“That's where you start to think like, does anyone actually listen to or watch women's sport?”

Gender Regimes and Students’ Experiences on Higher Education Sport Courses

Abstract

In this article we apply theoretical tools from the work of Elias and Connell to critically discuss the ways in which gender relations on Higher Education sport courses are manifested and experienced by students. Drawing on data from an analysis of curriculum, as well as interviews, surveys and workshops with students across a range of sport courses at one university, we explore curriculum design and the ways in which knowledge is presented which both marginalises and compartmentalises issues of gender, as well as presenting knowledge as gender neutral. This article provides a critical understanding of how knowledge about gender and women's sport features and is taught in UK Higher Education sport courses, alongside how students experiences in the classroom to provide an understanding which reinforces existing gender regimes and gender relations.

Since the mid-1990s, the number of women studying in United Kingdom (UK) Higher Education (HE) has overtaken that of men, with the most recent statistics from 2019/2020 indicating that 57 percent of all UK HE students are women (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2021). Despite this, gender differences are still largely engrained in field of study, with women significantly under-represented in subjects like maths and physics (David, 2015). There has also been a growth of sport degrees, with 137 universities in the UK offering 992 sport courses (What Uni, 2021). On these courses there are a higher number of men compared to women studying sport; in the latest data from the 2019/2020 academic year, there were 1,365 female sport and exercise science students compared to 2,580 male students (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2021). The reason for the gender gap across sport courses may be complex and multifaceted. Previous research has identified issues with the curriculum, gendered issues on UK campuses and degree programmes, alongside problems with lad culture and everyday sexism (Jackson and Sundaram, 2018; Serra et al., 2018).

Given the expansion of HE sports courses, a critical lens is needed to further understand the construction of gendered ideas and the curriculum in these courses. In this article, we further the research by Clayton and Humberstone (2007), Serra et al., (2018), and Pielichaty (2020) by applying the theoretical concepts of Elias and Connell to understand how gender relations are embedded in HE sport courses and experienced by students in ways that reinforce rather than challenge existing regimes. Specifically, we explore how gender regimes on sport courses are reflected in the curriculum, how knowledge is socially constructed as gendered, and how gender relations can be conceptualised in the ways they reinforce existing gender regimes and marginalise women students and researchers. Students' experiences of the curriculum and development of knowledge about women's sport and gender relations will influence their understanding and ability to challenge these in a sector which remains male dominated (Bowes and Culvin, 2021; Velija and Piggott, 2022).

Theoretical Framework: Gender Regimes and Figurational Gender Relations

We utilise the concepts of Elias and Connell to provide a critical analysis of gender relations and how they are manifested and experienced on sport courses. Like the theoretical approach of Frydendal et al., (2021), we combine Elias and Connell to understand power relations and experiences. Elias's concepts of power and knowledge integrated with Connell's (2005) conceptual framework of gender relations is used to provide a critical discussion for understanding the multiple ways gender relations operate on sport courses within a broader organisation. Elias emphasised that human societies can only be understood in terms of long-term social processes of change and that human life is characterised by interdependent relations which are diverse, shifting and underpinned by changing balances of power. Elias emphasised how human societies are characterised by different degrees of dynamic interplay between internal and external social controls, with the latter evident in relatively complex societies (Velija and Malcolm, 2018).

Elias's key text is an empirical example of these principles; for example, *On the Process of Civilisation* (1939, 2013) examines the processes by which changes have taken place and are central in standards of behavioural expectations (Dunning and Hughes, 2013). In particular, he identifies shifts in behaviours towards higher degrees of self-restraint and the changing relationship between internal and external social controls. He describes broader historical progression by which western European societies develop intricate rules relating to personal comportment, social interaction and emotive and affective expression (Thurnell-Read, 2017). Elias adopts the term sociogenesis which refers to the process of development and transformation in social relations, whilst psychogenesis refers to transformations in psychology, personality or habitus that accompany social change (Goodwin and O'Connor, 2016). These terms conceptualise how at an individual level, young people learn and acquire adult standards of behaviours and control of emotions. These are defined by the current social standards of behaviour, which reflect increasing degrees of self-restraint.

Liston (2018), Mansfield (1998, 2008) and Velija (2012, 2014) have outlined and applied an Eliasian approach to understanding gender relations in the field of sport and leisure, particularly focusing on how knowledge about women in sport has been socially constructed and reinforced through understanding gender as a relationship of power. Outside of sport, the work of Brinkgreve (2004) explores how gender relations have changed over time; through more interdependence, power relations between men and women have resulted in both groups requiring a mutual understanding of the others' emotional needs in figurational dynamics. Ernst (2003, 2009) applies the concept of established and outsider relations to provide a conceptual analysis of women's underrepresentation in leadership positions, specifically how knowledge about women as leaders is produced and reproduced in ways that limit women's progression in organisations. We specifically utilise the tools of Elias which enable us to think about how knowledge is socially constructed, taught and received through a range of social interdependencies. Elias's sociology of knowledge focuses on how knowledge is produced by humans and how it is used over time (Malcolm, 2021). This knowledge aids a broader social structural analysis of the way power relations influence the relative acceptance of different explanatory accounts (Malcolm, 2021). In our research we apply this to knowledge about sport to critically argue that gender knowledge is not neutral; indeed, decisions about what is taught and the interdependencies between those teaching and those being taught reflects wider gender relations.

