feminist knowledge. National sociology benchmarks are used by universities validating sociology degrees and they give broad guidelines rather than specifying curricula content (QAA, 2007). Detailed surveys of curricula content are not undertaken. It is also difficult to understand the likely effects of any feminist knowledge that is learned without insight into where sociology graduates go and how they use what they have learned in their lives. For feminist knowledge to be effective in promoting national and international changes graduates need to gain positions across a wide range of employment and at every level.

It is difficult to estimate the potential influence that sociology graduates who have acquired feminist knowledge could have although it is likely to be affected by the horizontal and vertical segregation, of men and women into different fields and ranks of employment (Leathwood and Read, 2009). Sociology-related social sciences are very female in the UK. In 2012\13 there were 31,000 students registered on first degrees classified by HESA as sociology and approximately 73% of these students were females and 27% men (HEIDI, 2014). However, these statistics do not contain criminology, which contains much sociology and recruits large numbers of students to sociology departments (Wakeling, 2009): it also recruits more men. Outside of sociology departments the discipline is embedded in courses as diverse as education, health, management and media studies. However, many of these are also female dominated disciplines which often lead to female dominated jobs in the lower-ranking professions (Leathwood and Read, 2009). Given the likely restrictions of the gendered reach of the discipline it is particularly important that the feminist knowledge that is taught in sociology curricula impacts upon male and female students study it at university.

Methodology

The four sociology departments studied were based in England and were differently located in the UK league tables: 'Community' and 'Diversity' were post-1992 universities who were consistently rated in the lower quartile and 'Prestige' and 'Selective', pre-1992 universities regularly ranked in the top quartile. The aim of this study was to provide an in depth

comparison of the four sociology departments so that we could evaluate whether the judgements about the quality of education implicit in the UK league tables are borne out by close examination of what students learn and how they are changed by their undergraduate education. This includes an understanding of how students from diverse backgrounds fare in these different contexts. We studied the departments over 3 years using a mixed-methods approach and the following data sets were generated and analysed: 98 biographical and then educationally focused semi-structured interviews with first year students from across the four institutions; a sub-set of 31 case-study students were interviewed regarding the 3 years of their studies; a survey of over 700 undergraduates from across the 4 universities; university, departmental and curricula documents; UK and international policy documents; 12 videos of seminars (1 in each year per university); a sample of assessed work from each university in each year; field notes from site visits; semi-structured qualitative interviews with lecturers (12) before and/or after the seminars; semi-structured interviews with key informants (4) from each institution; and, relevant departmental, university and national statistics. In this paper we focus mainly on the analysis of curricula documents, the 98 first year interviews and the 31 interviews with case study students in the third year. However, we also draw upon a gendered analysis of the videos of seminars in the first and second years, in interpreting this data.

The interviews with students took place at their universities. They were recorded, transcribed and open-coded by 4 researchers who worked to agree the following set of descriptive codes: current education; family; future identities; me now; previous education and employment; and, wider university. These were used to create parent nodes in Nvivo which each had between 3 and 9 child-nodes or sub-codes. All coded data was checked by at least two of the research team to ensure consistency in the use of codes. Curricula content and structure was analysed and 8 thematic codes were developed through cross-researcher validation processes.

For the analysis presented in this paper we enrolled these original data sets and codes to explore the overall curricula and selected modules for feminist/gender content. We also used a wide range of gender/feminist relevant terms in Nvivo to interrogate relevant themes in the interviews. For example, the sub-code 'relationship to discipline' which coded any mention of sociological theories, concepts or empirical examples were analysed for reference to gender, feminist theory, feminist theorists etc.

The first and second year videos, were originally analysed and transcribed to produce qualitative descriptive codes that would enable us to go back to appropriate segments of the data. We used these to focus on gendered participation in terms of the amount and content of contributions in different pedagogical contexts. The understanding we developed from this have been drawn upon to help us interpret the findings from the analysis of the interview data.

