Using student focus groups and student curators to diversify reading lists at Northumbria University

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Contents of talk

- Background to project
- About the projects
- Key findings
- STEM v Social Science
- Challenges
- Concluding thoughts

Suggested Subject Reading - BSc Criminology and Sociology

View Online

Do you have some spare time and are you looking for reading materials during lockdown? Perhaps you want to do some background reading to prepare for your degree?

Below is our 'Lockdown Reading List' including Sociology and Criminology related books, articles films and podcasts. These are intended to be entertaining and also to encourage you to start to think about some of the themes that will be developed in your modules. We hope you enjoy our recommendations!

15 items

Some general texts (6 items)

Lowborn: Growing Up, Getting Away and Returning to Britain's Poorest Towns - Kerry Hudson, 2020
Book | Recommended reading

Coercive control: how men entrap women in personal life - Evan Stark, 2009
Book | Recommended reading

Women, violence and social change - R. Emerson Dobash, Russell Dobash, 1992
Book | Recommended reading

The right amount of panic: how women trade freedom for safety - F. Vera-Gray, 2018
Book | Recommended reading

The aftermath of feminism: gender, culture and social change - Angela McRobbie, 2009
Book | Recommended reading

Invisible women: exposing data bias in a world designed for men - Caroline Criado-Perez, 2020
Book | Recommended reading

Articles (2 items)

From Stigma Power To Black Power - Imogen Tyler
Document | Recommended reading | Imogen Tyler's graphic essay 'From Stigma Power to Black Power'

Coronavirus has made it even easier to forget about disabled people - 2020-04-29
Article | Recommended reading | Article on disability and COVID

KF7032: Big Data and Cloud Computing (Whole Year 2020/21)

View Online

15 items

Core Texts (11 items)

Learning PySpark: build data-intensive applications locally and deploy at scale using the combined powers of Python and Spark 2.0 - Tomasz Drabas, Denny Guang-Yeu Lee, 2017
Book | Essential reading | ELECTRONIC BOOK

Learning PySpark: build data-intensive applications locally and deploy at scale using the combined powers of Python and Spark 2.0 - Tomasz Drabas, Denny Guang-Yeu Lee, 2017
Book | Essential reading

Learning Spark: lightning-fast data analytics - Holden Karau, Andy Konwinski, Patrick Wendell, Matei Zaharia, 2015
Book | Essential reading | ELECTRONIC BOOK

Learning Spark - Holden Karau, Andy Konwinski, Patrick Wendell, Matei Zaharia, 2015
Book | Essential reading

Statistics for machine learning: techniques for exploring supervised, unsupervised, and reinforcement learning models with Python and R - Pratap Dangeti, 2017
Book | Recommended reading | ELECTRONIC BOOK

Mining of massive datasets - Jurij Leskovec, Anand Rajaraman, Jeffrey D. Ullman, 2014
Book | Further reading

Python for data analysis: data wrangling with Pandas, NumPy, and IPython - Wes McKinney, 2017
Book | Essential reading | ELECTRONIC BOOK

Python for data analysis: data wrangling with pandas, NumPy, and IPython - Wes McKinney, October 2018
Book | Essential reading

Data mining: concepts and techniques - Jiawei Han, Micheline Kamber, c2011
Book | Further reading | ELECTRONIC BOOK

Data mining: concepts and techniques - Jiawei Han, Micheline Kamber, Jian Pei, c2011
Book | Further reading

Big-data visualization - Keim, Daniel, Qu, Huamin, Ma, Kwan-Liu
Article | Further reading

Background – Northumbria University

- Northumbria University – Race Equality Charter 2020

- Decolonising Northumbria - Five strands: research; curriculum; institution; anti-racist classroom; and student-facing strand.