Gender regimes offer a framework for the ‘patterning of gender relations’ in an organisation that provides an understanding of the structural context and individual practices (Connell, 2005, p.6). Local gender regimes may exist within a broader institutional context, and these local gender regimes can share but can also depart from specific behaviours (Sundaram and Jackson, 2020). Gender regimes are distinguished by four dimensions; the gendered division of labour; gendered relations of power; the gendering of emotion and human relations; and the way gender difference is conceptualised and practiced through gender culture and symbolism. Connell’s work offers a conceptual framework for analysis, and she is clear that one aspect of the regime does not dominate over others (Mennesson, 2012). Connell’s (2005) framework is adopted by Sundaram and Jackson’s (2020) seminal research on lad culture in higher education. They use the concept of gender regimes to explain the ways in which the courses, spaces and curriculum are gendered and highlight how this contributes to the maintenance of power as unequally distributed in universities. We utilise the concept of gender regimes to aid a critical analysis of the multiple ways gender relations are embedded and reinforced across the classrooms, courses and spaces of HE.

Gender Relations, Higher Education Spaces and Sport

In the UK there is no set curriculum for HE sport courses and while the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) publish benchmark statements for HE courses at undergraduate level which outline what students could be expected to know at the end of their studies, these are wide ranging. HE sport course in the UK often map to Events, Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism benchmarks for validation (QAA, 2019). Due to the diversity of knowledge and content across these areas, these benchmarks cover a range of topics, which range from knowledge about human responses to sport and exercise; sport performance; health and disease management; and the historical, social, political, economic, and cultural diffusion of sport. However, issues of equity and gender do not directly feature.

Previous research on gender and the curriculum in HE sport courses has illuminated several issues and patterns. Humberstone (2009), reflecting on her own experience teaching on a sport course, highlights how many sport management degrees ignore issues of gender relations. This is coupled with the way knowledge is presented as gender neutral which may typify and reinforce current gender norms in the sector. Pielichaty (2020), also analysing sport management degrees, highlights that more research is needed on how gender is projected within universities and their courses. She suggests a greater critical analysis of the curriculum and more awareness of representing diversity in guest speakers, as well as how language and informal practices can impact on how inequities are manifested and reinforced.

Other research has produced similar findings. For example, Serra et al., (2018) specifically focus on HE sport courses in Spain to explore the ways in which the curriculum marginalises issues of gender equity using a Bernstein framework for analysis; using a five-level typology of gender visibility in curriculum documentation, it is argued gender knowledge is not fully introduced, and even within socio-cultural subjects it is marginal and there are few opportunities to challenge knowledge about sex differences (Serra et al., 2018). These issues also speak to a wider agenda around ensuring inclusive educational programmes, with a greater commitment to decolonising the curriculum and moving away from Eurocentric paradigms, to diversify knowledge systems and consider the intersections of power (Charles, 2019). In Clayton and Humberston’s (2007) research, the authors explore students’ responses to the curriculum when they must study compulsory modules on gender and leisure on sport degrees. They found that male students were particularly resistant to knowledge that challenged male dominance, but the importance of students developing a more critical analysis of masculine and racial identities was clear.

There are further studies analysing teacher training courses, including physical education and adventure education. For example, in research that explores educators' experiences in Norway, Dowling and Kårhus (2011) found there was an overall ignorance of gendered power structures. Physical education was instead considered a gender-neutral space with underlying ideas surrounding meritocracy prominent, ignoring the role of gender inequities. Gender theory was also marginalised in teacher training, and only sparingly and superficially included in a small number of modules. This resulted in stereotypical ideas about gender being reinforced, naturalising the 'male values' of sport and physical education (Dowling and Kårhus, 2011). In other research, Warren et al., (2019) explore how the hidden curriculum in adventure education prioritises values and traits perceived to male, with gender insensitive teaching reinforcing the dominance of white men in the history of outdoor education. These factors influence gender-based curriculum messages which position men as more suitable for outdoor careers.

