

'I have a sense that it's probably quite bad ... but because I don't see it, I don't know': Staff perspectives on 'lad culture' in higher education.

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Abstract

Concerns have been voiced about lad cultures in UK universities for approximately five years. The National Union of Students has been especially vocal in airing concerns, which more recently have been taken up by universities through bodies such as Universities UK. A small amount of work has explored students' perspectives about, and experiences of, laddism. That research suggests that lad culture is particularly associated with groups of men in social contexts and involves excessive alcohol consumption, rowdy behaviour, sexism, homophobia, sexual harassment and violence. This paper is the first to explore staff perspectives: we draw on data from interviews with 72 staff across 6 universities to explore their perceptions of lad culture, including its prevalence, the contexts in which it occurs and the forms it takes. We argue that perceptions about the prevalence of lad culture are strongly influenced by how it is conceptualised and, relatedly, to whom it is visible.

Introduction

Concerns about lad cultures in universities proliferated in the UK print media early in 2013, thus rendering it visible in the public imagination. In what Phipps and Young (2015a, 306) refer to as a ‘minor media storm’, headlines have included: ‘Can universities ever get rid of boozy, sexist lad culture?’ (The Telegraph, 24/2/14); ‘Lad culture: What can be done when it's everywhere at university?’ (Independent.co.uk, 6/1/15); and ‘Sexist Lads’ Culture is out of control at Universities’ (Daily Mail, 16/9/14). Lad culture has been poorly defined in the media where the term is used to cover a range of practices including drunkenness, public rowdiness and sexual harassment. The blanket use of the term has perhaps concealed what more recent analyses of lad culture have shown to be pervasive features, namely, sexist, harassing and sometimes abusive practices that are explicitly used to degrade, humiliate and objectify women (see also Jackson and Tinkler, 2007). Simultaneously, reports of cases of sexual violence in universities (and elsewhere) have reproduced victim-blaming myths and failed to make explicit the embedded nature of sexism, harassment and violence in higher education contexts.

Early accounts of lad culture in the press tended to be based on anecdotal accounts of practices such as ‘slut dropping’ (where male students offer women lifts home after night-time socials but leave them stranded miles away from home) and ‘hazing’ (initiation ceremonies usually linked to male sports teams), as well as fancy dress parties with themes such as ‘pimps and hoes’ and ‘geeks and sluts’ (*The Independent*, 11/10/2012). More recently, the press have reported several cases they have identified as reflecting lad culture, including the production and circulation by the men’s rugby club at the London School of Economics of leaflets which had sexist and homophobic content (*The Guardian*, 06/10/2014), and students at Nottingham University singing a misogynistic chant that included a line about digging up a female corpse and having sex with it (*Daily Mirror*, 25/10/2014). A continued absence from such reports is an analysis of the underpinning culture of gender inequality and misogyny within these university contexts. As we discuss, media-led discourses about university lad culture may have

contributed to a silencing or invisibilising of the pervasive sexism, harassment and violence within university communities themselves.

Although there has been considerable media interest in lad culture in UK higher education (H.E.) contexts, research in this sphere is still in its infancy. There is a small but important body of work in which the focus has been exclusively on students' perspectives about, and experiences of, laddism (Dempster, 2007, 2009; 2011; Warin and Dempster, 2007; Jackson, Dempster and Pollard, 2015; Phipps and Young, 2013, 2015a, 2015b; Lewis, Marine and Kenny, 2018). The significance of sexism, sexual harassment and abuse to students' experiences of lad culture has become a focus in recent work by the National Union of Students (NUS). For example, The *Hidden Marks* study (NUS, 2010) explored women students' experiences of physical intimidation, fear, and verbal, sexualised and physical harassment and violence. It generated survey responses from over 2000 women students in H.E. institutions across the UK, of whom two-thirds reported having experienced some form of verbal or non-verbal harassment in or around their institution. Phipps and Young's (2013) qualitative study similarly found that experiences of misogyny - ranging from the objectification of women to physical and sexualised harassment - were prevalent for women university students in their sample. Their work drew explicitly on the concept of lad culture in H.E., characterising it as 'a group or "pack" mentality residing in activities such as sport and heavy alcohol consumption, and "banter" which was often sexist, misogynist and homophobic' (page X). Following Phipps and Young's research, the NUS (2014) conducted a study of men and women students' experiences of lad culture in H.E. which indicated that a significant number of them had witnessed the perpetration of physical and sexualised harassment and assault in and around their institutions, as well as being victimised themselves. Two-thirds of the 2000 students included in that research reported having witnessed verbal sexualised harassment or abuse towards fellow students. Thus, in research, sexual harassment and violence have become more recognisable as pervasive features of what students