- Stockdale and Sweeney (2019) *Exploring the criminology curriculum* https://www.britsoccrim.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Exploring-the-Criminology-Curriculum-PBCC19.pdf
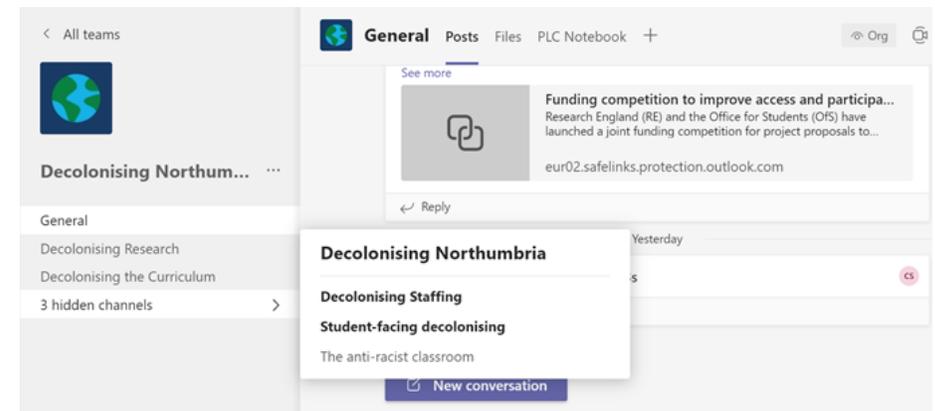
Background - EQEF projects

- Student curators – develop student-led resources including additional reading list and publisher materials, library displays, and the creation of virtual materials such as podcasts and videos in relation to the project

- Online focus groups – working with students as co-creators reflecting on the diversity of their reading lists, and collaboratively identifying readings that better reflected marginalised voices within their modules

- £1k for each project

- 2020/21

- *Criminology* and *Computer and Information Sciences* Departments

Student Curator project – what we did

- Recruited 2 student curators (CIS/Crim)

- Regular steering meetings

- Criminology student explored the reading lists and curated content by diverse range of authors that relate to module content and subject-specific material in relation to Black Lives Matter

- CIS student interestingly took a different route and used their computing skills to develop means of hosting/showcasing material

Student Curator - Findings

- Real challenges due to Covid-19 (our time to lead the project as female academics with caring responsibilities / ability to think creatively!)

- Difficulties in relation to conceptualising library space/student resources – physical & virtual space

- Tied with research on developing student's critical information literacy … ideally would be to build this over the course of the degree programme and curator role would develop from here