We have adhered to Bernstein's (2000) suggestion that the external language of description (provided by the research data generated) is kept separate from the internal language of description (that of the theoretical conceptual model) for as long as possible. This is to allow the data to provide a perspective that is distinct and that can modify and develop the theoretical model.

Conceptual framework

Arnot (2002) adapted Bernstein's theoretical framework to develop a 'sociological theory of gender relations ...[that]is both critical and interpretative' and it explores the way 'gender relationships work within the social order' (p.1). The core concept of gender code is important as it is the mechanism through which unequal gender relationships are generated, maintained and potentially challenged at all levels of society. Gender codes are present in conscious and unconscious values regarding gender differences and they designate hierarchies between men and women that are carried in thoughts, behaviours, things, institutional structures, media etc. and which we internalise. For example, at the macro level, the gendered patterns of students' taking sociology conveyed in the statistics above are a manifestation of gender codes and the gender order. They also operate to make male undergraduates less likely to take sociology degrees. Sociology departments have to overcome these gender codes if they are to engage men intellectually and personally with feminist knowledge.

If sociology departments are to teach feminist knowledge effectively they need to provide sites whereby students existing gendered identities (learned through previous education, the home, the media and so forth) are recontextualised via the overt and hidden curricula (Arnot, 2002). Hidden curricula are those aspects of which are not made explicit in documents or discussed but nonetheless carry codes that shape people (Morley, 2007): for example, the absence of feminist perspectives in sociology curricula would implicitly transmit the value that it is not considered valuable even if people teaching in the programme explicitly stated contrary opinions. Gender-codes do not determine behaviour and individuals who encounter them can continue unequal hierarchies or transform them. For example, in the statistics above whilst sociology is highly gendered there are still over 27% of students who are men who have acted against gender codes who could engage with feminist theory against acting contrary to mainstream gender codes.

Gender codes operate through the classifications and framings which constitute them (Arnot, 2002). Gendered classifications carry power and they order things, people, concepts, ideas and practices hierarchically. For example, if Marx, Durkheim, Weber and Foucault are presented as the key theorists in the first year other sociologists (and all women sociologists) would be seen as hierarchically lower. Strong classifications create stronger hierarchies. This would suggest that feminist knowledge might therefore become more devalued if it is taught in specialised modules and weaker classifications whereby feminist theorists are embedded centrally in core modules could lead to greater equity. An example of a weak classification would be a curriculum which included equal numbers of text books written by men and women and that gave feminist theory similar presence in core modules to men. This would classify the notion of a renowned sociologist as encompassing male and female sociologists. Gendered framings transmit control often through pedagogical interactions and processes. For example, there is a feminist literature which suggests that pedagogies which are more emotionally aware, promote equal and honest relationships, and a sharing of experience that enhances discussions of theoretical concepts might be ideal for learning feminist knowledge (Barnett, 2011; Harlap, 2014; Leathwood and Hey, 2009). A weak classification of teachers and tutors is needed to facilitate this type of framing.

The classification and framing of feminist knowledge in the curricula

In order to understand whether the four sociology curricula were giving students equal access to feminist knowledge and, ultimately the potential to affect gender equity in their own lives and in society, we analysed curriculum documents. This facilitated an exploration of the

extent to which feminist knowledge was strongly or weakly classified and an assessment of whether there was evidence that the different configurations of curricula affected students' transformations in any way. Feminists have consistently suggested that knowledge produced by and for women is less valued but they have long debated whether this situation is best changed by integrating feminist knowledge into disciplines or having specialised curriculum (Minnich, 2005).

We found that Prestige and Diversity had strong classification of feminist knowledge whereby Community and Selective had weaker classifications. All four sociology degrees have first year core modules containing the readings, concepts and core knowledges that are considered essential to becoming graduates of the particular sociology-related social science degree(s) that are taught. Prestige also included optional modules as part of the core.