experience as lad culture, and research has contributed to a more developed theorisation of laddish practices (as discussed in Phipps, Ringrose, Renold and Jackson, 2017).

Research highlighting that sexual harassment and violence are central to lad culture, coupled with the increasing attention to lad culture more generally, is beginning to influence UK H.E. policy and practice. For example, Universities UK (UUK) set up a taskforce to examine violence against women, harassment and hate crime (UUK, 2016). They subsequently published the *Changing the Culture* report in 2016 which made a series of recommendations to universities for developing preventative measures and providing support for students. As a follow-up to the UUK report, HEFCE allocated funding for a variety of projects to address sexual harassment, violence and hate crime on campus. In the 2018 UUK report *Changing the Culture: One Year On* they note that 'significant but highly variable progress appears to have been made across the higher education sector' (p. 6), and they also delineate explicitly the links between sexual harassment, violence and lad culture that drives their work:

Following campaigns to eliminate gender-based violence and harassment in higher education by the National Union of Students (NUS) and others from 2010 onwards, combined with well-publicised reports of misconduct, concerns grew over the links between these issues and the existence of lad culture on campuses (UUK, 2018, p. 5).

Thus, there has been a policy and research-driven turn that focuses concerns about university lad culture primarily on sexual harassment and violence. So, when examining university staff perceptions of lad culture we were particularly interested in whether this conceptualisation was widely held within university communities, or whether different understandings of lad culture were dominant, for example, as anti-social student culture.

Although lad culture is a UK-specific term, behaviours that are seen to characterise it, especially sexual harassment and violence, are certainly not specific to UK H.E.. A recent survey of all 39 universities in Australia, for example, suggested that 51% of all university students were sexually harassed on at least one occasion in 2016, with higher rates for: women; lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and gender diverse students; Aboriginal and Torres strait Islander students; and students with disabilities (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2017, 6). There has also been a lot of work conducted in the USA, especially on physical and sexualised violence by fraternity brothers against women on college campuses. Like laddism in the UK context, 'frat cultures' have been characterised and critiqued as involving a 'pack mentality' (e.g. Sanday, 2007), excessive alcohol consumption, and sexually harassing and abusive behaviours. In H.E. contexts that are characterised increasingly by a focus on inclusivity and diversity (Wantland, 2005), fraternities have been described as 'the final stronghold of the boys' club' (Sullivan, 1993, 28). Despite the visibility of sexual harassment and violence in these H.E. contexts, consistent, effective university responses have been less evident. Evidence suggests that institutional frameworks for preventing physical and sexualised violence, dealing with perpetrators and supporting survivors of gender-based harassment and assault are not well developed (Schwartz, DeKeseredy, Tait and Alvi, 2001). Although sexual violence prevention strategies have been employed on college campuses since the 1990s in the USA, the vast majority are ineffective (DeGue et al., 2014; Marine and Nicolazzo, 2017). Studies suggest that cultures of toxic masculinity, peer effects, alcohol and substance abuse are associated with perpetration of physical and sexualised violence against women students (e.g. Schwartz et al., 2001), echoing recent findings from the UK context (Phipps and Young, 2013). However, programmes to challenge violence against women have often focused on encouraging women students to minimise risk (a 'public health approach'), for example by avoiding 'risky' situations (Marine and Nicolazzo, 2017), and have focused on creating change at the individual level rather than addressing cultures of misogyny and sexism. A systematic review of prevention strategies for sexual violence perpetration by DeGue and colleagues (2014) revealed that fewer than 10% of programmes included content to address factors

beyond the individual level (e.g. peer attitudes, social norms, organisational climate), and the vast majority were one-dimensional, very short (one-off sessions) and lacked strong theoretical frameworks. Therefore, in many ways the responses rendered invisible the gendered, sexist and misogynist cultures that are associated with sexual harassment and violence. Thus, although this article draws on research conducted in England, it is closely related to, and in dialogue with, research internationally.