Other aspects of research on gender and HE outside of sport courses have focused more broadly on lad culture. Lad culture has been defined in a National Union of Students (NUS) report (2012) as 'a group or "pack" mentality residing in activities such as sport and heavy alcohol consumption, and "banter" which was often sexist, misogynistic and homophobic.' To expand, it encompasses a spectrum of different overt and subtle behaviours, including drunkenness, public rowdiness, sexual harassment and the objectification and degradation of women. Although intersecting with other inequities (such as homophobia and racism), sexism is argued to underpin lad culture, and the term may encompass behaviours that are commonplace, normalised and which largely go unchallenged (Jackson and Sundaram, 2018). It is also necessary to understand how women negotiate and resist instances of lad culture and everyday sexism, alongside normative gendered expectations (Lewis et al., 2018). This is particularly important, as university spaces are considered one of the main mediums of socialisation for young people, where they acquire values and behaviours which may perpetuate (or challenge) gender roles and stereotypes (León-Ramírez et al., 2018)

Previous research outlines its prominence in universities, environments often associated with instances of sexism, which is indicative of wider gendered cultures and structures, alongside gender inequities and misogyny (Jackson and Sundaram, 2018; Lewis et al., 2018). Interestingly, research has outlined examples of lad culture in both classroom and social spaces, and evidence suggests it may be more common in sport environments (Jackson and Sundaram, 2018). In the work of Jackson et al., (2015), they found evidence of laddish behaviours in teaching-learning contexts, which included talking and generally being loud (which disrupted classes); being a joker; throwing stuff; arriving late; and being rude and disrespectful to lecturers. While our research is not specifically on lad culture, the students on sport courses are experiencing their studies in gendered spaces, and lad culture is likely part of these spaces.

Drawn from current studies and gaps in literature, this research was guided by the following research questions:

1. How and where is gender taught as part of the curriculum in HE sport courses?
2. What are students’ views on the teaching of gender in HE sport courses?
3. How do students experience gendered cultures during their university course?

Methodology

For this research, data was drawn from a predominantly qualitative approach, using an analysis of curriculum, workshops (seven students), a survey (46 students), and interviews (ten students, all of whom had previously completed the survey). This totalled 53 students across nine sport courses at one post-1992 university in the southeast of England. Across these sport courses, male students outnumbered females to various degrees. For example, *Football Studies* had a gender breakdown of 277 male students to four female students, across all year groups in the 2020 to 2021 academic year. Similarly, *Applied Sport Science* had 116 males compared to fourteen females, with *Physical Education* having a (marginally) more equal breakdown of 87 males and 30 females. The curriculum analysis, workshop, survey and interview data were collected as part of a wider study on gendered curricula and students' experiences on HE sports courses. While the conclusions from this case-study can therefore not be generalised to other environments, the research does provide an in-depth and detailed insight into the experiences and viewpoints of the sample.

Prior to any data collection, ethical approval was firstly gained from the university ethics committee. Then, a content analysis took place which involved examining 33 module descriptors across three of the largest undergraduate sport courses to consider the extent to which gender knowledge was embedded into the sport curriculum; we used the five-level typology from Serra et al., (2018) to do this, previously discussed in the literature review section of this paper. Following this analysis, two workshops were conducted with current students on the sport-related degree programmes, with both taking place in March 2020 and lasting around 90 minutes. Although workshops have often been marginalised in qualitative research, they can be useful for brainstorming, and sharing knowledge, questions, concerns and ideas (Caretta and Vacchelli, 2015). They were chosen over focus groups to ensure a more informal and relaxed approach, and for a more natural flow of conversation between workshop participants.

In the workshops, all participants were over the age of eighteen and were provided with a participant information sheet and informed consent form, which they were asked to sign prior to data collection. The workshops involved discussion and critique around three main themes which were developed after analysing existing literature as well as the curriculum across the sport programmes. These themes were: The extent to which gender knowledge is embedded into the curriculum; whether students in practical and classroom experiences gendered cultures, including lad culture; and suggestions to develop a gender inclusive HE sport course. The workshops were conducted by a research assistant who prompted discussion around these themes through a list of discussion topics, took notes when discussions were ongoing, and asked students to record their answers around the main themes using *Padlet.* To expand, we had developed the *Padlet* to include questions derived from the workshop themes. Following each workshop discussion, participants were asked to summarise their thoughts around these questions and upload their answers. Responses were anonymous and the prior discussions were useful to allow more in-depth responses than a standard questionnaire or survey. The workshops were open to all students, regardless of gender. Across the two workshops, seven students (five men and two women) across three sport-related degree programmes (Physical Education, Football Studies and Applied Sport Science) attended and shared their views.

Student numbers for the workshops were lower than expected but due to the COVID-19 lockdowns taking place in the UK from March 2020, no further face-to-face workshops could be conducted. As an alternative, an anonymous online survey was created, targeting students on the sport-related degree programmes at the university. The purpose of this survey was to gain more students' perspectives due to the relatively low number attending the workshops. Although originally unplanned, the survey was considered a useful replacement for the workshops and was designed to build upon this data. The survey was created online, using *JISC online surveys*, with the questions largely open-ended and based on what would have been discussed in the workshops. Initially, the survey was piloted with several university staff members who were able to provide feedback on the clarity and order of questions, as well as any potential omissions. Adaptations were then made to the survey based on this feedback before its launch in May 2020.