Prestige had one core sociological theory module in the first year and this module had no texts about women theorists or even authored by women. However, students had to pick two or three of their optional modules from nine available and 3 had gender or feminist in the title and their content was specifically focused on feminist knowledge. Prestige's core curricula therefore was comparatively weakly framed curricula so there was a possibility that students would only encounter feminist knowledge that was strongly classified. This could happen if they picked the two feminist modules and a fourth module from outside of social sciences, (e.g. a language) which contained no sociological knowledge. However, in the other optional modules integrated feminist curricula were offered and they might only encounter feminist knowledge that was weakly classified. However, on the surface it appeared as if the male dominated non-optional core module did confer a strong sense of hierarchy and a sense that all other theories were classified as subordinate to these in the first year.

Diversity, also had first year curricula in which feminist knowledge was offered in a specialised module that was optional. So students at both of these universities were offered the opportunity to conceptually focus on feminist knowledge in its own terms. For Diversity this was in addition to having feminist knowledge integrated into the other three core modules where it was brought into closer relationship with other theoretical material: hence it was both strongly and weakly classified in different modules. Prestige and Diversity continued to provide opportunities to study feminist knowledge in specialised modules throughout the course of the degrees and a high proportion of staff specialised in feminist research.

In the first year at Community and Selective feminist theory was only taught in modules where it was integrated into the curricula, producing a weak classification of feminist knowledge in a type of mainstream modelling. Community had only core modules in its first year. These focused on Sociological Theory, Politics and Identity, Social Policy and Crime and each were organised thematically around social or practical issues that related to the particular discipline: relevant theory was integrated into each week. For example, the social policy module had weeks on housing, welfare, education and so forth and key theorists were introduced in relation to these. Each module guide listed gender as something that would be considered. The readings overtly relating to gender or feminism could be quite minimal, for

example, the social policy module guide had readings with gender or references to feminism in the title concentrated into one week on gender (five out of seven readings whose main or sole focus was gender from a total of 177). However, there were many readings that will have included discussions of gender in relation to the particular issue in line with the integrated style of the module.

The first year of the degree at Selective offered a similar issue led curricula across a number of key social science disciplines and there were no optional or core modules dedicated to the study of feminist knowledge. It was weakly framed in that the sociology module was the only compulsory module. In this relevant theories were introduced in relation to each theme. However, students could access a lot of feminist knowledge through the reading lists, approximately 25% the readings overtly related to gender. Unlike Community, Selective also offered optional gender focused modules in later years.

In looking at what the 98 first year students said relating to feminist knowledge in the interviews we identified contrast between the students who studied in the universities in which feminist knowledge is only integrated (weakly classified) in the first year and those in which specialised (strongly classified) feminist modules are offered. These findings, presented in Table 1 appear to indicate a relationship between how strongly feminism is classified and the proportion of the 98 first year students that mentioned gender or feminism as being significant to their learning and/or the way they felt they had changed as a result of the knowledge they had studied. Overall, the proportion of students claiming this is quite low (25 out of 98), given that it ideally would be mentioned by most students. The figures in the table exclude students who only mentioned gender/feminism or associated concepts simply to describe the title or list the content of modules they had done (3 at Community, 1 at Diversity, 9 at Prestige and 2 at Selective) although these figures add to rather than contradict the trend described here. Whilst the numbers overall are small it is clear there are proportionally more students from Diversity (11) and Prestige (8), compared to Community (3) and Selective (3) who refer to feminist knowledge.

Community and Selective with their more integrated curricula and criminological focus, both attract more male students so the greater focus on gender in could be accounted for by the gender differences in the recruitment to these degrees and perhaps a more masculine culture. It is also notable that the number of men being influenced by feminist theory was reasonably stable across all four universities suggesting that men and women were differently interacting with the feminist knowledge in curricula. In order to explore this connection further we looked at 3rd year interview data where students to see how they felt the academic content had influenced them.

Insert Table 1 here.