In this paper, we draw on our research exploring university staff perspectives on lad culture. As noted, previous research has focused entirely on student perspectives, so this is the first paper of its kind. We explore: 1) staff understandings of the term lad culture; 2) perceptions of its prevalence; 3) the contexts in which it occurs and the forms it takes. As highlighted in the UUK reports (2016, 2018), attempts to challenge lad culture, sexual harassment and violence need to be institution-wide. Such challenges will not occur without shared and specific understandings of what is to be challenged, and recognition that it is a pervasive issue (as opposed to an issue that affects only a handful of individuals). Thus, it is vital to explore how staff understand lad culture, whether they see it as problematic and where it is evident. Our analyses throughout the paper are particularly attuned to in/visibility: where is lad culture in/visible, to whom and why? Before engaging with these questions, we outline our research methods.

Research methods

Our research explored staff perceptions of lad culture in HE contexts. We chose to explore staff perspectives for a number of reasons including that: a) they may have a different picture of the issues than students; b) they are able to comment on institutional responses (if any) to aspects of lad culture, as well as what policies or practices might be put in place; c) we need to know how staff perceive and understand lad culture if they are to be tasked with challenging it and d) staff

perspectives on lad culture, sexual harassment and sexual violence can be considered to be constitutive and reflective of university cultures. Additionally, as noted in the previous section, no research had focussed on staff.

Before commencing the research, we sought and were granted ethical approval from the Universities of Lancaster and York. We interviewed staff during 2014-15 from across six universities in England. We confined our study to England because of differences in funding structures and policy frameworks between English universities and those in other parts of the UK. The six institutions were purposively selected on the basis of institution-level characteristics which tend to influence campus culture and student demographics: pre/post 1992-status (as an indicator of research intensiveness), campus/non-campus, geography (north and south) and student intake (in terms of gender balance, ethnic and socio-economic mix). There were six institutions in our sample. Three were post-1992 universities (ex-polytechnics) and were located in different regions of England: north-west, north-east and south-east. The other three were pre-1992 universities, members of the Russell or 1994 Groups, and also located in the north-west, north-east and south-east of England. Classifying universities as campus or non-campus is not straightforward. If we define as campus universities those that have university-owned buildings and spaces situated in one place, then three of our institutions would most-likely be classed as campus Universities (2 of the Pre-1992 group and 1 post-1992) (see, for example, The Student Room list of campus universities). Table One provides an overview of our 6 sample institutions.

Table One – Key Features of our 6 Universities

University	Pre- or post-1992	Campus or non-campus	Region in England
U1	Post 1992	Non-campus	North-east
U2	Post 1992	Non-campus	South-east
U3	Post 1992	Campus	North-west
U4	Pre 1992	Campus	South-east
U5	Pre 1992	Campus	North-east
U6	Pre 1992	Non-campus	North-west

At each institution we conducted around 10 interviews; most of these were individual ones (62 in total) plus 3 focus group discussions (each with 3 or 4 people). In total, 72 staff took part in the individual or focus group interviews, of whom 51 identified as women and 21 as men. A range of staff were involved, including: senior managers such as Pro-Vice Chancellors, College Provosts and Deans of School; Student Union officers; lecturers; welfare tutors; college officers; and security staff. Most interviews were carried out face-to-face although some were conducted by telephone. All were undertaken by the two authors (separately), using the same semi-structured interview schedule. The themes covered included: understandings of the term lad culture; individuals and groups associated with lad culture; higher education contexts in which lad culture occurs; causes of lad culture; and institutional frameworks or policies for tackling it. Most interviews lasted for approximately one hour; they were audio-recorded and transcribed in full. The interview data were coded thematically using NVivo11. Development of the codes was undertaken by the authors/interviewers and informed by previous research, the research questions and themes

emerging from the data. There were 11 main codes, for example, contexts of lad culture, addressing lad culture. Seven of the 11 had sub-codes, some of which were further subdivided. For example, contexts of lad culture had 14 sub-codes including clubs, halls of residence, social media. One of these – academic contexts – was further subdivided into four, including course/discipline differences and laddism: staff towards students. All names in this article are pseudonyms chosen by the authors; quotations are taken from individual interviews unless otherwise indicated.