The first page of the survey included detailed information about the project and students were asked to sign a declaration confirming and consenting to their participation. Questions were then asked regarding: The gender-split of students on their respective degree programmes; experiences of working with other students; experiences of gendered cultures; inclusion of gender knowledge in the curriculum; examples of lad culture in both classroom and practical spaces; and suggestions about how sport degrees could be more gender inclusive. Students across the sport programmes were targeted, with a total of 46 respondents completing the survey up until its closure in January 2021, all of whom were current students or had recently completed their degree. Out of the 46 students, 32 were men, 13 were women and one respondent did not declare their identified gender. Students were studying across nine programmes, which included undergraduate, postgraduate, and top-up courses. These were: Football Studies; Applied Sport Science; Physical Education; Football Studies and Business Management; Sport Management; Sport Coaching and Development; Youth Sport and PE; Sport and PE; and Sport Coaching and PE.

At the end of the survey, respondents were asked if they would be willing to discuss these themes further in an individual, in-depth follow-up interview. In total, ten students indicated they would be happy to be interviewed, all of whom identified as women. Largely due to the male-dominated nature of the sport courses at the university, both the workshops (five men and two women) and the survey (32 men and thirteen women) mostly included responses from men. Therefore, interviews solely focusing on the views of women were considered a useful way to create further balance within the sample. Interviews took place between March and November 2020, with each lasting around 30 minutes. Although some interviews took place face-to-face, the majority were virtual using *Microsoft Teams*, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns in the UK. Similar ethical procedures to the workshops were used, including the use of participant information sheets and informed consent forms. Interview themes were largely like that of the surveys and workshops, with a focus on the gender-split between students and staff, and students' understanding and experiences of gendered spaces in both classroom and practical sessions. However, the semi-structured nature of the interviews meant that the order of questions and the prominence of interview themes varied. They were also considered useful to follow-up on themes which arose in the surveys and workshops.

As the study was qualitative, thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. Firstly, all interviews were transcribed verbatim shortly after they took place. Then, across the data set of workshops, survey data and interview transcripts, data was read and re-read to gain further familiarity and to begin to grasp themes that were evident. The findings from interviews, workshops and the survey were analysed separately using *NVivo 12* and data was coded using guidance from Braun and Clarke (2006), which involves creating and interpreting patterns and themes in the data set. Firstly, any data considered interesting or relevant to the study was extracted and coded with a name which captured its meaning. Codes were then grouped into broader themes which were subsequently checked, reviewed and revised. For example, some themes were combined, some separated, and others were discarded (for example when there was not considered enough data to constitute a theme). An inductive approach was used to analyse data. Both researchers were active in this process which allowed the data analysis to be cross-checked to form a final interpretation of the findings in relation to theory. Although the data from workshops, surveys and interviews were analysed individually, the analysis was then cross referenced and refined to provide a holistic set of themes across the data sets.

Although using undergraduate students for research is common in British universities, there is potential for coercion - perceived or real - due to the unequal power relationship between students and their lecturers (Comer, 2009). As lecturers on several sport courses, we were aware of the wider ethical issues of recruiting our own students for this study and took steps to counteract these issues. All students were initially recruited by a research assistant who went into students' timetabled lectures to gauge initial interest in the study. Students were reassured that there would be no preferential treatment for those students who did take part. While the survey was anonymous, the workshops and interviews were conducted by the research assistant, who was an alumni student and was not involved in any teaching at the university; this assisted in minimising any perceived pressure students may have felt to engage in the research. Participants in the survey and workshops are not identified by name, while interviewees have been given pseudonyms to protect their identity.

Results and Discussion

Knowledge, Curriculum and Gender Relations

Elias explored how knowledge about specific groups is produced and accepted. In our research we started our exploration with an analysis of the curriculum of three of the largest undergraduate courses: Football Studies, Physical Education, and Applied Sport Science. This included an analysis of 33 module descriptors (some modules were shared across programmes), using the framework from Serra et al., (2018) to identify gender visibility in the modules as shown in table one.

Table 1: Module Descriptors

Gender and Curriculum Framework	**Number of Modules**
Gender exclusively taught	**0**
Gender embedded in module content (in learning outcomes and indicative content)	**2**
Gender taught partially (noted in indicative content)	**16**
Gender superficially mentioned in the module descriptor	**3**
Gender not mentioned	**12**

The modules where gender was included in some capacity covered a range of social/global issues, for instance modules such as the sociology of sport/football. In the twelve modules where it did not appear these were sport science and research methods modules. The analysis of the curriculum gave us a sense of where issues of gender was taught in modules. Like Serra et al., (2018), we found that gender was a small part of the curriculum and appeared sparingly as weekly content or indicative content. Where gender is not being 'taught', often the curriculum is considered gender neutral; however, decisions about what knowledge is included reflects dominant ideologies of what knowledge is (and is not) perceived to be of value to students. This is also related to the types of pedagogy that lecturers adopt, as well as decisions about how something is taught, which is decided by lecturers. Lecturers are therefore able to decide what knowledge students engage with across their course, alongside who produces that knowledge, and which sports and athletes are included as examples. To this end, the lack of women researchers on reading lists was noticed by many students:

> 'More women, research from women researchers, because at the moment, it all just seems to be like men and maybe that is the case that there aren't any women

