

Diversity and Decolonization in the Department of Methodology

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Background

Karl Pearson: Anyone who has ever attended even a single statistics class will be familiar with him, or at least his work. The scholar, who is commonly known as one of the founding fathers of statistics, was a London professor and the creator of statistics basics such as Pearson's chi square test (Delzell & Poliak, 2013). While I was taught how to use the latter at the LSE, I was not taught about Pearson's other interests, such as the establishment of Eugenics as an academic field as well as the vehement opposition of refugee immigration (Delzell & Poliak, 2013). Pearson is just one of many examples in which the curriculum features and disguises a scholar who stands in opposition to the LSE's beliefs.

Methodology is where "good" and "bad" research is taught. It is here that students learn about who may be the researchers, and who may only be researched, and it where what we accept as knowledge, and the pursuit of it, is passed on to others. Methodology is also the realm in which numerous ethics violations and abuses of power occurred, such as in the case of the Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment (McVean, 2019). Because of this, it is particularly relevant to examine the teaching, including teaching materials, within the Methodology department with regards to their commitment to diversity and decolonization, so that errors from the past are not continually committed and tolerated (Capan, 2017).

Literature Review

In recent years, students and staff around the world have campaigned for universities to reconsider their connection to the colonial past and present, whether this be through campaigns such as "Rhodes must fall" at the Universities of Cape Town and Oxford (Chaudhuri, 2016) or student movements asking "Why is My Curriculum so White?" at University College, London (Peters, 2018). Curriculums in particular have drawn criticism for their centring of white, Eurocentric and often male writings and theory, while marginalizing other points of view (Salami, 2015). And while schools, universities and companies alike have undertaken numerous "diversity efforts" in the decades past, this often bears the risk of tokenizing those scholars of colour that are added on to the end of, for instance, an already extant reading list (Ajegbo et al, 2007). The goal in recent years, then, has been to move beyond efforts to "diversify" reading lists and thereby other scholars of colour once more, and rather: to attempt to decolonize the curriculum (Tikly et al, 2004, as qtd. in Maylor et al, 2007). As Kessi et al (2020, p. 72) ask: "The first and last question of decolonial [and thereby diversifying] work is whom does it serve and what (or whom) does it centre?" A decolonial curriculum then, is one which continuously questions the status quo of accepted knowledge, and the circumstances and processes from which it arose.

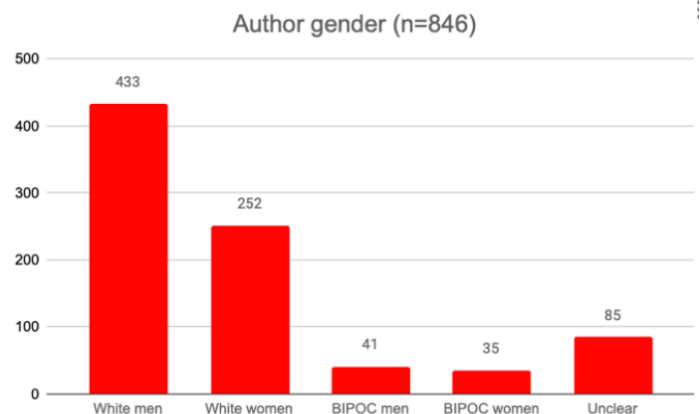
Methodology

For the purposes of this research, a publication review was conducted across a sample of reading lists from within the Methodology department. Over 850 units across 9 courses on both qualitative and quantitative methodologies were analysed. The data analysis in part followed Professor Shakuntala Banaji and Lara Salih's work on decolonizing the curriculum in the Media and Communications department, which is now being mirrored elsewhere at LSE. Additionally, information was collected on the authors' institutional affiliation, the location of this institution, the publishing location as well as course conveners' characteristics to explore links between, for instance, a course convener's gender, career trajectory or position with regards to their material selection.

A publication review, necessarily, reduces complex categories such as race and gender to binary categories such as male and female. In order to honour the complexity of these categories, a survey was sent out, in addition to the curriculum review, to a sub-sample of the authors present in the curriculum, asking authors to self-identify with regards to their gender and racial identity, as well as inquiring about their nationalities and native languages, to be able to paint a more intricate picture. The survey yielded a response rate of roughly 25%.

Data Analysis/Findings

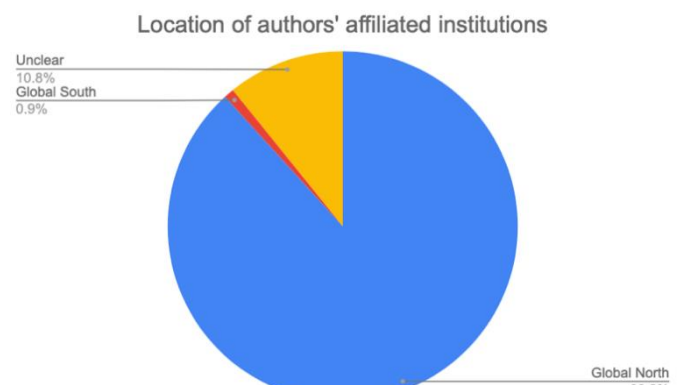
Amongst the 850 units analysed in the curriculum review, 1/3 of the primary authors were female, 2/3 male. However, going beyond this rudimentary analysis, over half – 433 of the authors – were white, male authors, with white women contributing 252 texts and only 8% of the curriculum being written by BIPOC men or women. Over 77% of all teaching materials were written by authors affiliated with Anglo-Saxon institutions, with the US and UK alone contributing over 484 of the 851 units of analysis.



