Chapter 10
Gender and the politics of knowledge in the academy

Barbara Read and Carole Leathwood

Abstract What counts as knowledge? Who are valid, legitimate 'knowers'? In this chapter we revisit work that we have conducted collaboratively over the last decade, focusing and elaborating on a single theme that has threaded through much of our work: the dynamics of gendered knowledges in higher education. We draw on a range of intersectional perspectives in discussing the dynamics of gender and the politics of knowledge in higher education institutions, drawing on work we conducted on the gendered, classed and racialised assumptions underlying notions of a perceived 'feminisation' of the higher education sector. We then move on to discuss more recent studies we have conducted to explore the continuing effects on knowledge production (and the teaching and learning of knowledge) of audit accountability measures such as the UK's Research Excellence Framework, and the casualisation of teaching in the sector. Finally, we conclude with a discussion of the growing challenge to the 'elite' academy from the radical/far right and how this is involving new (and some very old) gendered conceptualisations of what knowledge is seen as valued, acceptable and appropriate in the contemporary academy.

2009: Gender and the changing face of higher education: a focus on knowledge

In the opening chapter of our 2009 book *Gender and the Changing Face of Higher Education: A Feminised Future?* we cited a number of attention-grabbing newspaper headlines that were proclaiming that university institutions had become 'feminised'. 'Ladies First: women take over universities', proclaimed the UK's *Guardian* (18 May, 2004). '…: Men Go Missing on Campus', claimed the USA's *Herald Tribune* (14 February, 2000). The same country's *Star Tribune* pronounced with a

B. Read (✉)
School of Education, University of Glasgow, Glasgow, UK
e-mail: barbara.read@glasgow.ac.uk

C. Leathwood
London Metropolitan University, London, UK

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A. Ross (ed.), *Educational Research for Social Justice*, Education Science, Evidence, and the Public Good 1, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-62572-6_10

degree of fatality as to the seeming irreversibility of the outcome of this 'gender war': 'Pack it Up, Guys. The Takeover is Complete' (17 January, 2004) (Leathwood and Read 2009, p. 1).

As we went on to discuss, the seeming 'feminisation' of the higher education sector indicated by these headlines was based on undergraduate enrolment statistics that masked wide divergences in terms of institution type/status, region/nation, and subject discipline. Moreover, as a raft of feminist scholarship over previous decades had shown, a greater proportion of women undergraduate students masks a continuing gender disparity in favour of men in more senior academic roles and leadership positions (Morley 2005, 2013; Acker and Webber 2006; Blackmore and Sachs 2007). A concern with numerical gender parity ratios of students or staff also implies that there can be a simplistic equivalence of an individual's gender identity and the production and dissemination of curricula, pedagogical styles and forms of interaction in the academy in gendered ways that 'match' each individual's identity – hence an increase in the numbers of 'female bodies' in an institution can somehow increase the 'feminisation' of that institution's culture (from an ostensibly neutral, implicitly 'masculine', base). And although discussions of the identities/positionalities of individual staff and students in higher education institutions are important, a focus solely on such statistics misses the more central question over the ways in which academic cultures and practices are themselves gendered, classed and racialised in complex ways, that do not correlate with numerical patterns of enrolment or employment. Such questions are crucial for researching social justice and higher education for the public good.

Taking the production and dissemination of academic knowledge as one particular strand of academic culture and practice, it is clear that the power dynamics involved are highly complex, geographically and historically fluid and contextual, and entwined with broader facets of inequality relating to institutional status/prestige and national/regional dominances that have been shaped through colonial legacies. A key argument in our 2009 book is that, despite a prevalent conception of the academy as a place of 'neutral', disinterested knowledge production and dissemination, the university as an institution, and the knowledge that is produced and circulated, has always been, and remains, complexly gendered, 'raced' and 'classed'. And in terms of gender, a 'masculinised' conception of knowledge has been – and arguably remains – more dominant within the academy, despite the numerical changes in participation that have instigated the 'panic' around feminisation. Indeed, our analysis of representations of women and men students and academics on a selection of university websites (Leathwood and Read 2009, pp. 71–94) illustrated the ways in which the university is constructed as both 'feminised' with regard to numbers of undergraduate students as well as masculinised in terms of the academic body and the culture of the academy.