Online focus groups – what we did

- Online focus groups via Microsoft Teams
- Module/course focus
- Intersectionality matrix (Stockdale & Sweeney, 2019)
- Key questions
  - What they enjoyed reading on their course
  - What they didn't enjoy reading
  - Padlet activity – listing authors
  - Padlet activity – intersectionality matrix
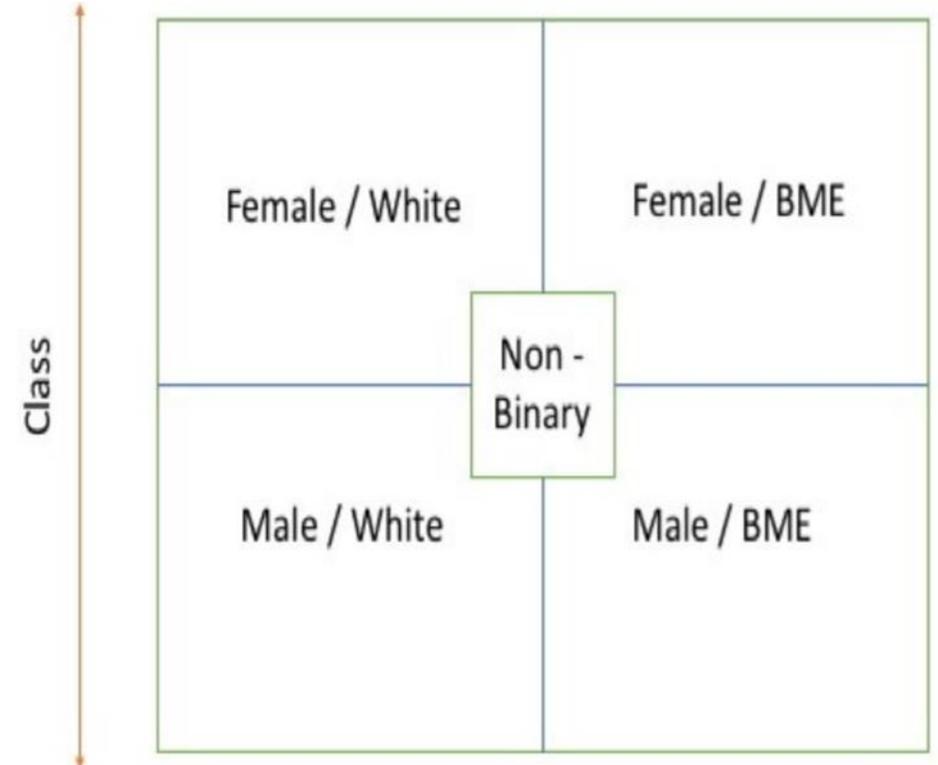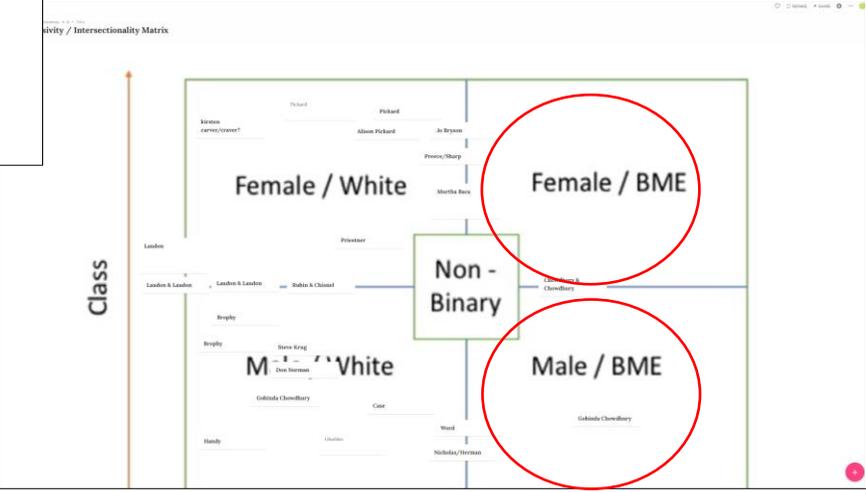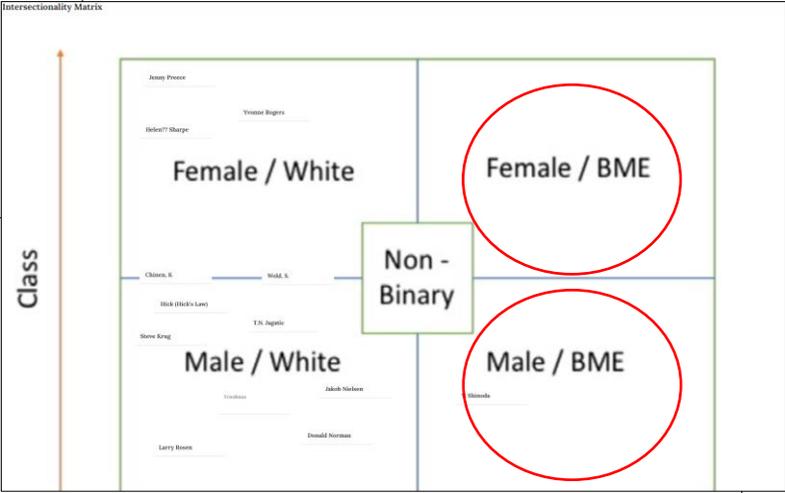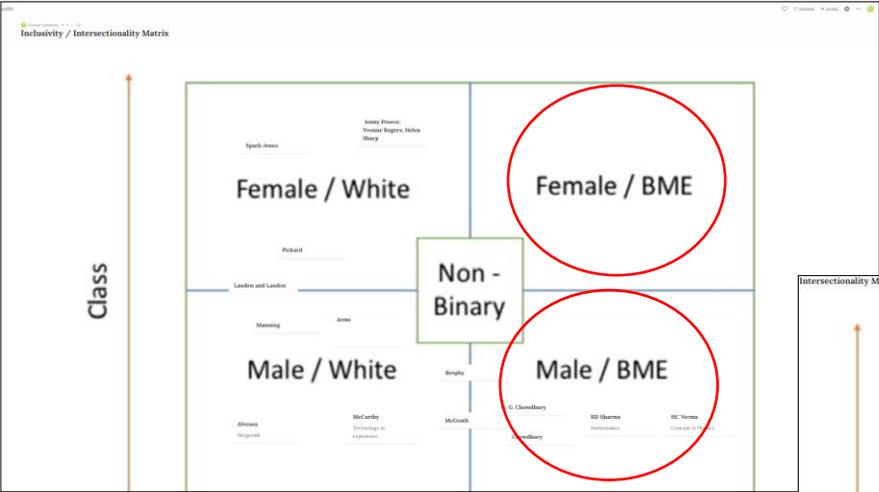 - Any other points

