Teaching Criminal Justice as Feminist Praxis

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Introduction

Thanks to popular culture's fascination with crime and criminals, criminology remains one of the fastest growing disciplines for undergraduate study in the UK. Prospective students often apply wanting to know more about how criminals – particularly serial killers – operate, even though this is rarely the focus of many UK critical criminological degrees. Perhaps more importantly, they (and their parents) are aware that the criminal justice system is essentially a recession-proof industry, ticking the all-important graduate employment box. This, coupled with incentives such as graduate fast-track routes in the increasingly professionalised justice sector, means criminology remains an attractive degree option in terms of value for money.

What ought to be of importance to the conscientious criminology tutor is whether – and how – students carry their learning with them into the workplace upon graduation. Critical criminology degrees which highlight structural inequalities, discrimination, victimisation, marginalisation, harm, persecution and so forth based on factors such as 'race', religion, sexual orientation, gender, age, and class seek to impart knowledge designed to inform progressive social change. Global movements such as Black Lives Matter and #MeToo, or those which highlight refugee/migrant crises and expressions of Islamophobia, demonstrate how criminology is a subject with a wider reach far beyond the classroom.

A specific focus on gender in relation to social and criminal justice issues often forms the basis of feminist-inspired critical pedagogies, with analyses typically foregrounding the experiences of women as victims, offenders, and criminal justice practitioners in an otherwise androcentric domain. Feminist pedagogy is inherently critical in nature, employing an analytical and questioning approach which is unaccepting of the (gendered) status quo (Shackelford, 1992). Feminist scholars engage in the wider deconstruction of (and resistance to) patriarchy through: incorporating students as experts of their own experience; encouraging students to engage reflexively with power, privilege and positionality; and prioritising transformational learning (Lawrence, 2016). This is especially relevant to criminology which, like many social science degrees, has a disproportionately higher ratio of female students.

While different feminist identities and pedagogical approaches exist, educators are aligned in their investment to affecting a critical pedagogy which is 'united in a view of education as a

practice committed to the reduction, or even elimination, of injustice and oppression' (Clarke, 2002: 67). Underpinning these objectives is the key feminist mantra *the personal is political* which helps unveil the gendered nature of social and structural institutions:

> *At its simplest level, feminist pedagogy is concerned with gender justice and overcoming oppressions. It recognises the genderedness of all social relations and consequently of all societal institutions and structures.* (Shrewsbury, 1997: 167)

Feminist educational spaces are designed to impact on students' lives within and beyond the classroom (McCusker, 2017). Applying a feminist approach to teaching means: emphasising (dis)empowerment; highlighting students' voices; resisting hierarchy; engaging collaboratively and sharing learning experiences in an immersive manner. Employing critical feminist pedagogies when teaching issues related to social and criminal justice are of specific importance due to their role in:

> [*E]ffecting social change, redefining pedagogical power and authority, valuing personal experience, diversity and subjectivity, reconceptualising classrooms as spaces for social justice, and using learning to help students to become activists and go beyond the classroom to effect the necessary wider changes that are needed.* (McCusker, 2017: 448)

Many feminist tutors employ this critical and transformative potential in their academic practice as part of their efforts to ensure students can 'contribute to equity and equality, within and beyond the academy' (De Welde et al, 2013). However, despite educators' best efforts or intentions, this type of message or method may not always be welcomed, or supported by intended audiences, particularly those who may be more results-oriented than impact-led.

This chapter presents findings from an empirical research project exploring feminist socio-legal scholars' experiences of teaching gendered and intersectional issues on criminology, criminal justice, and criminal law modules in UK universities. Between 2018-19, forty-four self-selecting participants completed an anonymous online survey, and fourteen took part in follow-up, semi-structured interviews. The thematic analysis of the survey findings fed into the interview protocol, with interviews being recorded for professional transcription and thematically analysed by both researchers. Interview participants were remunerated for their time with an online shopping voucher. The research underwent full ethical review in the lead author's university and was funded by a grant awarded by the Socio-Legal Studies Association.

To adhere to confidentiality and anonymity, interviewees are referred to by their pseudonyms and any identifying details about their institutions are omitted.