We were concerned to draw attention to the ways in which the knowledge studied at university has not somehow magically arisen into discrete categories of discipline and subject. The social construction of such categorisations – and their associated value and status – reflects wider power dynamics, including, of course, the dynamic of gender (Evans 1982, 1997; Trowler 1998). We examined the historical origins

and development of academic knowledge in the Global North, which became constructed through the prism of Enlightenment discourses of the possibility of objectivity and a single 'truth' that could be uncovered by rational, disinterested researchers (see Derrida 1976 [1967]; Foucault 1979 [1976]; Harding 1984; Irigaray 1985).

It was largely feminist scholars who pointed out that the enquiring, rational subject of Enlightenment thought was a masculinised one (e.g. Cixous 1981; Harding 1984; Hekman 1990). The binary logic underpinning much of Enlightenment thinking often constructed concepts such as 'truth', 'objectivity' and 'rationality' as implicitly – or explicitly – masculine, and valued these concepts more highly than their feminised opposites of falsehood, subjectivity, and irrationality. The influence of these discourses ensured that the dominant conception of the scholar (and the academic student) was a masculine one – with the notion of women students, let alone academics, initially treated with open ridicule (Dyhouse 1995, 2005). And during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as women began to be admitted into higher education institutions worldwide, there remained significant constraints or barriers towards the study of certain disciplines and subjects deemed to be more appropriate for men, including the sciences. In the UK for example, women were initially excluded from professional scientific societies, and then steered towards certain areas such as medical and biological sciences – an interest in the human body and its care possibly rendering these subjects slightly more acceptably 'feminine' than the 'hard' sciences of physics, chemistry and engineering (Watts 2007).

We attempted in the book to chart the ways in which decades of feminist and other critical scholars have gradually chipped away at the power of such dominant discourses. Such challenges included not only a change as to who was considered acceptable as students or scholars, but also a challenge to the seeming neutrality of the academic knowledge that was produced and studied (see e.g. discussions in Holloway 1998; Thornham 2000; Vander Stichele and Penner 2005). This included, for example, critiquing masculinised conceptions of 'genius' and the lack of women and minority ethnic artists and authors included in the established 'canon' in literature and art (Gourma-Petersen and Mathews 1987; Parker and Pollock 1987; Nead 1992); and feminist historians similarly challenged the concentration in historical accounts of the actions of powerful individual men (Scott 1999). There also emerged a growing recognition amongst feminist academics that it was not enough to just 'add women and stir' into established curricula – what was needed was a deeper critique of the social historical circumstances of women that might inhibit their ability to produce literature or art, and to shift perspective from individual, privileged actors to social groups, topics and perspectives that were often ignored or marginalised (Lerner 1979; Scott 1999). At the same time, African American and Black feminists internationally were challenging the inclusivity of the feminist movement, arguing that critiques and campaigns often focused on the interests and perspectives of White, middle-class women whilst claiming to speak for all (hooks 1982; Crenshaw 1989). In recent decades the growing popularity of poststructuralism and queer theory have provided additional perspectives from which to critique established curricula and the notion of neutral 'objective' academic knowledge (Butler

1991; Epstein et al. 2003; Bird 2004; Stewart 2007). Finally, another key aspect of challenge to the mainstream curriculum – the field of Women's Studies – emerged since the 1960s as a major way of critiquing traditional canon and perspectives in the academy in many countries across the globe, with concerns and critiques reflecting their own national and cultural contexts (Pappu 2002; Coate 2006; Stake 2006). However, as we noted in 2009, Women's Studies as a field has always suffered from public conceptions that it is an invalid 'Mickey Mouse' subject (Marchbank and Letherby 2006), along with ambivalent institutional support and precarious funding – only exacerbated by the market imperatives of neoliberal governance (Stake 2006; see below). Jen Marchbank and Gayle Letherby (2006) argue that Women's Studies may have declined in some countries (such as the UK) because of the movement's broader success in challenging masculinised academic curricula – a topic we will return to below.