Third year students' gendered transformations

The exploration of third year students' relationship to feminist knowledge indicated the persistence of the gender codes that students had integrated prior to coming to university in differentiating men's and women's relationship to feminist knowledge. Students were not

directed to specific theories during the interviews as we wanted to understand what aspects of the knowledge they had encountered during their degree that they thought had influenced them. Numerically and proportionally fewer third year case study men (5\10) mentioned feminist knowledge than women (14\21). Numerically, comparing institutions makes little sense with this small sample which had very different numbers of male and female students (Community 3 female and 3 male; Diversity 6 female and 2 male; Prestige 6 female and 2 male; and, Selective 3 male and 4 female). However, across all four institutions women students' references to feminist knowledge, indicated that they were questioning their own and others gender codes. For example, Fleur from Prestige is reflecting on the artificial classification of men and women and Leena brings out the messages conveyed about women's bodies in her brother's magazine:

I'd rather just focus on masculinities in relation to gender as opposed to masculinities compared to women, because I also don't think, in my mind I think it's like a kind of a black and white case of like the binary opposites of men and women. I think it's a spectrum because, you know, I probably know more about cars than the average male and most of my friends say I'm more of a man than they are, so to me that's not really something I'm comfortable writing on and so I'm looking now at sort of like the work of Morton, Nixon, Edwards and that kind of, like the way they've talked about men, like portrayed in magazines. (Fleur, Prestige, Year 3)

even like my little brother he's got like a kids magazine you know the ones with the little toys and stuff like that... looking through it every image of a girl is the same, she's always skinny, she's always skinny, like and whenever they show a bigger girl they always make a point about oh this is a bigger girl, that's the only reason they're showing her. (Leena, Diversity Year 2)

These insights interrogate ways of thinking and being, and it is this type of learning that is associated with transforming the classifications that constitute gender codes and with acquiring a specialised pedagogic identity which incorporates feminist knowledge (REFS). Esther from Selective does this most overtly when she reflects on how reading about gender has changed the way she sees herself and her behaviour.

Yeah and I constantly question myself as well. It's kind of made me uncomfortable with certain ways of how I act because I know from, you know, what's been said and I've done lots of reading ...I'm realising how gender is so constructed and how what I'm doing is really constructed and I see how my actions before doing this module and how I act now, it's very different. (Esther, Selective, Year 2)

Lauren from Diversity reflects on how using feminist theory in her dissertation gives her insight into a condition that she herself has:

I'm trying to investigate in terms of gender, using Butler's Theory and Queer Theory, how ...people experience (polycystic ovarian syndrome) that because there's a lot of women being affected and the symptoms are very non-feminine ... you don't want to have hair all over your body or your face 'cos that's a male thing. (Lauren, Diversity,

Year 3)

Not all women who had encountered feminist knowledge were transformed in this way but the potential for accessing knowledge which allowed them to recontextualise and alter their gender codes and to produce new or different classifications existed (Arnot).

The five case study men who talked about feminist knowledge as being something which changed their views or influenced their learning are, not questioning their existing gender codes but instead claim they have had access to knowledge about women they had not previously encountered. Maurice at Community and Frank at Prestige illustrate this more distant approach by focusing on the sex industry and female circumcision. Whilst they demonstrate an interest in gender the topics relate to a particular categories of women who are far removed from their daily lives:

Well I was speaking with my tutor and I'd seen a report beforehand on prostitution and it interested me, sort of shocked me at the same time. So I said to her, I'd like to do something in the area. (Maurice, Community, Year 3)

I did a course on arts and culture in Africa veering because of the experience about two weeks ago it was the most interesting course I've ever done [Right]. I did very, very well; I got 65% and erm (.) and erm I'm thinking about doing my dissertation on female circumcision tribes in Africa (.) so (.) it's very, very sociology but at the same time I'm feeling it got my interest. (Frank, Prestige, Year 3)

It is not that these male students are disinterested in feminist knowledge but it does not, as yet, lead to a fundamental questioning of the rules upon which gender codes are produced: the references are to specific women or inequality as an object of study. Frank does describe himself as having an interest in gender inequality and feminism and sees the Prestige's focus on gender as a positive aspect of it initially.