The chapter focuses on four key thematic areas identified in the analysis: challenges to participants' feminist identities and feminist ideologies more generally; mechanisms of embodying and embedding intersectionality; experiencing reflective practice as feminist praxis; and efforts taken to make learning relevant. The chapter concludes by reinforcing the need for feminist pedagogy before presenting five take-away recommendations for best practice as illustrated by our findings.

Challenges to Feminist Identity and Ideology

Feminism's visibility in contemporary popular culture has benefited from both the internet and high-profile women leaders like Beyoncé, Angelina Jolie, Emma Watson and Meghan, Duchess of Sussex openly identifying as feminists and inspiring generations of younger people (Stern, 2018). However, for many of our participants, it was their own university studies which sparked a more private curiosity and awareness around feminism as both an ideology and identity. Learning from inspiring and engaging tutors had resonated not only due to the content of classes, but also the ways in which the material was taught. In their efforts to emulate and build upon this with their own students, participants noted the importance in meaning and value of eliciting understanding and relevance through applying information in ways that was relevant to people's lives. For example, drawing on personal experiences was considered an effective way to make learning more authentic, so this often began with a desire to be upfront about their own feminist stance early on:

> *I start the module by making the case that we should all be feminists regardless of gender and outlining patriarchy as harmful to all regardless of gender, sexuality and so on.* (Survey respondent)

> *I do feel that I should, and I certainly do, declare that I'm a feminist before I teach. And I don't think that should make an impact on what I'm teaching. But … I think I do it so then people understand where I'm coming from.* (Sylvia)

Taking efforts to state one's feminist position models a teaching practice which recognises individuality and subjectivity in a way that invites students to understand without judgement. Importantly, such a move may also help offset learners' dismissive or hostile interpretations of

feminism or feminist identities which have arisen because of misrepresentations of feminism as extremist, 'man hating' or being synonymous with lesbianism:

> *I had one male student tell me he couldn't identify as feminist as 'some women take it too far'. I suggested to him that his position is the same as not identifying as male as some men are rapists.* (Survey respondent)
>
> *I still see a lot of people responding to the word 'feminism' like it's a dirty word.* (Betty)

Betty's comment that, to some, feminism is a "*dirty word*" is demonstrative of resistant social (and political) responses to the identity. For this reason, Stern (2018: 45) describes feminist self-identification in the classroom as an act of 'vulnerability'. Conversely, Blackmore (2013: 146) suggests that disclosing one's feminist identity as a 'political, epistemological and indeed normative position' constitutes a feminist leadership approach.

Resistance to feminism (and feminists) in the academy, from both students and faculty, is not a new phenomenon (See work by Clarke et al., 1996; Morley, 1998; Thwaites and Pressland, 2016). Exploring this culture of student resistance to feminism, McCusker (2017) highlighted the importance of generational factors. Recognising that her students had been exposed to more negative representations of feminism at a time where several identified as 'third wave feminists' or 'postfeminists', she was mindful of the cultural differences between this period and her own exposure to it 'at the height of its so-called second wave':

> *Whatever their reasons for rejecting and disavowing feminism, their views certainly reflected a gulf between them and me. I wanted to traverse that gulf and find means to engage in meaningful discussions about feminism with them.* (2017: 455)

In reflecting on these issues of positionality and interpretation, McCusker demonstrates her commitment to feminist (pedagogic) praxis and facilitation. Interestingly, similar themes were evident in some of our participants' narratives. Jane recalled how it can be difficult for students – particularly those so familiar with the status quo – to get on board with feminist critique as '*they will feel that it's biased, or that it's political*'. This bias (usually inferred to be against men) was also evident when seeking to address binaries such as good or bad; for or against; right or wrong; man or woman. Resistant students often used feminist challenges of power, privilege, and hierarchy (which highlight how some women are structurally disadvantaged) as templates to critique feminism on the presumed exclusion of, or bias against men or male

experiences. Participants noted the regularity with which students would focus on the supposed omission of men as victims:

> *I have noticed a trend towards highlighting male victims, whether of sexual violence or, more commonly, victims of false rape allegations. While this is positive that less visible forms of violence are receiving attention, I notice that this is sometimes weaponised during discussions of violence against women.* (Survey respondent)

Bright (1987: 131) argues that effective learning processes require students' active involvement and tutors' recognition of the pervasive effects of patriarchy 'even on the most feminist of class members'. Female students' eagerness to highlight the dearth of knowledge on male experiences of sexual and domestic violence (and on women as perpetrators of such harm) could be read in several ways. To some, this may be in opposition to feminism's traditional efforts to foreground women, while to others it could be seen as extending the focus beyond women in line with the growth of intersectional feminism. It may be also the case that focusing on men as victims protects these students from thinking about their own (heightened) vulnerability to victimisation on the basis of gender.