In the vast majority of countries in the world higher education is now accepted as the province of both women and men – although to greater and lesser degrees the original embodied conception of the ideal/appropriate academic and student as White, middle- or upper-class and male can still be seen to have influence, for example in the continued assumption that academics and students will have no caring responsibilities and can attend university at any hour, working on their studies and/or research through the night, with 'wives' or other family providing material, emotional and practical support (Leathwood and O'Connell 2003; Leathwood 2006; Brooks 2012; Moreau and Kerner 2015). In terms of access to the production of academic knowledge, a projection by John Pratt (cited in Oxford 2008) suggested that women were poised to outnumber men at researcher and junior levels in the academy – whilst also projecting that it would be 2070 before there was gender parity at professor level. This nevertheless caused a reaction in some quarters familiar to those following the 'panics' regarding feminisation – with a piece in the UK's *Times Higher Education* stating:

> Figures from the Higher Education Statistics agency suggest that at researcher and lecturer levels, women are poised to take over…. Already British universities and their staff are working to come to terms with a feminisation of the academy. (Oxford 2008, p. 30)

In contrast to this perception, we pointed to the clear gender disparity of considerably more men in senior academic roles in universities worldwide, and in positions of research as opposed to teaching. Moreover, we noted at the time, the greater proportions of women and especially minority ethnic academics, as well as those from working-class backgrounds, clustered in short-term, casualised contracts (Reay 2000; Hey 2001).

Notwithstanding the statistics relating to occupational status, the continued gendering of academic knowledge can be seen through a number of more subtle dynamics, including a continuing discursive construction of some forms of knowledge as more 'appropriate' for particular genders, with those most highly valued generally still associated with the 'masculine' (Smith 1974; Spender and Sarah 1980; Bagilhole and Goode 1998; Coate 2006). Research shows that students' conceptions of their own ability to take on, and interest in, particular subjects, are still often

related to the degree to which such subject areas are constructed as 'appropriate' for their gender (Leathwood and Read 2009; see also Francis and Skelton 2005). In the early twenty-first century this was still impacting on the numbers of women students taking up particular scientific subjects at Higher Education level – particularly in engineering and computer science (UNESCO 2018).

These dynamics cannot be understood without reference to the overwhelming influence in the sector of neoliberal imperatives. Our discussion of gender and academic knowledge in 2009 needed to be framed in the context of the trend in the last few decades towards increased marketisation of the sector, along with a rise in a culture of managerialism and performativity (Ball 2003b; Blackmore and Sachs 2003; Naidoo 2003). We also noted the ways in which knowledge in the academy has been increasingly 'packaged' in curricula in commercially more attractive modular forms and across virtual or blended platforms, as universities compete for lucrative fees from (especially) international students (Brecher 2005). Students are themselves cast in the role of consumers of this knowledge, encouraged and warned of the need to be constantly updating their skills and experience to remain 'flexibly' employable in an increasingly precarious and short-term job market (see Morley 2003; Barnett 2004; Moreau and Leathwood 2006; Singh 2007). As Rajani Naidoo (2003) and others noted, it is students in higher education institutions most centrally catering to the business and industry sectors – most often those institutions with less status/prestige – that are most affected in terms of the curricula they have access to as a result of these changes. Drawing on a range of international studies, we have discussed how students in these institutions are more likely to be 'non-traditional' – i.e. students from working-class or lower socioeconomic backgrounds, mature, minority ethnic, and in many countries in sub-Saharan Africa and South and East Asia, women (Leathwood and Read 2009; see also UNESCO 2018). Politically 'sensitive' subjects such as women's studies and peace studies, and less explicitly vocational subjects such as philosophy, are then more vulnerable to be cut due to concerns with 'economic viability' (Jackson 2000; Marchbank and Letherby 2006). As Naidoo noted in 2003:

> Rather than gaining access to powerful forms of knowledge, the majority of disadvantaged students will receive an education that has been reduced to narrowly defined core competencies which have been legitimated on the bandwagon of consumer choice. (Naidoo 2003)