Ethnicity and gender of authors in the curriculum review

Unlike previously expected, scholars of colour were not significantly more likely to be featured in further reading than essential reading. Most saliently: only 8 out of over 850 units of analysis were written by authors primarily associated with Global South institutions. This amounts to less than 1% of the entire corpus. Additionally, over half of these eight authors presented as white.

With regards to course conveners' characteristics and their impact on curriculum selection, female course conveners tended to feature more diverse curriculums than male course conveners. Similarly, those who had obtained their PhD in the past 10 years seemed to consider issues of diversity more than those who had held already their title for over 10 years.



Location of authors' affiliated institutions (Global North/South divide) in the curriculum review

Courses on qualitative methodology also tended to feature a more varied curriculum, though these statistics were aided by a comprehensive course on ethnography which paid particular attention to the oft-tainted history of this methodology, as well as the sample generally featuring more qualitative than quantitative courses.

The survey generally supported the results from the curriculum review: most authors listed their nationality as American, and a majority of the survey's participants identified as white. A question querying native languages, however, painted a more intricate picture than either ethnicity or nationality could provide, with the appearance of the First Nation language Penobscot as well as the Southern Indian Tamil.

Recommendations

As outlined above, the Methodology department's curriculum is far from diverse, and even further from decolonized. In order to address and improve on the issues laid bare through this research, this report proposes three solutions:

Redesign of the Methodology course curricula:

The results leave little doubt: the course curricula in the Methodology department require urgent decolonization and diversity, and so a redesign is unavoidable. Crucially, no quotas to be reached are recommended, for the fear of readings by scholars of colour being added at the end of an already extant reading list. Neither is the abandonment of all research or theory which may be tainted by the circumstances under which they arose or by the unsavoury views some founding fathers of statistics held. Instead, I propose a continuing effort to contextualize and contemplate those materials being used to teach student – and it is students who need to be included in this conversation (Kessi et al, 2020). Nonetheless, lecturing staff must look beyond the US and UK towards including work from scholars from the Global South in an effort not only to decolonize, but also to provide a comprehensive education to the students.

Funds and/or work credit should be offered to staff wishing to undertake this task (for instance through the Eden Catalyst Fund), as well as assistance in the form of departmental workshops on decolonizing the curriculum. Further, as other projects in the 2020/21 Change Makers programme have elucidated, decolonizing the curriculum also entails decolonizing teaching practices.

Implementation on a course on the history and ethics of methodology:

My next, and assumedly most salient, recommendation is the implementation of a course on the – frankly – dirty history of methodology, its impact on research today as well as the ethics of researching in general. The Methodology department teaches budding scholars and researchers. If the school is to offer a truly comprehensive, complete education, this must include imparting extensive knowledge to students on the history of the methodologies they employ, how these may be abused and the ethics of using them in research. Doing so will ensure better researchers, enabling students to conduct research that is ethically sound, historically informed, and aware of any biases or ethical pitfalls they may encounter. Students will also carry the knowledge from the module into their respective departments and further

endeavours, promising a ripple effect and lasting impact. The history of Methodology has had lasting impact on how it is used today: because of this, the module should be mandatory for any student wishing to engage in primary research for their dissertation.

To accommodate lecturing staff's varying areas of expertise, teaching should be distributed amongst the staff of the Methodology department.

Centring the student voice:

As can be read above, decolonization requires a continuous effort. To honour this, the school needs to implement periodic feedback mechanisms to gather input from students affected by the curriculum. The termly teaching survey should be expanded to include two open-ended questions on the curriculum, for instance on whether students felt represented within the reading lists of their courses and how minorities in particular experienced the teaching. Creating anonymous feedback opportunities will allow the student experience to be heard regularly and safely.

Research amongst the sample of reading lists from the curriculums of the Methodology department at LSE shows that, as of this moment, the department's curriculum is far from decolonized or diverse, and equally far from reflecting the commitment to equity and inclusion the school prides itself on. The LSE boasts with an international student and staff body, with close to 70% of all students and 40% of staff coming from over 140 countries around the globe ("International students;" Minsky, 2015). This diversity must be reflected in the curriculum used to teach students, while always taking into account that reading lists make up just part of the decolonizing effort, with teaching practices and power relations amongst student and staff being equally important (see the research conducted on decolonization by other Change Makers researchers Zoya Zia, Jagna Olejniczak and Monika Jirotkava).

Additional graphics and full references are available here.