> researchers in like the topics that we're being taught, but maybe trying to make a point of trying to include more, I'm not sure' (Annie, Sport Coaching and Sport Development Degree)

As Annie notes, she does not know whether there are more women researchers in the area or whether they are absent from the suggested readings, which are allocated by lecturers. This was also highlighted by Emily:

> 'I think I've had three readings for a module so far. And all three have been like from a male perspective. I know it's probably 'cause there are less women in the like, academic literature for sport, because obviously, like less women go on to the course and it kind of trickles up. But it also trickles back down' (Emily, Sport Coaching and Sport Development Degree)

The dominance of research by men on reading lists is something documented in past research on gender and HE (Meibauer et al., 2018; Phull et al, 2019; Warren 2019). In their research on adventure education, Warren et al., (2019) note the prominence of white men over influential women and the way in which the term 'forefathers' is used which sets up the history of adventure education in a way that marginalises women. Warren et al., (2019) found; the prioritisation of values and traits perceived to be predominantly masculine; gendered career messages; and the centring of white men in the field's history. This is significant because of the importance of challenging people's perceptions of gender on courses. There is a need to acknowledge how decisions are made about the curriculum, what is taught, and whose knowledge is discussed, which can broaden students' understanding of how women are also central to constructing knowledge in the field/discipline they are studying.

An example of how knowledge is utilised in different groups can be seen in the work of Cowley (2021). Through a systematic review it was found that research in sport and exercise science continues to generalise data from males to females and there is still little critical discussion of how men are presented as the norm in sport and exercise research. This has wider implications as research centred around men is then taught on sport courses, with little critical discussion of this bias. Thus, not only is it men who are often presented as having the research expertise and knowledge about sport, this knowledge is often about male bodies and athletes, which is then uncritically assumed to be inclusive of women. Knowledge is presented as gender neutral but in fact there was little or no consideration of women in the sport science course:

> 'In applied sport science we have not discussed anything to do with gender and sport so far in the curriculum. I think this could be incorporated in topics such as anatomy and physiology as men and women are biologically different. But also, in places like psychology where we could discuss approaches to a man training a woman and vice versa rather than not mentioning it at all' (Freya, Applied Sport Science Degree)

Through the curriculum, students are introduced to knowledge about gender in specific modules, but in some courses - such as sport science - knowledge is presented in ways which ignore ongoing inequities that position men's bodies as the norm.

In football studies, the lack of consistency in teaching around the topic of gender relations was evident. For instance, gender was often considered a bitesize topic discussed in distinct parts of a module, but this knowledge was then not extended to other modules:

> 'We've been taught about the inequalities between genders within the game *(football)* in terms of pay and exposure. But no examples from a women's game have ever been used when discussing tactics/strategies on the pitch' (Workshop, Man, Football Studies Degree)

The compartmentalising of gender knowledge as discussed by Serra et al., (2018) is also evident in our data, where discussions on gender and inequity were argued to be included in one or two sessions. Subsequently, all other examples given to students draw predominantly from men's football, which is just presented as 'football'. This is therefore significant as men's football is considered the norm, emphasising how power relations influence how knowledge is presented. The course is supposedly about football, but in fact it is about men's football; when women's football, or wider issues of gender relations in football are discussed, it is demarcated as different, separate and a small part of the course. Another student in the workshops also reflected on this, describing a 'dichotomy of women's football and that women lecturers were not perceived to potentially have as much knowledge' (Workshop, Man, Football Studies Degree). What and when something is taught is also related to who is teaching, which can also be gendered, as most of the lecturers on sport courses at this university are men. When women lecturers do teach, their knowledge is questioned because it is men who are perceived to be knowledgeable about football, demonstrating the way power relations influence the acceptance of different accounts. Thus, their knowledge is more valued by the students (Malcolm, 2021).

The gender spilt was not just numerical but also in the types of sessions lecturers were running. Jessica (Physical Education Degree) explained how in practical sport sessions 'most are led by male teachers. It would be good to have some led by women too from different backgrounds and seeing a different perspective'. This was noted in a discussion in the workshop around gender when a student noted that he would like to see 'in PE - more women as lecturers in practical sessions' (Workshop, Man, Football Studies Degree). In the interviews, the students noted how the dominance of lecturers who were mainly men was reflected in how research and knowledge was framed in the curriculum and taught spaces:

> 'It would be nice to see more of like a female presence in the teaching erm in the teaching staff because you see, like, you see all these men doing all this research and stuff and like it's really nice to see this research going ahead because it feels like it's

> actually something to do with us' (Annie, Sport Coaching and Sport Development Degree)

These exchanges reflect the ways in which women lecturers, their knowledge, and women's sport are marginalised. As Annie (Sport Coaching and Sport Development Degree) reflects, 'that's where you start to think like, does anyone actually listen to or watch women's sport?' The marginalisation of women's sport is normalised through both its absence on the formal curriculum and through practices such as reading lists, the dominance of male colleagues, and male-focussed research, indicating these courses are largely about men's sport and men's experiences, thus side-lining and 'othering' women in sport. This is significant as Elias's concepts encourage us to think more about how knowledge is utilised in different groups and explores the way in which power relations influence the acceptance of different accounts (Malcolm, 2021). This has a wider consideration when we think about broader inequities in sport and the need to decolonise the curriculum and moving away from Eurocentric paradigms, to diversify knowledge systems, and consider the intersections of power (Charles, 2019).