What constitutes lad culture?

Lad culture was associated with a range of behaviours which were characterised in varying ways by staff, although there was a large degree of consensus over certain aspects of it. There were many parallels between the ways our interviews described laddism and the way it has been conceptualised and presented in the media. For example, laddism has been presented in the UK press largely in relation to students' social lives and most staff focussed on this sphere, at least initially.

Furthermore, reports about lad culture in the media have highlighted 'extreme' manifestations of laddish behaviour that are more likely to cause moral outrage and, as we discuss later, some of our interviewees also tended to conceptualise laddism as extreme. We recognise that there are plenty of examples of 'extreme' laddism. However, representing lad culture only as 'extreme' in its expression of sexism and misogyny tends to go hand-in-hand with portraying it as rare and perpetrated only by a 'few bad apples' who are easily-identifiable. Such portrayals tend to render invisible lad culture's entanglements with other sexist practices and with wider social and cultural norms for gender behaviour. They work to pathologise a small number of 'extreme lads' and render invisible the broader socio-political discourses that normalise sexism and harassment as part of everyday life.

Thus, in our analyses we were mindful of the ways in which the current representation and conceptualisation of lad culture in, for example, the mainstream media, related to its conceptualisation and in/visibility in university settings. As we delineate later, laddism was perceived by some of our participants to be evident in teaching-learning contexts, although this varied by

institution and discipline. Also, while most staff associated laddism principally with men, a sizeable proportion suggested that women could also be laddish, and a small proportion suggested that women could be 'just as bad as men'. While we acknowledge the necessity of considering how lad culture may be engaged with by young women as well as men (Jackson, 2006a, 2006b), it is beyond the scope of this article (see [add ref after reviewing] for a discussion of this). Here we focus on staff perceptions of men's laddism. When narrating their understandings of laddism in social spheres, the perceptions of many staff resonated with key aspects of how students in Phipps and Young's (2013, P X) research perceived lad culture. Based on interviews with women students Phipps and Young suggested that:

lad culture was seen as a 'pack' mentality evident in activities such as sport and heavy alcohol consumption, and 'banter' which was often sexist, misogynist and homophobic. It was also thought to be sexualized and to involve the objectification of women, and at its extremes rape supportive attitudes and sexual harassment and violence.

In our research, staff across institutions identified lad culture specifically as encompassing behaviours that were overtly sexist and included demeaning attitudes and behaviours towards women. Homophobia and racism were also seen by many to characterise laddism, but sexism was regarded as the most prevailing and central aspect of it:

I think sexism is the most dominant element of lad culture. I certainly think there are elements of racism and homophobia in there but I think generally actually they are seen as less acceptable - homophobia and racism in our society generally - so I think they're a slightly less acceptable element of lad culture but they're certainly still an element of it (Jessica, woman, U2).

A plethora of examples of laddism were provided by interviewees; these included physical, verbal, visual and sexualised actions used to shame, demean, humiliate, objectify and intimidate women students in relation to their gender, sexuality and ethnicity. Such practices were viewed as creating a cultural context in which women students and staff were subjected to sexist language and actions, sexual harassment and abuse. So while laddism was perceived as covering a range of practices, sexism and misogyny were often narrated as underlying these.

Something happened with one of the rugby teams, I can't remember which one it is ... so they were shouting abuse at [the close colleague of a very senior member of the University] - of all people to shout something at! And she was pregnant and they pretty much shouted at her that they wanted to pin her down and rape her (Sophie, woman, U3).