In 2020, it is an explicit concern about students and the economic value of their degrees that is given as a rationale for challenges to less obviously vocational subjects in the UK. The *Review of Post-18 Education and Funding* (2019) concludes with recommendations 'intended to encourage universities to bear down on low value degrees and to incentivise them to increase the provision of courses better aligned with the economy's needs.' (DfE 2019e, p. 10). The subject areas specifically identified as 'low value', a signification that extends well beyond the economic, are social studies and creative arts and design, both areas with significantly more women students (over 60% compared to less than 40% of men) in 2017/18 (HESA 2019). It is also notable that in 2017 the UK government withdrew student bursaries for those studying 'subjects allied to medicine' which include nursing and

midwifery, almost 80% of whom were women in 2017/18. The valorising of disciplinary areas traditionally associated with men and the undervaluing of those marked as 'feminine' continues.

Gender and the dynamics of research audit

Our book was written and published at the same time as the global financial crisis of 2008 and we were unable therefore to gauge the effects of the fallout on academic culture and practice. However in the UK as elsewhere, pre-existing forms of social inequality across many areas of public life were being – and continue to be – exacerbated by right-wing political rhetoric and policy justified in the name of financial restrictions in the wake of the financial crisis (McCormack and Salmenniemi 2015). Our work in the 2010s included a number of projects looking at academic work and life in the context of a neoliberal performative culture that only intensified with the austerity culture ushered in after 2008. Louise Morley had stated a few years earlier that in academia, 'scholarship has been reduced to income generation' (2003, p. 22), and Stephanie Daza in 2012 noted that by the beginning of the new decade this imperative had been exacerbated, with a 'grants culture', along with 'neoliberal scientism', colonising research in its material and ideological demands for accounting, efficiency, austerity, utility, and measured effectiveness' (p. 773).

It was against this backdrop that we conducted a qualitative project in 2010/11, interviewing over 70 academics in UK institutions by email, asking them about their perspectives and experiences of academic life and work in the context of recent policy trends in the sector (Leathwood and Read 2013). This had included, in England, the removal of the annual government grant distributed to higher education institutions to support teaching in the sector, and was just before the first universities began charging sizeable tuition fees to students as a consequence. We were also in the middle of the latest cycle of the national research audit – the Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2014 would tighten further the funding criteria for university departments, where only academic work judged as 3* 'internationally excellent' or 4* 'world leading' would 'count' towards a department's awarded grade and funding amount. We were particularly interested in ways in which such exercises work in Foucauldian terms as 'disciplinary technologies', that incite academics to ever greater forms of self-surveillance, self-monitoring and performativity as we find ourselves simultaneously governed and compliantly self-governing: as Cris Shore and Susan Wright noted, 'the logic of the modern audit system is to produce not '"docile bodies" but "self-actualised" auditable individuals' (Shore and Wright 2000, p. 78).

As we noted (Leathwood and Read 2013), this has particular gendered dimensions. Feminists have long argued that it is men who are more likely to be deemed as research 'excellent', with traditional 'markers of excellence' such as citation

indices, journal editorships, large grant awards, membership of research panels and the prioritisation of research over teaching all likely to favour men (Van den Brink and Benschop 2011; Leathwood 2017). The emphasis in the UK research audit on specific numbers of outputs over a given timeframe necessarily discriminates against those taking career breaks or those working part-time (an issue recognised in the UK's REF in later iterations of the audit). Moreover, the increased competition and conspicuous need to publicly perform to targets arguably favours those who feel comfortable with the competitive 'display' that Sandra Harley calls 'academic machismo' (2003, p. 78). It also disadvantages those – more commonly women – whose work entails greater involvement with the sort of 'productive non-productivity' and emotional labour underpinning work such as collegial support and student mentoring, as opposed to more immediately measurable outcomes valued more highly by research assessment audits (Harley 2003, citing Strathern 1997, p. 318).