Embodying and Embedding Intersectionality

Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) coined the term intersectionality to illustrate how women of colour who experienced discrimination did so on grounds of both race and gender. This concept of the intersectional location offers a framework within which to highlight the experiences of those who do not fit the white heteronormative male paradigm (so often centred upon in criminology). Taking a broader approach to intersectionality involves recognising that people embody a range of identities and as such may be variously affected by sexism, racism, or discrimination based on factors such as disability, class, age, sexual orientation and so forth, in complex and simultaneous ways. These issues are often repackaged within a neutralised discourse of 'diversity' in a manner which individualises their differences and obscures the historic power relations informing the systematic factors underpinning them. Ahmed (2004) has illustrated how institutions may seemingly embrace discussions on 'diversity' yet avoid engaging in meaningful actions towards truly establishing diversity. Furthermore, these discursive moves fail to recognise or give serious consideration to 'the comprehensive range of literature and research, as well as discourse, from anti-racist, gender equity or critical and feminist pedagogy' (Blackmore, 2013: 146).

However, despite the (slow) growth in non-traditional voices gaining greater prominence, criminology as an academic discipline remains dominated by white western scholarship, as is often reflected in the androcentric course content (Stockdale and Sweeney, 2019). Illustrating this, several participants indicated that their institutions took a siloed approach whereby topics considered of a 'special interest' were annexed or situated separately from the main degree content on demarcated weeks or in stand-alone gender or race modules:

> *[W]e will do all the teaching and then we will have a week where we talk about gender … Or we have a week where we talk about race, but of course we won't connect that to gender or disability or sexuality or indeed the core topics. … And it's really not the way that the world works.* (Irene)

Such separation efforts belie how experiences of structural, institutional, and interpersonal discrimination and/or disadvantage overlap and inform one another while impeding the ability for curricula to be fully representative and inclusive of different experiences, identities, and ideas. Instead, programmes often 'lump everything about race and difference into one section', if indeed such issues are covered at all (hooks, 1994: 38). This also contributes to people associating gender with women (but not men), or race being synonymous with Black, Asian or minoritized ethnicities (but not white). Several of the online survey respondents indicated how they overcame this in their pedagogic practice:

> *I try to incorporate gendered elements in individual lecture content, rather than having a standalone lecture on it.*

> *Many of our students seek a career in the police service. I devote a whole session to the experiences of women in the police service, and spend some time on intersectionality (black women officers).*

A central component of feminist pedagogy is the engagement in reflexivity for meaningful personal (learner) development, not just for performative or dynamic assessment purposes (Koster, 2011) but as a method of helping learners engage with the material on an interpersonal level. Participants noted the methods of integrating intersectional content and approaches to highlight wider social structures and fallacies around disciplinary objectivity. These included taking advantage of opportunities as they arose throughout the course, and providing vague module descriptors:

> *I like to include student-led elements in modules and I see this as informed by feminist pedagogy. Exploring issues of power and inequality is important to all of the modules.* (Survey respondent)

> *[A]lthough I don't force it, whenever something occurs to me that has a kind of gender angle, I do raise it.* (Harriot)

Underpinning this was a recognition of the importance of taking such action for students' learning:

> *I think it's also important to embed those critical ideas … maybe less formally, more informally. And I think for me it's because inherently the systems that we're teaching about are classed, raced, gendered, ableist, colonial. You know, all of those things are present all of the time, and so the idea that you can teach about them without mentioning that to me seems bizarre.* (Irene)

> *I think definitely there is a kind of openness to and an enthusiasm for looking at things like in a more intersectional way … I think it feels more real for them, more like that's something they can understand and they can see, rather than it like just being someone having a bee in their bonnet about women being treated badly.* (Pauline)