Gender Relations of Power in Gender Regimes

Connell (2005) explains how gendered relations of power relate to control, authority and force, including organisational hierarchy, legal power, as well as collective and individual violence. In the interviews, the students discussed how the course was dominated by men numerically and this was clearly a visible difference that students were aware of immediately:

> 'And honestly being on one of those courses, it's noticeable. And I've been at uni before in Cardiff, and it was the exact same there' (Annie, Sport Coaching and Sport Development Degree)

This was something that the students had reflected on before commencing their studies. As Freya notes, she had considered that she would be a:

> 'bit like an odd one out. But I could sort of, I talked to my dad about it before I actually joined. Because when I came to look around and I had some talks and I was like, not many girls looking to do the course and stuff. And maybe it's because sports are seen as quite a male thing. Maybe. I know my cousin wanted to join a similar course in Manchester and one of the main reasons that she didn't was because there was a lot of boys on that. And it was they were like really football based type things'
>
> (Freya, Applied Sport Science Degree)

For other students this dominance was something they noticed but had grown used to through their sport education experiences at school and college, highlighting the way that gender relations are experienced prior to university (Sundaram and Jackson, 2020). Thus, by the time the students came to university, both men and women had experienced spaces (especially sport spaces) where men dominated:

> 'I'm not that bothered. But to be fair, that's probably because like, when I was at college, I only had, so we had three female sport students, no female sport lecturers. And that was it. So it was only men at college. And like at school, I think we only have one woman PE teacher? So, like all of the sport kind of stuff. And like, even like my hockey coaches, and like in my sporting environment. Everyone's kind of a man'
>
> (Emily, Sport Coaching and Sport Development Degree)

Jessica also reflected on how over time it is possible to adjust to spaces, and relationships develop, stating 'now that I've got to know everyone, it's absolutely fine. Like I'm used to, obviously being in sport. I'm used to being the minority' (Jessica, Physical Education Degree). As Clayton and Humberstone (2007) note, female students in the classroom are used to this and they may not believe it impacts them, but they recognise the masculine spaces and sometimes misogynistic behaviours.

While the composition of men to women students differed across the courses, the students had experienced examples in which gender and women in sport were problematically framed. In classrooms, women students were the minority, and their experiences when discussing gender and sport could be minimised or ridiculed. For Emily, this had happened in a classroom session on sport and social issues when one of the students criticised women's sport: 'I think the biggest quote was like from one of the lads, and he quoted that women's basketball was BTEC basketball' (Emily, Sport Coaching and Sport Development Degree). Emily went on to say that this student was not challenged (by other students or staff) on their views of women's basketball and Emily was left feeling that there was no real commitment to understanding gender relations in sport and the ongoing ways people denigrate women and their sporting achievements.

Later, Emily recalled another time when discussing issues of gender and social justice that after the discussion got heated, a student responded disrespectfully: 'He's like, calm down love, and we're all like, love? Really? The thing is, he's not even northern so he puts that on just in front of his mates on the course' (Emily, Sport Coaching and Sport Development Degree). This was also discussed by a survey respondent who stated: 'I have struggled in the past with some of the male cohort not listening to the women' (Student Survey Response, Woman, Sport Coaching and Sport Development Degree). The use of gendered language to counter Emily's argument (and her experience) of gender demonstrates how women can be ignored and how issues of inequity can be belittled in educational spaces. While we did not find examples of resistance previously found in research by Clayton and Humberstone (2007), the sample of students involved may have had an interest in this topic. For others on the courses, they may not have experienced being marginalised themselves (in relation to gender) and therefore there can be denial of gender issues in sport.

Sport courses also include practical activities, and many women discussed how dominant gender relations were more likely to be reinforced in these spaces, particularly around physical competence:

> ‘Competitiveness is often prevalent in this environment and can come across as 'cocky' particularly when a popular sport is being taught. Often felt judged when women were taking part in a stereotypical male predominant sport such as football.’ (Student Survey Response, Woman, Physical Education Degree)

In different spaces, gender relations were manifested in multiple ways. For example, in an interview, Emily noted how in practical lessons, which often happen in the sports hall, the types of activities that dominate tend to be gender specific and limited:

> ‘Within my practical settings, I know for a fact seven of our lads have only ever coached football within that practical like they’ve never even tried rugby or anything else. It's always been right guys, today we're doing football’ (Emily, Sport Coaching and Sport Development Degree).