The anxiety and stress caused by potentially not 'making the grade' was evident in our study, particularly as expressed by women participants. We noted:

> Being the 'good girls' of the academy is perhaps less about 'the pleasure of compliance with (masculine formal) authority' in Hey's (2004, p. 37) words, and more about a defence against public shaming if one isn't seen to make the grade. (Leathwood and Read 2013, p. 1171)

Participants in our study discussed the impact of such dynamics on not only their work and lives, but on the academy as a whole, including fears that small-scale, critical, qualitative work, innovative or 'left-field' work, and feminist research were less likely to be funded in the race for securing large grant funding (2013, p. 1166), with implications for the kinds of knowledge that is produced and legitimised. Participants also expressed concerns about research capacity-building and where the new researchers for the future, and the associated new ideas and perspectives, would come from given the difficulties for early career academics to establish themselves in this context.

Gender and precarity in academia – consequences for knowledge production

In our research on academic life and work we began to draw on the wider sociological literature and theorisation around social precarity that was increasingly being utilised to look at issues around what appeared to be a decline in the proportion of people across global north countries with 'permanent' work contracts that guaranteed associated benefits such as pension contributions, paid vacation and sickness leave (Hudson-Sharp and Runge 2017). We found it useful to draw on wider uses of the notion of precarity beyond the strict correlation with employment contracts, widening to people's experience or feelings of insecurity or destabilisation, of 'slipping over the edge', which could characterise experience in a range of aspects of life

(Ettlinger 2007). Following Judith Butler (2006, 2009a, 2009b), we defined precarity as *social* when it is not simply the product of accident (e.g. slipping on an icy pavement) but is connected to, or indeed induced by, wider sociopolitical policies and practices (e.g. being moved onto a 'zero hours' contract,[1] or falling foul of tightened policies around visa regulation as a 'Tier 4' student[2]). As Butler (2006), Isabell Lorey (2015) and others have been keen to stress, social precarity can be experienced by a wide range of people but is more likely to be felt (and experienced more severely) by those in less advantaged groups in society.

Of course, and as we have already discussed in this chapter, academia has never been a place of secure employment for those differing from the hegemonic conception of the typical 'ideal' scholar, in terms of identity markers such as 'race', social class and gender (see. e.g. Mirza 1995; Reay 2004; Leathwood and Read 2009; Maylor 2009). The dynamics of precarisation exacerbate these pre-existing patterns of inequality, for example the UK's Equality Challenge Unit (2015) analysis found that women, under-35s, disabled and Black and minority ethnic academics are more likely to be on temporary and/or 'teaching-only' contracts.

What are the implications of processes of precarisation for the production of knowledge? A growing number of studies describe the negative effects of the consequences of employment precarity on the quality and quantity of an academic's work. In the 2010/11 study we conducted with over 70 academics, we found that having time to write and publish was a source of anxiety, especially for those on insecure contracts. Pippa for example stated:

> A part-time hourly paid worker is like a temp. She only gets paid for the actual hours worked and so Christmas, Easter and summer are unpaid. There is no time to write or publish because she has to try to find work during these unpaid months. This ends up being almost half of the year when you add it all up. Such stress and anxiety also means that you cannot do your job very well. In my first year as a teacher I had insomnia and panic attacks. (Pippa, Senior Lecturer)

Establishing a specialism was also a key concern. For example, Faye (a Research Fellow in a research-intensive university) stated:

> In part the dilemma is balancing priorities. As a 'contract' researcher once one project finishes (and often before) you have moved to another project and the 'headspace' to write from the former project is less easy to find…[Due to working in a variety of different areas] I feel a confident and experienced researcher but my ability to see myself as a 'specialist' in one specific area is much harder. It is that degree of specialism that leads to really high quality publication. (Faye, Research Fellow)

The importance placed on developing 'a specialism of one's own' is linked to what is often described as 'traditional' or 'collegium' models of the academic role, with an emphasis on the academic as an ethically independent researcher free to conduct research without constraints from institutional or external political entities, and that

[1] Zero hours contracts are employment contracts with no guaranteed hours of work.