Figure 4: Intersectionality Matrix

Online focus groups - Matrices

Online focus groups – initial themes

- CIS students do not question the context and author background of reading list literature – more about **the way text is written**

"A book called 'Interaction design: Beyond human-computer interaction', I read that. The way that the authors had written it was really good, it was quite humorous in a few parts, so I quite enjoyed it"

"Pickard's for the research methods module which I've tried to read through it a few times and its … I find that it's heavily referenced. ...I'm reading that book and it just doesn't really gel with me, so I've been looking at other examples"

Sexism

"We had to read Charles Handy's management book. And I actually wrote to the professor because the text was incredibly, well ==I found it incredibly sexist==, and I can't remember off the top of my head now, but it said things like "women in management are authoritarian" and "men are better managers" and "women in the profession have unruly kids" there were no citations or anything for this. And I ==got so distracted I started highlighting all the sexist references== rather than what I was supposed to be looking at which management theories"

Inclusivity matrix as a trigger

- Some students found that using the inclusivity matrix **triggered them to think about diversity**, previously never considered.

"I'm quite selfish as a student in that I just want the best information I want the best sources. But from… thinking about like inclusion and things like that, it is definitely important, but to be honest it's not really something that crossed my mind until you organise this session.

So, I see women's names, or I see men's names beyond that I've never thought about the colour of the author or anything else, for me it's all about the information"

Male, white authors

- Using the matrix helped students to see the **unequal balance of reading list authors.**

"So, on the matrix you have kind of categorised the authors and researchers in terms of their gender and ethnic characteristics. So, the names are spread out in different parts of the matrix. What do you think when you look at where the names are placed?

Erm…

All white males.

Yea pretty much.

And what do you think about that? Do you think that's not an issue, do you think that's a bad thing, a good thing?

It seems a bit unfair. A bit biased.

There's no balance"

Opinions on lack of diversity

"Well, the ==obvious thing is that there is nobody in the female/BME section==. From a first look it looks like we are slightly weighted to the male side. I suppose that gives you another question about whether Information Science is male dominated....I wonder if there was more of us here today who were from the library side whether we would have more female authors on the Matrix?"