Those determined to undertake this work highlighted concerns around time pressures and time constraints, particularly with respect to being able to effectively design and deliver critical pedagogic content:

> *I try and show my students that intellectual engagement and acumen do not require being egotistical, or competitive and, conversely, that a more empathetic, holistic approach to intellectual engagement and academic work is not antithetical to interesting, rigorous contributions (even though it may be more arduous and take longer).* (Survey respondent)

> *if you're wanting to … rewrite part of your lectures to have a greater focus on feminism or intersectionality or on critical race … you don't get the time for that.* (Coretta)

Unsurprisingly, these sacrifices were largely ignored by interviewees' institutions. Nonetheless, they continued to undertake this additional work as its ongoing importance and relevance was evident to them as feminists. For Sylvia, her commitment to taking the time to ensure an intersectional approach paid dividends when she saw this reflected in her students'

assessments. Francis recalled how, despite her university's failure to engage with intersectionality in the curriculum (focusing solely on gender in gender-related modules only), the university's diverse student population meant they were likely to be "*more personally affected by some of the issues that intersectionality would draw out*." In other words, the students' lived identities and experiences meant intersectionality was on the table, whether or not the University wanted to acknowledge it.

Reflective Practice as Praxis

An important part of feminist pedagogic praxis is conscious reflection, coupled with efforts to be as inclusive and representative of others' voices as possible (Bignell, 1996). Several participants recognised that their feminist identities shaped their teaching and how they interacted with students. Gloria noted that sharing a minoritized racial identity with some of her students may have played a positive role in their engagement with both her and the material:

> *I think for a lot of BME students … partly it's the content of what we are teaching them, but partly it's also because I am probably their only BME tutor, sometimes for the entire duration of their degree life. So it might be that they're responding more positively to me for that reason. But there are students who really appreciate, um, sometimes students from BME working class backgrounds as well, who are suddenly able to make sense of things because we include that in the syllabus, right?* (Gloria)

However, discussing issues such as race proved trickier for some; indeed, race has been noted as 'especially challenging to teach in classrooms that have little diversity and/or where the instructor is a member of a socially privileged group' (Hernandez and Ten Eyck, 2015: 9). One participant, Pauline, described feeling conscious of occupying a hierarchical position beyond that of a tutor, and the bearing this may have had on the information she was imparting:

> *I think the only place where I do tend to sometimes feel a bit uncomfortable is when I am talking … about issues that don't really affect me … And then I am more conscious of kind of, 'Am I doing this justice?'* (Pauline)

Pauline indicated that this was particularly important given that she was a white woman often teaching about marginalisation and discrimination. Speaking about one particular class focused on highlighting Black women's experiences from the perspective of Black women writers, she elaborated on her reflexive and representative learning techniques:

> *I used to give a lecture that was specifically on intersectionality and I would, like, use quite a lot of images in the slides, so I'd have, like, an image of Kimberlé Crenshaw stood at a podium talking about it, or a bit of a video clip of her. I'd have images of book covers from, like, bell hooks and Kimberlé Crenshaw* (Pauline)

Her intentions were to ensure students were aware of the origins of the content as well as how it might resonate directly with those in the room. Several participants outlined how it is in these spaces that students' intersectional identities can shape their levels of engagement with the material being presented:

> *Women and students who have other minority identities also tend to be more receptive.* (Survey respondent)

> *What I find quite interesting was that women were more receptive to the feminism and the criminal law content, and then I had BAME* [Black, Asian, and Minoritized Ethnicity] *students that seemed more receptive to the race and miscarriages of justice material. … it's their own experiences that shape whether or not they are receptive to some ideas* (Coretta)

Participants sought to make material resonate with and for students through classroom collaboration, experiential learning, and consciousness-raising:

> *I use radical pedagogic approaches that aim to decenter power and make the learning space more shared and collaborative. This includes co-designing the assessment criteria with students, letting students have some say in what topics we cover, and making sure the readings we use are not just from old white men.* (Survey respondent)

> *I think it's about making these things come alive for students and using their own experiences or the experiences of people that they know, to show the importance of these things.* (Jane)