There was, according to some students, a sense that the men on the courses felt they were physically superior and more competent. For example, a survey respondent stated: ‘Yes “lads” think of themselves as a higher ability or even girls taking part in sport as a joke/banter’ (Student Survey Response, Woman, Sport and Physical Education Degree). Later in the survey, one student explained that mixed practical classes can be problematic because: ‘Males can become over the top or wouldn’t want to injure a female’ (Student Survey Response, Man, Football Studies Degree). For some men on the sport courses, they draw on perceptions of female fragility, rather than focusing on how gender is only one aspect of difference, reinforcing the assumption that men are stronger and therefore more capable of injuring a woman in a mixed setting. There was, it seemed, little space where these perceptions are challenged on the HE courses, as knowledge about women’s bodies as being fragile is not particularly questioned, and women’s bodies are othered (Hills, 2015).

In sport science lab sessions, the body and privacy of the body was sometimes problematic for women, and this had not been considered by teaching colleagues (who are mainly men), with women ‘othered’ in these spaces (Hill, 2015). For example, Freya described the following situation:

> ‘There's been times where it's like male tutors take our practicals, but for our physiology, like you have to wear like a heart monitor thing like around your chest. And it was like, well, I don't know if I can volunteer to do that because all of the guys took their tops off. And I was like, I don't know how I do that. So I just didn't, like volunteer for it’ (Freya, Applied Sport Science Degree)

This was also discussed by Sati, who noted how in another session the difficulties associated with women putting on chest monitors had been considered, but only as an afterthought:

> ‘So once when we had this like chest monitor on obviously because we’re girls, *(the lecturer said)* oh, you can just go around the side if you want to put it on. Because the guys can just put it on’ (Sati, Applied Sport Science Degree)

Here, the space and organisation of the lesson is organised for men, with the issue of heart monitors and putting these on different types of bodies not being fully considered by the lecturers. While such issues may seem minor, they reflect the patterning of a set of gender relations which support gender regimes of male dominance in sport HE settings. In this context, the course and space are assumed to be for men, and this may prevent some women from taking part due to lack of privacy, subsequently impacting on their learning and experience.

The Gendering of Emotion, Human Relations and Gender Difference

As part of gender regimes, Connell (2005) identifies the need to highlight how emotional and human relations are organised along gender lines in organisations. In our analysis we explored this by considering how students worked together on their courses. For example, in the survey data, students reflected on their own course and how 'typically boys work with boys and girls work with girls. However, a few groups will mix' (Student Survey Response, Woman, Physical Education Degree). The grouping of students in classrooms was noted by other students in the survey:

> 'There were some mixed groups that worked together, but most group work entailed a group of all men working together and/or a group of all women working together. I personally worked within mixed groups, with both men and women working together' (Student Survey Response, Woman, Youth Sport and Physical Education Degree)

This was not problematic for some students but for others this was noticeable, and as the student here notes: 'It was intimidating at first, some boys don't like the fact we are girls, but most are open minded' (Student Survey Response, Woman, Football Studies Degree). The separation based on gender lines is problematic and for women on the course it can further reinforce a feeling of separation.

For Indigo, the issue of engaging and working with men was problematic in how it might be seen or interpreted by others:

> 'It's just I feel like they've got their little group and I don't want to go in and be like the girl that wants...I don't want to be seen as the girl who's going to come and sit with you guys' (Indigo, Applied Sport Science Degree)

Indigo tried to pre-empt how this might be perceived by others and is aware of how her behaviour may be interpreted by fellow students, and how gossip about Indigo might develop from sitting with the men. She later expanded this to talking about how she dresses:

> ‘It's also just things like, what do I wear to practicals? Like little things like that. Sort of like the back of your mind. It shouldn’t matter. I shouldn't be thinking or like worrying about things like that’ (Indigo, Applied Sport Science Degree)

The emotional relations are visualised as who Indigos sits with and how she dresses is a gendered issue, as gender is enacted but also ascribed by others (Hill, 2015).

Gender identities and power are also practiced in different spaces, particularly classroom spaces. In the interviews, cultures of gender, such as lad culture, are manifested. As Annie discusses:

> ‘I think there's a lot of lad culture on our course. I think because there's so much like, where there are so few girls, there's so much testosterone in that room, people are just competing to be top, top guy, really, I just think it's just, it's a competition between the guys as to who can be the most masculine’ (Annie, Sport Coaching and Sport Development Degree)

The issue of groups and cultures being ‘pack’ like was also observed by Emily:

> ‘Oh, yeah, especially like, they do come around in packs like, you'll see them come to the lecture in a pack, but they don't live together, they meet up outside the building’ (Emily, Sport Coaching and Sport Development Degree)

The physical dominance of men on the course was then further discussed by Emily later in her interview:

> ‘Whenever we like get to like do football or something more masculine, because obviously, when we turn up, most of the girls turn up in their leggings, and like shorts and a T shirt, they turn up in their trackies and then they take off their hoody then they will stay in their pack until we call them over to do activities or something like that.