[2] International students are required to apply for a 'tier 4' visa in order to be allowed to study in the UK, with higher education institutions mandated to monitor tier 4 students' attendance/engagement with their course.

might have no immediate utilitarian value (Read and Leathwood 2018; also Leathwood 2013). Quite apart from the argument that the ideal of the academic 'disinterested pursuit of the truth' has never been disinterested, nor able to produce the truth, it was also clear in our study that participants were heavily influenced by an alternative discursive construction of the academic produced through a neoliberal lens. In this construction of the academic, and academic knowledge, what is most highly valued is research that that can be judged and evaluated to be 'high quality' through the metrics of research audit (as is implied by Faye's last sentence above). 'Making the grade' in this regard was a pervasive source of anxiety for a substantial number of our participants, tied as it was to the ability to possibly secure, or retain, a permanent contract that will allow for paid research time. The relentless cycle then continues, as – if successful in acquiring or keeping this research time – academics then feel constrained to continue to utilise this time to produce the forms of knowledge, and the formats in which it should be packaged, that will again allow them to 'make the grade' in the next audit on the horizon.

Although there is no simplistic equation between a person's gender, social class position or ethnicity and the focus or political nature of their work, two key developments impact negatively on research. Firstly, the greater number of women, working-class and minority ethnic academics on insecure contracts that negatively impact on their ability to conduct the research they would ideally like to specialise in. Secondly, the constraints academics reportedly feel in terms of 'playing safe' with the sorts of (politically mainstream) topics and (quantitative, large-scale) research designs that are more likely to attract research funding. These developments combine to paint a research landscape in which more critical research, with innovative qualitative methodologies, conducted by academics from a rich diversity of backgrounds and experience, becomes less and less likely to be realised.

In this context, it is those with the greatest material, social and cultural security (predominantly privileged White men on secure and more senior contracts in the elite universities in the Global North) that are more able to determine/define research topics and questions to be asked, and to produce the knowledge that becomes legitimised in the global academy.

Gender and precarity in academia – consequences for the curriculum

Our next collaboration involved a research project looking more specifically at casualised contracts, with a focus this time on the possible impact of this for academics' teaching and their relationships with students (see Leathwood and Read 2020; Read and Leathwood 2020). The research, conducted in 2017/18, involved qualitative email interviews with 20 UK-based academics who were on some form of insecure academic contract, including fixed-term and hourly paid. Of particular

relevance here are the participants' accounts of their perceptions of the implications of their contractual status on their teaching and curriculum preparation, with the marginalisation that they experienced as casualised staff and the insecure short-term nature of their employment underpinning most of the issues they raised. A major concern was what we identified as a 'last-minute modality', with many participants reporting, for example, last minute issuing of contracts or only receiving notification of their teaching shortly before they were expected to take a module. Olivia, for example, explained:

> I was also not told I was convening an additional module until I arrived back this week – there was no forewarning or handover or time to prepare and many colleagues in my position have experienced similar issues.

Participants reported that they were often expected to teach on someone else's module, frequently with very little time to prepare. For example, Julia revealed that she would wait up until late in the evening for the module convenor to send her the teaching plan for her 9am session the following morning, and if it hadn't arrived by midnight, she would get up very early the next day in order to prepare for her teaching. Concerns were expressed not only about the overall quality of what they were able to offer to students but also about the lack of time and opportunity to be innovative or to update the knowledge base of the teaching sessions. Jane, for example, explained that because of the last-minute notification of her teaching, she had been unable to change a module that was 'very White and male', whilst Jennifer reported trying her best to 'decolonise and genderise' a sociological theory module 'which was the usual Durkheim and his White-man gang', but her arrival shortly before the start of term made this difficult.

The use of short-term temporary contracts for academic staff therefore has serious implications for the curriculum, with students potentially denied access to innovative and critical knowledges.

Gender, knowledge, and challenges from right-wing populism/ authoritarianism

Another developing dynamic in relation to gender and academic knowledge that we had not previously focused on has been the rise in populist anti-intellectual rhetoric, accompanying a rise in the number of far right parties and leaders gaining power in Europe and the US, finding common cause with other far right/authoritarian leaders across the globe (see Clarke and Newman 2017; Norris and Inglehart 2019). For many governments and political movements, the academy has long been seen as an obvious target, especially in relation to the attempt to (and in some cases success in) cracking down on dissent and critique of those in power either by academics themselves and/or student protest movements. Government constraints and crackdowns on the autonomy and 'academic freedom' of universities is of course pervasive globally; see e.g. recent developments in Turkey (Abbas and Zalta 2017; Aktas et al.