Sending each other pictures of their conquests, either mid shag, or sometimes without them [women] knowing which is very concerning [...] blokes circulating pictures of unconscious or just women who are not dressed at all, completely naked, who are not aware of the fact that a picture's been sent and it will be circulated around men. And what's really worrying is how acceptable that is amongst other men, completely acceptable. (John, man, focus group, U5)

He [one of the rugby club boys] said something as he walked through the door like 'the girl I took home last night had an implant in her arm so she must have been a slut' (Claire, woman, U5)

Our interviewees spoke of lad culture in ways that generally accord with the argument of Dempster (2007) and others (e.g. Phipps and Young, 2015) that laddism is not one thing, but rather is a constellation which in some ways might be regarded as a continuum: 'Well I suppose it can range from sexist comments, jokes, remarks that kind of thing, from one end of the spectrum to actually

physical abusive behaviour' (Mary, woman, U6). Dempster's interviewees (men undergraduates at a pre-1992, campus university in England) noted that almost all accounts of the more extreme, and therefore most visible, forms of laddism involved men's sports teams, and especially rugby. This was echoed to a large extent in our research: two of the three quotations above, for example, reference men's rugby. The following account also involves a men's rugby team, and was conveyed to us by Kate, a member of Student Union (SU) staff at University 6. The incident was traumatic for our interviewee, and the seemingly well-rehearsed, clearly articulated account below suggests that she has spoken about it many times, which she confirmed during our conversation. It also echoes similar occurrences at other universities (e.g. Stirling) that have been reported in the press (e.g. Huffington Post, 20/11/2013).

I was on the bus with a few friends going out for the night and we were at the top of the bus near the back, and then I think a few stops on the whole of the [University 6] rugby team came on in their post-match suits and everything and were obviously quite drunk and there were about 40 of them and they came up being all rowdy and drunk and stuff. And I think they first asked me and my friends to move so that they could have the back area of the bus ... and we were like 'no, we're sitting here' kind of thing and so they all kind of filled up in front of us, probably about 10 rows of seats where they were sitting, standing all in the alleyways kind of being really loud and stuff and after a while they started chanting and singing a song called Chicago which I hadn't heard before ... some of the verses are horrendous ... most of them are about sexual assault and then there's one verse which is almost at the end and instead of the sexual assault it was, a woman she came into a store, an organism she wanted, who gives a fuck what she got. So it's actually showing just the degrading of women when they do actually have sexuality as well as kind of saying, they're just there for men to get their sexual fill. So it was really really offensive and there was also some racial slurs in there as well, it refers to a girl from Indo China who had a rice in her vagina I think was one of the things. ... I basically got into a bit of an argument with the

captain on the bus, asking him to tell his team mates to stop and explaining why it was so offensive and all this kind of stuff and we had a bit of an argument and he was quite loud and aggressive and just unpleasant ... and then when they got off the bus I think there was some kind of initiation or something. They said the first years had to go out the window, so this is the back window on the top of a double decker bus when the bus stopped, and they asked us to move so they could make these first years jump out of the window quite drunk and we were like 'no' and they were like, climb over, so there was like two guys who managed to climb over us where we were sitting or standing to jump out the back of a window of a bus quite drunk onto a road where there was traffic. So I mean there's quite a lot in that situation that kind of speaks for lad culture and the hierarchy within that as well and the captain refusing to do anything about it.

This narrative illustrates the ways in which lad culture, while associated with heavy alcohol consumption and men's rugby, revolves around gender-based harassment and violence, and intersects with homophobia and racism. The practices of the rugby club members may be understood as expressions of particular classed and racialised masculinities which Phipps (2017b) argues reflect a neoliberal H.E context characterised by 'new gender essentialism' (p. 819) and a backlash against feminism. Phipps' (2016) analysis of lad culture suggests that while sexism is an underpinning characteristic or driver of such practices, entitlement, dominance and privilege may be established and reinforced in a number of ways, including through racism and trans- and homophobia directed at other men, as well as women. She notes how such performances of masculinity, through humiliation and degradation of those identified as 'Other' to the white, middle-class straight norm, may be enacted as a means to dominate, or as a response to feeling dominated through a perceived loss of privilege. Kate narrates an incident that in many ways epitomises the press's conceptualisation of lad culture: it is loud, brazen, public, alcohol-fuelled and involves men rugby players. It is highly visible. However, as noted earlier, conceptualising lad culture only in this

way masks the insidious and pervasive sexism, harassment and violence that underpins it. It is to issues of in/visibility that we now turn in considering perceptions about the prevalence of laddism.