> They don't like mix with anyone else' (Emily, Sport Coaching and Sport Development Degree)

While there is growing literature on the complexity of identities and laddish behaviour (Jackson and Sundaram, 2018; Jeffries, 2020; Phipps, 2017), the definition drawn upon to describe lad culture – outlined earlier in this paper - was evident in many women students' experiences, especially in relation to the idea of 'packs'. For example, Sati stated;

> 'It's just mostly guys like. I don't think it really relates to women as much, but it can do. Just like when they're in a group, they're all trying to be like alpha males, just like show off and impress their friends and be intimidating to others' (Sati, Applied Sport Science Degree)

The behaviour of groups of students may go unquestioned, be normalised and may be related to other issues of power in HE. The ways in which power intersects arguably creates hierarchies of knowledge and experiences (Sundaram and Jackson, 2020).

As part of the discussions of the classroom culture, Indigo drew on the example of banter being normalised between lads:

> 'It's sort of just like lads just being lads like. Just sort of like the banter and the jokes, like between guys and stuff. Like almost like a class joker, clown sort of thing' (Indigo, Applied Sport Science Degree)

There are similarities to the work of Sundaram and Jackson (2020), highlighting the pervasiveness of terminology around gender which can be passed as jokes or banter in ways which dismiss everyday harassment. As Jeffries (2020) explores in his research with those who identify as 'lads', banter is a key form of communication. It is a way in which they can develop social bonds between each other, although 'lads' acknowledge that navigating banter is not straightforward and recognise its problematic nature (Jeffries, 2020). Yet in our research, banter in the classroom was particularly problematic for students and differed depending on the space in which it took place:

> ‘Classroom lad culture comes across as individuals whom would rather get a funny response to a question as opposed to an intellectual response. Comparing to practical sessions which tend to have more guys showing off their ‘skills’ to impress one another’ (Workshop, Man, Football Studies Degree)

Groups can be problematic, with one survey respondent stating: ‘The boys would huddle in groups and be laughing and joking and displaying 'banter' but I don't know exactly what about’ (Student Survey Response, Woman, Youth Sport and Physical Education Degree). While the type of banter is not heard by this student, they are acutely aware of the types of jokes that could be shared in these spaces. Challenging such behaviours can be difficult for all students, as a male student notes: ‘I would be uncomfortable or lack confidence to speak up in a predominantly male group with their games-based sport background’ (Student Survey Response, Man, Sport and Physical Education Degree). Not all men approve of these behaviours; however, these behaviours do not generally get questioned or challenged. The small spaces where gender inequities are discussed in the curriculum are therefore not transferred or recognised as existing in the classroom and the students’ lives.

Conclusion

In this article, we discuss the ways in which gender and gender regimes are embedded in curriculum and practiced/experienced by students on HE university sport courses. We build on the research by Clayton and Humberstone (2007), Serra et al., (2018), and Pielichaty (2020) by utilising the theoretical concepts from Elias and Connell, to connect issues about the social construction of knowledge and the curriculum with how this knowledge is experienced by students. Through combining these concepts into our analysis we are able to illustrate how gender inequities in HE sports courses often go unchallenged, and how gender patterns can be understood as multi layered examples of power relations which continue to disadvantage women (Jackson and Sundaram, 2018). Specifically, our research highlights the ways gender regimes are reinforced through curriculum and knowledge in the context of one university; what is taught and by whom reflects broader power relations in sport where women and their knowledge/experiences remain marginalised, reminding us of the ways in which knowledge can be used by different groups (Malcolm, 2021). When women's sport and gender relations are taught it is often in specific modules, compartmentalised. However, in day-to-day discussions, and in all other sessions, examples and discussions are nearly always around men's sport and male athletes, naturalising male bodies as the norm. This is further found in the lack of gender diversity in staffing and the student body which reinforces gendered relations of power. Finally, through drawing out the gendering of emotions and human relations, we explore how women students in practical and classroom sessions experience banter (between other males) and lad culture. In these spaces, we found no examples of staff or students challenging attitudes around women and sport. Through exploring how gender is taught in the curriculum *and* students' experiences of studying gender we can identify the ways knowledge is largely presented as gender neutral with little critical analysis of gender relations as historically and socially significant.

These findings are significant because students on HE courses are likely to go on to work in the sport sector where there continue to be gender inequities in all areas, highlighted by the gender pay gap (Velija, 2022), and gender inequity in sport governance and leadership (Elling et al., 2019), as well as other problematic behaviours in locker room and social sport spaces. However, students' understanding of these issues may be limited or their ideas unquestioned. Their perceptions of gender neutrality are reinforced by gender knowledge forming only a small discussion within a specific set of modules, suggesting it is topic worthy of a compartmentalised discussion with little wider application or analysis. The implications for this are that students may enter the sport sector without the knowledge and skills to be able to effectively challenge gender inequity in their future work, and may see gender, not as a set of ongoing power relations, but as something that is an issue only for *some* people in sport. Our research is only a case study of one university and given the expansion of sport courses in the UK, we would welcome a larger analysis of sport courses, to explore gender and the curriculum alongside an understanding of how this is taught and experienced by interdependent groups of students and lecturers.

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