"It seems a bit unfair. A bit biased"

"==It's very white==. […] So, I think, especially again coming from the discipline...library management, yeah, it's bad! It doesn't reflect .. everybody's experiences"

"==I didn't realise until actually doing this exercise that a lot of the women authors seemed to be paired with men=="

Class

- CIS Students were generally **not familiar with the idea of class.**

"No. No thoughts on that whatsoever"

"I'm not sure"

"I would have absolutely no way of knowing"

"Yea same, absolutely no idea"

Does a diverse reading list matter to students?

- Most CIS students did not see the **background of the author** as important to their studies

"It doesn't matter to me. As long as what they have written is easy to help us understand the topic and the module....==its about how much their knowledge influences us to help us gain our knowledge=="

"For me it doesn't matter, ==it's all about the quality==. If the quality is good, if what I'm getting out of it is good then it doesn't matter who wrote it. If the literature which I am using for my academic work is good then I go for it, I don't see really why it would matter who wrote it"

"I'm quite selfish as a student in that ==I just want the best information== I want the best sources"

Does a diverse reading list matter to students?

Northumbria University NEWCASTLE

▪ Some CIS students had **mixed views**

"I completely agree I want to read the best…whoever is the best thinker in the field regardless I don't care about their backgrounds are necessarily. However, ==I don't think you can have a really representative discussion on something like AI [Artificial Intelligence] unless you have minority and female voices in that discussion==, because there have been so many issues of them not being included and huge ethical issues with AI coding and things like that.

I think you have to look outside maybe what is considered to be the best or the smartest or the whatever. That's not necessarily my area, mine is library management, but in library management absolutely ==it is hugely important to hear the voices of everybody==! ...so, I think any discussion of librarianship has to be....inclusive of all voices"

Changing perceptions

▪ Majority of CIS students thought it was **important to think about diversity following the matrix activity** – however some were more confident than others as to whether it would change their approach in the future.

"I think it has <mark>raised my awareness</mark>, I'm not sure that it's going to change anything I do at the moment. I think the reason for that is that there is so much to do, I'm not sure I feel I have got the time to be worrying so much. That sounds awful, doesn't it?"

"I think it is <mark>maybe something I will be more aware of</mark>; I don't know whether or not it would change the texts that I choose to read though. <mark>I feel like maybe it should do, but I don't know that it would</mark>"

Changing behaviour

"*For me I would like to go and research female BME background authors in my subject. Because I am quite astonished that I don't know any authors form that background*"

"*Yea I think I would try to look for more diverse authors to try and get like those different viewpoints but rather than just kind of sticking to what I'm being told*"

STEM v Social Science

- Use of matrix was useful tool for both groups

- STEM generally perceived as a male subject by the CIS students

- Social science students were typically quite shocked when they saw the results/hadn't considered this previously

- CIS Students generally felt that the subject, and quality of writing is more important than the author

- All students believe that for some topics, and niche areas, it is not always possible to read a diverse range of voices.

Challenges we faced

- Covid-19: conducting research in pandemic.

- Computer fatigue - previous focus groups were fun/interactive/drinks and snacks etc.

- Difficulties engaging students, especially with the lack of face-to-face content/limited opportunities to build connections with students to encourage participation

- STEM students don't always read that much theory

Concluding thoughts

- Where next?
- The role of academic staff
- The role of the library

Publications forthcoming:

Casselden, B., Stockdale, K.J., Sweeney, R. '*Using student focus groups and student curators to diversify reading lists at Northumbria University'*.

Stockdale, K.J., McCluskey Dean, C., Sweeney, R. '*Exploring the criminology curriculum – using the intersectionality matrix as a pedagogical tool*'

Stockdale, K.J., McCluskey Dean, C., Sweeney, R., Azam, I., Brown, J. '*Exploring the criminology curriculum – reflections on developing and embedding critical information literacy*' in Young, S. & Strudwick, K. (Eds) Teaching Criminology and Criminal Justice: Challenges for Higher Education. Palgrave.

Any Questions?

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