Perceptions about prevalence: the in/visibility of lad culture

We don't notice it, so I think it's quite accepted. Because when I was first thinking about lad culture at this university I thought 'oh well there isn't really' and then I realised actually there is and there's quite a lot of it. It's something that even I sometimes don't even notice. (Alex, woman, U4)

The institutionalised invisibility of lad culture referred to by SU Officer Alex above may be explained in various ways. One possibility is that lad culture is not an issue in H.E. contexts, or at least not a widespread one. However, previous research and our analyses in this project cast considerable doubt on the validity of this explanation. Rather, like Alex, we argue that it is widespread but much of it is rendered invisible for numerous interrelated main reasons.

First, as discussed in the previous section, many of our interviewees' understandings of laddism corresponded to the limited conceptualisation of lad culture depicted in the UK media. In the press lad culture is portrayed as involving highly visible performances of hegemonic masculinity including excessive alcohol consumption and 'extreme' examples of sexual harassment. Similarly, for many of our interviewees lad culture was portrayed as 'extreme' and perpetrated in isolated incidents by a handful of problematic individuals, rather than as a pervasive culture that produces, reinforces and normalises gender-based harassment and violence in a range of forms.

Yes, [lad culture is] certainly evident, we've certainly had disciplinaries; I think people being abusive of women ... male students, not people, male students being abusive of women staff here. Shouting like on a building site with students driving around here shouting at female

students; two or three incidents of female students being accosted. Reporting at the Student Union that the atmosphere could be quite intimidating and harassing in there. So it's definitely here. I wouldn't say for a moment that it's predominant in any way ... I've had female students come and report unwanted attention or assaults or non-consensual, but I've never had the feeling this was a massive problem or there were dozens of these cases. And I also quite strongly have the feeling that it's very much disapproved of by the vast majority of the students, male and female. So I think it certainly exists but I don't think it predominates. (William, man, U4)

I suppose [there are instances of laddism] once or twice a year that I'm aware of. I wouldn't say it's endemic and I wouldn't say it happens all the time, but there are certain times of the year - at the end of the academic year, large sporting events - where it's more likely to happen. (Tom, man, U5)

Thus, the pervasive 'everyday' instances of sexual harassment and violence, or what Lewis et al. (2018, 67) refer to as 'the "wallpaper" of sexism', were rendered invisible.

Second, and closely related, only high profile, extreme cases received staff attention and action:

By the time the issues come to me, then I'd say it's [laddism] fairly infrequent but I can imagine that if I investigate it I'd probably find that it's a lot more frequent than it appears ... I think if I really stuck my nose in, then I probably would find that there's a lot more instances occurring than actually come to my door. Normally by the time it comes to my door, it can be pretty serious. (Ella, woman, U2)

Ella is not alone in not 'sticking her nose in' to find more instances; as Sundaram (2018) has argued, university agendas to produce critical global citizens who seek to challenge social inequalities such as sexual harassment and violence come into tension with the reality of increasingly individualised,

neo-liberal modes of teaching, assessing and interacting with students. Indeed, in the context of creeping marketisation of H.E. where institutional reputation is essential to ensuring high market value, it is not in a university's interests to look for, or even encourage students to report, cases that may result in adverse publicity. While reputational damage was not a major theme in our interviews (we did not ask about this directly), it emerged in a few instances. For example, while we were discussing an institution's and individual's willingness to take part in our project, William (man, U4) opined:

If anything comes out, everybody says 'well, I'm not sure we should be washing even the tiniest bit of dirty linen in public' ... I think we should wash dirty linen in public on the grounds that dirty linen exists everywhere to a certain extent and it's better washed really. We obviously shouldn't over-publicise it; we certainly don't want it to seem that because we are willing to address it we've got a problem with it.