The statistics on racial, religious, gendered, domestic, sexual, or other forms of interpersonal violence indicate that in any given group of students, one or more of these issues will have some form of personal relevance (Shorey et al, 2011). As Murphy-Geiss (2008: 385) notes, teaching topics like domestic violence requires an approach that goes beyond 'traditional' models of reading and lectures and pays attention to 'multiple pedagogies' that highlight emotionally engaging methods and realistic situations. This was relevant to participants who reflected on students having disclosed personal experiences of domestic abuse – particularly

coercive control – during class. Thelma recalled a class on domestic homicide where the students had been struggling to understand why a domestic abuse victim wouldn't just leave the abuser. Among them was a student who Thelma knew to have experienced coercive control. Thelma described how the student's decision to disclose this during the discussion not only provided a level of insight that went above and beyond anything the literature could impart, it also challenged the other students' preconceptions:

> *[B]ringing in the experience of my kind of co-teacher, who was willing to share that experience, and … give them a kind of real-life example that it's not always possible, even with people who you might think had … the means and the education … to be able to* [leave]. (Thelma)

Such opportunities allow the class dynamics to fundamentally shift in terms of who is considered the 'expert' or 'tutor' in a given moment. The "*co-teacher"* terminology used by Thelma indicates the philosophy underpinning critical and feminist approaches to teaching whereby lived experiences are considered authentic and equitable to learned material (Soleil, 2000). This may involve using uncomfortable classroom experiences to facilitate students' learning. As do Mar Pereira (2012: 132) outlines, transformative feminist teaching is cognisant of the potential for transforming feelings of discomfort – both students' and tutors' – into 'generative learning tools'. As an example of this, Irene indicated that over the past few decades of teaching she had witnessed an increasing level of "*explicit resistance around race and class*", particularly in terms of students' approaches to racial stereotypes or profiling, which had manifested in students making problematic comments in class. Irene's decision to use these comments as a basis for critical engagement and discussion rather than admonishing students paid dividends:

> *[B]ecause of our location, we have very few Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students. Some of them came up to me afterwards and we had a really good discussion about their discomfort and my discomfort in what was being said. And on the whole they were kind of complimentary about the way it had been handled, but it was profoundly uncomfortable for all of us, and I really wanted to check that they were okay*. (Irene)

Recognising the conditions under which power and privilege operate, Boler and Zembylas (2003) argue that there are no 'safe' classroom spaces, therefore labouring under this misapprehension may obscure the groundwork necessary to create spaces for critical

engagement. In other words, such efforts may involve doing 'extra work' in a manner that other tutors or modules may not require:

> *I try to break down hierarchies in the classroom at the start of each term … about respect, working together, get class to engage with materials critically* (Survey respondent)

> *I do quite a lot of work on the seminars that I run, … a lot of preamble and stuff about how to have difficult conversations. How to disagree effectively and respectfully, and all those kinds of things*. (Betty)

Contrastingly, Harriot indicated that she employed avoidance strategies due to not being comfortable or confident to address such topics when they emerged spontaneously:

> *I want to challenge it, I want to be anti-racist, I want to be a good ally and I want to set an example to students in the room, but also I don't want to discourage them from speaking out, I don't want to embarrass them and I don't want to stifle opinions that are different to mine just because they're different to mine you know?* (Harriot)

Participants acknowledged that some students could disengage if they felt certain identities were being challenged on the grounds of privilege, or if they are being asked to consider how some might benefit from structural factors that disadvantage others:

> *some hostility from the white males when they hear me banging on about structural violence again and patriarchal subjectivity but I try to pre-empt that by discussing intersectionality and variations in the white male experience too.* (Survey respondent)

> *when exploring male to female violence and the prevalence and nature of the violence - males (and at times females) struggle with this or challenge me at least* (Survey respondent)

While they were acutely aware of how this critical approach might be having the opposite effect on some students' engagement, participants recognised that it was impossible to talk about subjugation without acknowledging power:

> *some of us have experiences of oppression and some of us have experiences of oppressing, and I think it's important that that doesn't get lost.* (Pauline)

Francis outlined how this was a necessary exercise with her students, many of whom she described as having "*super-privileged backgrounds*":