Ok (..) last year I wrote an essay on the suffragette movement and... that was quite an interesting essay. I learnt a lot history [Yes] and development of women and protesting and rights and I really found that very engaging, very fascinating, read over 20 books for that, that's the most I've ever, ever done for an assignment [Yeah] I did very well as well I got 72 so I know it's my best piece of work [Yes] and erm I was very, very proud of it. (Frank, Prestige, Year 3)

However, in all of Frank's comments it is his work rather than the injustice to women or the transformation of gender codes he focuses on. Elliot from Selective talks about his codes regarding class having been changed. However, his focus on teenage pregnancy and the unfairness of judging young women is somewhat secondary to his interest in class codes. This does involve the type of deep learning we describe in women above, but it is not so much in relation to gender codes and feminist knowledge:

And I find that really interesting, people's attitudes towards girls that choose to have a baby from a young age, but how we sort of demonise people based on their class. Things to do with that were really interesting. The way that, I find middle class

people really interesting, being, you know, middle class myself as well and the way that they all look down on working class people and not really realising that they're doing it. They'll just think that, you know, "How can they behave like that?" and I find it fascinating that middle class people put themselves on such a pedestal, that they think that everything should be done like they do. (Elliott, Selective, Year 3).

Even though there are readings around masculinity scattered throughout the different optional modules we don't have an example of a man who talks about gaining deeper understanding of their own masculinity or providing evidence that they have had their own masculine gender codes recontextualised and transformed by university curricula. However, we have several examples of women who have engaged with notions of masculinity. Faith is looking at black boys' education in her dissertation is finding the literature challenging her previous perceptions of boys in her neighbourhood. Faziah reflects on her uncle's role in her family and culture vis a vis masculinity and Elmira talks about gendered assumptions regarding men being victims of violence.

Discussion

Whilst the numbers are necessarily small in this qualitative study, the patterns that have been identified warrant some consideration in terms of what appears to be happening in these important sites for learning feminist knowledge. The low number of first year students (just over 25%) who identified feminist knowledge as important to their learning and transformation suggests that the four curricula were not working to engage a high percentage of students to think about the impact of gender codes on their lives in the early part of their degrees. In the third year 21 of the 31 case students engaged significantly with feminist knowledge and talked about it in discussing their experience of university learning: 3 out of the 7 case study students who attended Selective, 3 out of 6 at Community, 7 out of the 9 at Prestige and 8 out of the 9 who attended Diversity. These small numbers and the uneven gender breakdown of our case study sample in each university (varying from exactly half (Community) to 7male and 2 female (Prestige)) made a focus on the qualitative difference between men and women in terms of learning, more important. In this section we discuss the factors possibly influencing these patterns. By drawing on the videos of teaching in the first two years and the interviews with students to consider the possible influence of curricula and pedagogy.

Curricula

Men's lack of engagement with feminist knowledge could be attributable to the gender codes that students' embody prior to coming to university (feminism is for women). It is possible to avoid studying feminism. This can be done by missing the weeks and topics involving feminist knowledge and/or by not selecting modules that substantially focus on feminist knowledge. Thus the existing curricula facilitate a situation whereby students can maintain gender codes without being exposed to other possible ways of thinking and being. Women's greater engagement could also be explained by the curricula interacting positively with the gender codes that women arrive at university with (feminist knowledge is classified as being

for them).

As Diversity and Prestige were more successful in engaging women with feminist knowledge in the first year it suggests that their curricula might be more effective. In the case of Prestige this might require that women actively choose a module with gender content. However, it is unlikely this is a direct and simple causal relationship and it could be explained by secondary factors, for example, having more staff with research and teaching specialisms in the area of gender.