In stark contrast with 'washing dirty linen in public', the steady marketization of H.E. has produced university contexts that often seek to silence or erase any threats to their marketability. As Phipps (2017a, 358) argues, 'for something to be marketable it must be unblemished: everything must be airbrushed out.' Thus, in an increasingly neo-liberal context, lad cultures, sexism and sexual harassment in higher education may be invisibilised by institutions to preserve their market value and standing (Phipps and Young, 2015). Interestingly, several high-status universities declined an invitation to be involved in our research, in some cases explicitly citing concerns about reputational risk as the reason.

Third, partly because of the limited conceptualisation of lad culture among many of our participants, there was a notion that it was evident largely or exclusively in social spaces, especially venues that sold alcohol. Thus, there was a common perception that lad culture was not visible to them because they did not frequent spaces in which laddish practices occurred: 'I have a sense that it's probably quite bad like that but because I don't see it, I don't know it'. (Sophie, woman, U3). Indeed, those

staff who did frequent student social spaces reported lad culture to be rife. The latter were almost exclusively Students' Union (SU) staff; in other words, they were students who were taking time out of their degree to undertake an SU role for a year or so, or people who had very recently been students. These interviewees, who were mainly women, generally saw lad culture as pervasive in student-frequented nightclubs and similar venues. Indeed, unwanted sexual attention and touching were reported to be so ubiquitous that students saw it as normal, it was not something they talked about and certainly not something they reported. For example, as one SU officer from U3 told us:

Abby: I would never think to report it to be honest. It's never, maybe it's because it's never really scared me enough for me to think it's a problem, but I mean it could be. Yes I've definitely been touched when I've said don't touch me, I've definitely had my skirt pulled up, I've definitely had people like kiss me when I've said get away from me, and they'll just take your face and they'll just kiss you. There's not a lot you can do about it but I'd never ever think to report it.

Int: Why not?

Abby: I don't know, this is the thing, I don't know and it's a good point. I wonder what stage it would have to get to to think I've got to report that. Maybe it's 'cos it's people I know, I'm not sure, I don't know.

Int: ... if you felt like you wanted to report it would you know how, and do you think that it would be taken seriously?

Abby: I wouldn't know how. Taken seriously? I don't know because I've obviously not taken it seriously enough to report it, so maybe not. Like I say, I don't know what it would take to take it seriously. I've never been carried out of a club or down the street. It's always been in a club

so I know I'm in the club ... it's like what would you say to report, 'cos I could give you 20 reports from one night out.

The ubiquity of sexual harassment is, ironically, one of the reasons Abby cites for not highlighting or reporting it. It is so commonplace that it is normalised. Thus, its ubiquity and normalisation is another reason for its invisibility; it is not made visible to H.E. institutions by students through complaints processes. Barriers to reporting also include, as Abby and other research suggests, a lack of clarity about channels for reporting and concerns about how reports will be handled (Alldred & Phipps, 2018). Furthermore, even when reporting occurred, a lack of joined-up information sharing and gathering within the institutions meant that there was no holistic picture. Some of our interviewees conveyed this with a sense of frustration:

Int: Do you think that lad culture is an issue in the university?

Tony: All I can say, I don't know. I was going to say I'm limited in the fact that what I deal with, I deal with any issues that are causing concerns for students in university accommodation. What issues there are out there in the clubs and pubs and things like that, and in the Students' Union and in general - I'm probably not the authority to ask about that. When we deal with things within university halls, we just deal with them on what the incident is about, so it's about noise or is it about bullying, is it about sexual harassment, is it sexual assault? We get very few of those [sexual assaults] but we do get some. (Tony, man, U3)

UUK (2016) has also highlighted and condemned a lack of systematic recording of instances of lad culture at institutional level, which prevents not only the development of a holistic picture, but also of a whole-institution response.

Overall, the lack of recognition of the prevalence of lad culture, sexism and sexual harassment presents an obstacle to institutional work to challenge such practices; its relative invisibility to staff

renders the need for challenge and prevention invisible also. As Sara Ahmed (2016) has written, when sexual harassment becomes invisible, so too does the labour of trying to challenge it. We move now to consider perceptions about lad culture in teaching-learning spaces.