2019) and Egypt (SAR and AFTE 2019). Moreover, it is by no means a recent phenomenon (see Altbach 2001).

Academics such as Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart (2019) and Siri Hustvedt (2017) have situated the long-developing rise in the popularity of far right politics in many global north countries as part of a growing cultural backlash against the gains of civil rights, feminist and other equality activists in recent decades by those who feel that the privileges they might have once securely and unquestionably held, especially in terms of 'race', religion, gender and sexuality, are now uncomfortably challenged: epitomised by the oft-used metaphor that 'the pendulum has swung too far the other way'. For example, a pressure group called 'Stop Abusive and Violent Environments' stated that single-gender scholarships favouring women in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) fields at US universities was an example that 'the pendulum has swung too far in the other direction' (Dutca-Lovell 2019).

Attacks on 'liberal elites' can include a complex mix of inegalitarian discursive rhetoric that not only invokes an obvious racism, nativism and xenophobia, but also includes a gendered strain invoking a particular kind of macho anti-intellectualism that targets critical progressive academics and academic work from a number of different angles.

In relation to higher education, the implicit misogyny, as well as racism, of right-wing attacks on 'political correctness on campus' are epitomised by the ridiculing of practices such as 'safe spaces', trigger warnings, and 'no platforming' (a protest against the invitation of an external speaker). This became the topic of a paper by one of us (Read 2018), where a comparison was made between the 'macho' masculinity of rhetoric against weak 'snowflake' students who could not tolerate alternative views, with the older discourse of 'neutral disinterested objective knowledge' traditionally espoused as the ultimate purpose of the university. As we have discussed throughout this chapter, this second discourse is actually highly gendered, classed and 'racialised'. And the discursive construction of liberal/progressive students as intolerant 'snowflakes' adds a further and more explicitly aggressive tenor to the long-established critique of research on the left as biased, and anti-racist and feminist intellectuals as too strident and aggressive for the academy.

These discursive constructions can have a 'chilling' effect on the types of knowledge produced and taught at university that is akin to, and also distinct in some ways from, the constraints and pressures of neoliberal performativity described earlier. In the guise of standing up for 'free speech', government leaders such as Donald Trump can threaten, for example, to withdraw federal funding for universities such as UC Berkeley (Reilly 2017), and websites can be established where students are encouraged to report lecturers who they believe to be too politically biased (Matthews 2019) – moves akin to the 'chilling' effect of UK's 'Prevent duty' strategy (see Nagdee 2019). In relation to gender, feminist academics, along with minority ethnic colleagues, have increasingly been the target of relentless trolling on social media in an attempt to undermine or silence their discussions – Karla Mantilla (2013, p. 565) argues that what she terms 'gendertrolling' 'nearly always occurs in

response to women speaking out about some form of sexism.' Such attacks only continue in intensity in the aftermath of global movements such as MeToo (Orchard 2019), and are not always overtly vitriolic, or even from the right. Moira Donegan (2019) notes that backlashes to MeToo and other feminist and progressive movements are often 'cloaked in the rhetoric of reasonableness and respectability':

> In other words, the backlash could be thought of as a return to familiar social and intellectual habits, habits that subvert justice but which are comforting to the powerful. Among these habits are that of depicting women as incompetent and untrustworthy, of thinking of men as honorable and incapable of meaning any harm, of thinking of feminists as unreasonable, and their calls for men to think more about the emotions, rights and desires of women as unreasonable, even totalitarian. (Donegan 2019)

Interestingly, Prince Andrew, a member of the UK royal family, recently claimed his 'mistake' in continuing a friendship with a convicted child sex offender (Jeffrey Epstein) was due to his being 'too honourable' (Baynes 2019).