In first year core curricula, feminist knowledge in all institutions seems to have been largely framed as being about women. There are very few or no readings about masculinity in those modules which are compulsory for all students in Diversity, Community or Prestige so material labelled feminist or as being about women would have to draw students towards studying gender. Selective's first year module is an exception where there are five readings that specifically focus on masculinity in the extended reading list of 170 academic texts. Across all curricula there are readings that are likely to have embedded material on masculinity but arguably without overt inclusion masculinity is not classified as a core component of sociological theorising. It is understandable that feminist knowledge would focus on women and women's perspectives in the core curricula as it is usually counterbalancing mainstream content and perspectives but perhaps more thought needs to be put into the way that module content and suggested readings classify different theories for students.

A focus on women in the first year curricula could mean men and women are positioned differently in relation to feminist content and it is possible that this contributes to men's relationship with feminist knowledge remaining more abstract. Frank at Prestige engaged with feminist knowledge in his third year interview considerably more than any other men but, despite his professed interest in gender, he is clearly struggling with the positioning of men by feminist knowledge:

when I started reading feminism itself I actually engaged with the text and from a lot of my courses the things we do I believe in the course and I think it's a very good perspective but I Like none of them are gender courses or feminism courses however, every single sociology course I have done has been changed at some point into a discussion about gender and about female subordination and about men being oppressors... (Frank, Year 3).

Whilst it is not possible to attribute direct causation regarding the way that feminism is incorporated into curricula these issues resonate with a wider literature that would suggest that the impact of curricula construction on the extent and nature of students' engagement needs consideration.

Pedagogy

The effects of feminist curricula content cannot be disaggregated from the pedagogies which frame them and there is much in the existing literature to indicate that it is difficult to acquire the level of feminist knowledge that would result in transforming gender codes without suitable pedagogic processes (Lather, 1991; Morley 2007; Leathwood and Read, 2009). In all institutions there was evidence that pedagogical approaches could put students off any curricula content and feminist knowledge was no exception. Fay at Prestige believed one tutors failure to convey their own passion undermined her ability to read and learn:

(The module) could be so good because ... the reading is quite good but ... she just kind of makes it boring, so I don't like going to things and I don't like ... writing the essays... Last week we had a lecture on the erm (.) international sex industry and you think that would be such an interesting subject because everyone has an opinion on it [... she just wants to tell you the information like (.) that she feels you ought to know, she doesn't express her own opinions and that just makes it quite boring (Fay, Prestige, Year 1)

Savati from Diversity claims some discussions in seminars did engage her with feminist knowledge in the first year:

And just in general the topics that we discussed such as adverts, how women are perceived, it was a different way of looking at things that I didn't realise was there... so I think erm overall in sociology that's what it does. (Savati, Diversity, Year 1)

In terms of gaining a specialised pedagogic identity that incorporates feminist knowledge seminars are particularly important as they provide the opportunity to gain the prospective aspects of the pedagogic identity:

The analysis of the videos of seminars across the first two years suggests that there are gender codes which are implicit to seminars that might reinforce the wider gender order and differentiate male and female engagement with sociological knowledge. The eight first and second year seminars we analysed for gendered interactions and engagements had numbers varying from two students and a tutor, to around 50 students with 3 tutors. At the extreme end they provide very different learning opportunities. However, three styles of teaching predominate in the seminars, large scale tutor led discussion, small group work in which students talk to one other around pre-set tasks, activities or themes and, student led presentations in groups or as individuals. In all seminars (with the exception of the 2 students, one male and one female on a snow day) women outnumber men. In one seminar there were only women but in most there are around 20% male students.