> *when you're talking intersectionality and feminist issues you end up talking about legal structures and power dynamics, and that can be really eye-opening for students, and it can kind of get them to check themselves a bit. But I actually think that students have a much harder time identifying their privilege in comparison to identifying their disadvantage. … I'm just not sure about students checking their own privilege. … I think teaching them about* [feminist and intersectional] *approaches is really good to get them to look at the system and think about patterns, but I think when you ask them about privilege, their own privilege … we should probably do that more*. (Francis)

> *a question that I always go back to is: What makes you say that?* (Jane)

Sylvia was keen to highlight that students should be made aware that addressing their privilege need not be uncomfortable if done correctly. Asserting the importance of "*recognising that privilege isn't a negative thing*" she suggested that often students would be "*reluctant to recognise their own privilege*" if it is considered a negative endeavour rather than a realisation that people are born into different types of advantage and disadvantage. Therefore, tutors' efforts to foreground issues of privilege – for example through experiential exercises where students visibly respond to privilege-based questions – may feel like a stand-alone task (Sgoutas, 2013) or incur resistance from sceptical students (Stern, 2018; Siliman and Kearns, 2020).

Making Learning Relevant

Bignell (1996) examines how the goals of feminist pedagogy – namely, to focus on students' experiences as valuable resources for learning – can be extended from theory to an informed practice. Concentrating on the reciprocal nature of learning, Bignell highlights how the incorporation of students' experiences not only helps shed light on the 'ruptures and gaps in liberating discourses,' but how 'the fear of exposing any shortcomings within the development of feminist pedagogy should not impede the progress which can arise from a better understanding' of these gaps (1996, p. 324). In as much as we think we are the ones teaching our students, we are also constantly learning from them. Several participants commented positively about the impact on their *own* personal and professional development through providing students with the space, confidence and encouragement to challenge the ideas being presented:

> *I give them permission to disagree with me. I just say, please … be able to express that respectfully and try and have a good reason for why you are disagreeing, or talk to me*

> *if you disagree but you can't quite work out why you're disagreeing. Try and articulate that to me so we can talk about it. So … I encourage critical thinking just because it's a fundamentally important skill. And also, I worry that I personally get dead set in my views and my ways and I kind of welcome the challenge, so I also frame it in that kind of sense saying that I want you to interrogate this stuff and work out what you think, but I also want you to keep me thinking and keep me on my toes.* (Betty)

> *I'm glad that they feel empowered to disagree with me in the classroom* (Harriot)

Tutors who are invested in promoting meaningful development among learners understand this, recognising that educational establishments 'are not separate from society, but constitute a key site in which democratic citizenship is understood and practiced' (Blackmore, 2013: 148). Reflecting on this, Stockdale and Sweeney (2019: 86) note the importance of keeping in mind the potential for critical pedagogies to produce more equitable outcomes in wider society:

> *If criminology students are potentially not being encouraged to consider certain sources or viewpoints when learning or writing about an area of criminology, then it is unlikely that the knowledge construction of criminological topics will develop in a way shaped by authentic and/or diverse voices. Thus, the power of such voices will continue to be reduced and be largely incapable of informing criminological thinking.*

Critical pedagogies 'aim to provide space for critical engagement with divergent perspectives in order to support students from disenfranchised populations to understand the impact of capitalism, gender, race and homophobia on their lives' (McCusker, 2017: 447). To do this requires a diversity of voices, as outlined above, but this will be influenced by who is designing reading lists or lecture content. Where such voices are muted or excluded, finding alternative means of learning and understanding become crucial exercises in representation. Several participants indicated the alternative ways they employed to bring varied perspectives into the classroom:

> *I try to break down power dynamics as far as possible in the classroom. I also try to be aware of the gender representations on reading lists, and the amount of time given to students in the classroom to avoid having a discussion dominated by one gender.* (Survey respondent)

> *I tend to use the obiter dicta of judges in cases concerning Articles 8 and 14 ECHR (chiefly) as a means to raise student awareness of the (judicial) politics of the law on feminist issues; on class, race, sexuality, gender, etc.* (Survey respondent)

Gloria outlined the efforts she took to engage students of colour and/or from working-class backgrounds through adding an intersectional approach to the feminist content already being taught:

> *I was sort of able to take that further and say, 'Well, actually, but the queer feminists have said' or, you know, … 'What if you're a gay woman, for example, who doesn't want to be outed to family?' 'Or what if you're a BME woman or a foreign national whose visa status is linked to the perpetrator, he is their employer or he is their spouse?' … I discuss the whole thing, and then we have like fifteen minutes at the end of the two-hour lecture where I bring in the 'law in action' kind of points.* (Gloria)

As a result, she had seen positive responses from students:

> *I have, of course, seen that some of my BME students respond quite – so they respond more when we are talking about race, or when we are talking about intersectional feminism. And within that, actually, BME women, I think, respond more than BME men do.* (Gloria)

This type of response was also noted by several of our online survey respondents who taught cohorts of students with diverse demographical backgrounds:

> *Student base is BME, so they love it.*

> *students know that mine is the only module where they will be exposed to this - feedback on module is always excellent for this reason*

Our study findings indicate that feminist socio-legal tutors are actively engaged in enhancing the relevance of curriculum content by incorporating lived and learned gendered and intersectional perspectives, issues, and experiences. While our small sample means these findings are not representative or generalisable to the wider feminist socio-legal scholar base, they do shed important insight into the nature and impact of transformative criminal justice pedagogies.

Conclusion

The presentation of views or ideas which are representative of ideological paradigm shifts may cause uncertainty among those exposed to them, but for change to happen educators must persevere with creating these challenging spaces (hooks, 1994). Doing so assists with embedding the relevance of such ideas to the mainstream. This is important as seeing certain topics or issues as only relevant to 'feminist' interests reinforces the idea of their subordinate importance in comparison to 'real' (i.e., mainstream) criminological concerns. This not only does a great disservice to all students who engage with the criminal justice system as practitioners (or victims or offenders) but puts an additional layer of responsibility on feminist academics to ensure that this work is done.

Perceiving certain topics as more related to feminism than others obscures the point that the *entirety* of the criminal justice system operates in a way that demarcates advantage or disadvantage along hierarchical identity lines. It also serves to indeterminate the specific advantages bestowed on those in powerful positions, or whose identities constitute the standard against which others are measured. Recognising that the justice system is gendered, androcentric, white privileged, and one that it operates in the interests of the economically privileged is vital for an authentic understanding of how it functions. As our participants have demonstrated, using the classroom as an example and space to show and explore how these wider dynamics manifest is also an integral part of learning and growth.

Feminist tutors often demonstrate some level of personal responsibility around the eliciting of this authenticity, particularly when it involves exposing students to distressing or uncomfortable content. In terms of gendered violence, this can mean addressing issues that have personal resonance with students in the class, while recognising that teaching about sensitive topics will affect students in different ways. Carving out the space to manage this demonstrated their commitment to both the students and the issues covered, despite academia remaining a precarious space for many, particularly those at the earlier stages of their career. The kinds of influences feminist teaching *could* be having on students may not be evident until much later on, and for many in the neoliberal academy, this kind of impact may not be prioritised, acknowledged or supported. Therefore, it is vital that feminist tutors remind themselves about what *they* consider to constitute success in their teaching.

Top Tips

- Seek to employ a range of alternative and diverse sources of knowledge, information, and insights, produced by people with varied backgrounds and identities to showcase a wider breadth and depth of experiences, such as independent media outlets, poetry, music, podcasts, documentaries, paintings, pictures, blogs etc.
- Indicate to students if they are invited to act as 'co-teachers' to theorise their own identities or experiences in a safe and exploratory manner, either in class or in assessments.
- Aim to adopt a 'reasonable adjustments' mindset to assessments (where relevant) if addressing sensitive or traumatic content in course material. Explore how the learning outcomes can be met without recourse to particularly harrowing content.
- Persevere with your endeavours as educators. It's important to recognise that the value and impact of your teaching may not be immediately visible to you or the student, but may resonate with them later on, potentially in significant circumstances.
- Link in with other feminist scholars for support, guidance, and insight as necessary within your department, institution, or through wider networks. Good places to start include the British Society of Criminology's *Women, Crime and Criminal Justice Network*, the Socio-Legal Studies Association, and the Women in Academia Support Network (Facebook group)

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