There are obvious connections here to the traditional hegemonic academic discourse of the 'neutrality' and 'objectivity' of knowledge that we have argued above is actually highly masculinised, and often invoked implicitly or explicitly to undermine academic knowledge that challenges established inequalities of power, for example the dismissal of feminist and anti-racist critical work as 'identity politics' (see the discussion in Alcoff and Mohanty 2006), without a recognition that this critique serves the identity interests of those who sense their privilege is challenged. In this age of increasing attacks on academic freedom from the far right, it is crucial to note that the academic discourse that one of us (Read 2018, p. 594) labelled 'Ivory Tower rationalist' continues to powerfully undermine the 'academic freedom' of alternative perspectives in the name of objectivity and the search for 'truth'.

Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed and revisited some of the work we have conducted over the last ten years on the topic of gender and the politics of knowledge in the academy. As such, there is much in relation to the topic that we have had to leave out or condense because our work has inevitably concentrated on specific issues and geographic areas. A key area of focus we are aware we have not paid due attention to as yet is the gendered politics of knowledge in relation to the global south. We have attempted to draw on studies and authors from around the globe where possible and appropriate (the topic of academic precarity for example is one that does not translate well into many global south contexts, where 'precarity has arguably always been the norm even if it has not been called by this name': Millar, K. 2017, p. 6). Nevertheless there are pressing issues relating to gender and knowledge in these regions that have not been covered here, for example the difficulties of pursuing feminist critical work beyond policy rhetoric of parity and the more technicised strategies of gender mainstreaming (Hale 2009; Mama 2011); continuing north–south inequalities that can be manifest, for example, in terms of the continued limits

on access to academic publications under paywalls, and continuing 'epistemological racism' (Connell 2007; Fennell and Arnot 2008; Almeida 2015) whereby the work of scholars from the global south are often marginalised or ignored in the north.

Threading throughout the chapter has been the complexities of the gendered dynamics of power in relation to the production, teaching and learning of knowledge in the academy. In doing so, our aim has been to contribute to discussions in this volume and beyond that aim to problematise the notion of the university, and the academic knowledge it produces, as an uncritical, universal public good. Critical, intersectional and transnationalist feminist educational work more broadly has made an enormous contribution to the public good by focusing on issues such as the minimisation of inequalities both inside and beyond the campus and school gates, and the valuing and inclusion of diverse identities and diverse knowledges. Nevertheless, beyond the surface statistics of women undergraduates 'taking over the university', just what can be considered valid knowledge, and who are considered to be valid, legitimate and appropriate knowers, continues to be a site of ongoing contestation and struggle.

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Barbara Read is Reader in Gender and Social Inequalities at the School of Education, University of Glasgow. Her research interests are in the areas of gender and student experience in Higher Education; and academic culture and work, focussing on inequalities of experience, casualization and precarious contracts. Her work has until recently focused predominantly on higher income regions, but she has now developed sustained collaboration with academics and activists in India and sub-Saharan Africa exploring gender issues in Higher Education; and from 2020 has been leading an ESRC-funded project looking at the gendered experiences of STEM students and graduates through university and into employment in India and Rwanda. Working at IPSE from

2000–2007, she has published regularly with colleagues in this volume, including the 2009 book *Gender and the Changing Face of Higher Education: a Feminised Future?* (with Carole Leathwood, OUP, 2009), and *The Identities and Practices of High Achieving Pupils: Negotiating Achievement and Peer Cultures* (with Becky Francis and Christine Skelton, Bloomsbury, 2012).

Carole Leathwood is Emeritus Professor at London Metropolitan University, a Fellow of the Society for Research into Higher Education and was Director of IPSE from 2012–2015. Her research interests centre around issues of educational inequalities, in particular in relation to gender, social class and ethnicity. With a disciplinary background in sociology and women's studies, her research has included studies on gender and the marketisation of further education; access and widening participation in higher education; policy analyses of UK and European education policy; the impact of research policy on academic work and knowledge-production; and, most recently, on the casualisation of academic labour. She has published widely in these areas including *Gender and the Changing Face of Higher Education: A Feminised Future?* (with Barbara Read, SRHE/OUP, 2009) and *Women Academic Researchers: Still Interlopers in the UK Academy?* (in Heather Eggins, *The Changing Role of Women in Higher Education*, Springer, 2017).