Across the eight videos there was a distinct tendency for male students to disproportionately respond to tutor led large discussions, particularly when they involved theoretical concepts. There is a case that this indicates that women are less theoretically confident than men or that they lack the instrumental aspects of the specialised pedagogic identity and the confidence to speak out. However, many feminist authors have concluded that this oversimplifies the

situation to see silence as indicating ignorance or a lack of engagement with the seminar topic (Guest, 2008). Silence is seen as a powerful communicator, perhaps a rejection of a pedagogy or a different type of engagement. In addition women are equally vociferous in student presentations in the videos and they participate in group work and offer experiences and illustrative empirical examples more often than men, as well as, on a few occasions challenging tutors theoretical knowledge. And, as it is women who engage most effectively with feminist knowledge it could be that the other pedagogic approaches, which involve either applying ideas to empirical, practical or personal examples, are more important. So the issue may be with what is happening in the small groups and in the types of seminar presentations that men tend to do. Whilst the latter is an issue of engagement with knowledge the pedagogical challenge may be better articulated in terms of how to develop pedagogical strategies that overcome the masculine gendered-codes of remaining personally distant from theory (something that is also achieved by many women). In this vein Felix from Prestige articulates why he has not been changed personally by the theories he has encountered:

I suppose the way I interact with what I study is quite from an outside perspective and I think I've learned to do that whilst I've been at university because when you're studying gender inequality and stuff like that, you get down to like the really dark side, like crime and deviance, domestic violence, you have to study it from an outside perspective 'cos otherwise you get too emotionally involved. So I suppose actually, no, I don't think it has really 'cos I've kind of treated it as theoretical? (Felix, Prestige, Year 3).

Comments that bring out the importance of pedagogy in enabling students to gain a specialised disciplinary identity proliferate in the interviews.

One video in Diversity in year one featured students specifically discussing feminist knowledge throughout. This seminar did emotionally engage students and at times felt chaotic, but a mixed gender group of ethnically diverse students were articulating their views about the boundaries around sex crimes and domestic violence. It is notable that whole group work was minimal and that students were sent back to small group work when whole group discussions were not resolving answers to questions. The tutor referred in her interview to using the dynamics of the group and its different experiences to generate content. It is significant that Diversity prides itself on a pedagogic style that helps students to integrate the horizontal knowledges of students' lives and perspectives with vertical (theoretical) knowledge because our sample of first year students from Diversity appeared to have the most students engaging with feminist knowledge.

Conclusions

Undergraduate sociology offers an important site where knowledges and skills regarding how to analyse gender inequality and develop strategies to overcome it can be learned about. This analysis of curricula and discussion of students' engagement through pedagogies has suggested that the specialised pedagogic identity acquired by sociology students in the four

degrees we studied does not sufficiently incorporate feminist knowledge, particularly for male students. This is an important finding.

It is widely accepted that feminist knowledge needs to be incorporated in curricula globally and across disciplines if we are to become a more gender equal, socially rich and sustainable planet (Unterhalter, 1999). UK sociology should be one of the most optimistic sites for increasing knowledge and students' engagement with issues of gender (inequity) because there is a wealth of expertise and knowledge.

Disciplines like sociology can contribute much to the world and we need to understand more about how other university disciplines can contribute to global prosperity and equality. However, to do this insights into the effects of existing curricula and pedagogies are needed so we can overcome difficulties in propagating valuable knowledges. We also require insight into where such knowledges travel once they leave universities and how much they are drawn upon. For example, this female dominated discipline has a wealth of expertise but the reach of feminist knowledge may be hindered by the horizontal and vertical segregation of women into particular professions and the effects of the glass ceiling. It is important to contextualise disciplines broadly in this way because:

The beliefs we bring about what is worth teaching, and about diverse people, the society in which we live, the students we are teaching, and the various academic disciplines have a good deal to do with the substance of the curriculum we create and teach. (Sleeter, 2000).

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Table 1: Students from the first year interviews significantly mentioning feminist knowledge.

	Main Disciplines	% Female	Overt gender modules (titles and content)	No of students significantly mentioning feminist knowledge
Community	Sociology Criminology	63%	0	3/27 (2)
Diversity	Sociology Social sciences Psychology Criminology	82%	8/24	11/23 (2)
Prestige	Sociology (Dual honours e.g. with Law)	82%	9/21	8/23(3)
Selective	Sociology Criminology Social Policy	74%	3/24	3/25(2)

*Numbers in brackets refer to the no. of males mentioning gender or feminist theory.