Lad culture in teaching-learning spaces

Although lad culture was more likely overall to be associated with social spaces, this varied between institutions according to student demographics and the physical estate of the universities. Lad culture tended to be identified as an issue in *social spaces* more often when institutions recruited predominantly 'traditional' students who lived on or close to the university and where there was a vibrant social scene locally. It was presented as less of an issue in social spaces in institutions where students were predominantly 'non-traditional': this descriptor covered a range of characteristics, including BME students, mature students, students with caring responsibilities and local students. The 'non-traditional' make-up of the student population was associated with lower levels of laddish behaviour as these students were perceived by staff not to engage in typical student nightlife and drinking cultures due to their family responsibilities, living away from the university, religious beliefs or cultural differences.

But a lot of our students live at home ... they're mature, they have families, they have placements, they don't act like traditional undergraduate 18-year-old students (Sandra woman, U1).

I don't know if you've see round, there is a Students' Union and there is a bar but a lot of our students don't drink, they live at home, they're older. So in terms of the night time economy, I don't think [name of university] contributes a great deal (Sue, woman, U2).

In institutions where there were predominantly 'non-traditional' students, lad culture was more often seen to be an issue in teaching-learning contexts (especially in U2), whereas this was far less commonly referred to in the institutions with a predominantly 'traditional' student demographic (universities 4-6). However, there were a few instances of classroom lad culture in pre-1992 institutions, and our data seem to reflect Phipps' (2016) observation that there are differences in the forms of classroom laddism between elite and non-elite universities. Phipps (2017b, 822) argues that 'when laddish masculinities have been reported in the classrooms of more elite universities, these have tended to be characterised by a more domineering demeanor which has been defined as intimidating to women, rather than disruptive'. We argue that the distinction between these forms is not clear-cut and there is considerable overlap between them; nevertheless, there are hints of this distinction in our data. A common theme throughout participants' discourses around laddism in teaching-learning spaces was the notion that this type of behaviour was levelled primarily at women lecturers, thus underscoring the gendered basis for such harassment and abuse. The example below is one of very few examples of direct, visible classroom laddism from one of our elite universities:

A colleague of mine was giving an interactive lecture on India and she said 'does anyone know how many women are in the Lok Sabha parliament?' - one of the houses of parliament - and there was a cry from the back from somebody of 'too many'... You encounter this. I certainly, in my department, I encounter a lot of misogyny and these sort of jokes about feminism, about women, about all these sorts of things. It's really prevalent. (Paul, man, focus group, U5)

There were also distinctions in terms of the directness or the visibility of such instances. A less visible form – in terms of it not being public and the student's identity being hidden - was via anonymous student evaluations of women staff. For example, Pete (U2) told us about a lecturer who had been described as 'MILF' [Mother I'd like to fuck] on a feedback form.

The types of classroom laddism that involved disruptive behaviour or refusal to engage with academic work in lectures were reported as more common in the post-1992 institutions. Such behaviour descriptors, which parallel the ways laddism has been described in school contexts, included coming to class without having prepared to participate or contribute to academic discussion, constant interruptions to the lecture/lecturer, heckling or undermining the lecturer or other students in the session: 'He would come into a lecture or a teaching session late on a consistent basis, he would eat, talk, burp, laddish I think behaviours' (Pete, man, U2). As well as being more frequently reported in post-1992 universities, it was also reported to be more common in some disciplines than others, most notably in management schools and sports-related areas both of which are highly 'masculine' domains (see also Jackson et al, 2015). For example:

For Sports programmes in particular, this can be problematic for staff. Male students can be disruptive in lectures and male staff don't help because they tolerate those behaviours or don't challenge these behaviours. When female and/or mature students challenge it, it is turned around on them instead of placing the responsibility on the male 'offenders' (Karen, woman, U1)

There is not space here to engage in in-depth discussion about the various forms of laddism in teaching-learning contexts, nor to examine the possible reasons for them. There are however, discussions of these aspects in relation to sports science by Jackson, Dempster and Pollard (2015) and in H.E. more generally by Burke et al. (2013) where all authors stress the importance of considering the intersections of gender, ethnicity, age and social class for understanding such disruptive practices, which are undertaken predominantly by young men. While such explorations are beyond the scope of this article, our findings suggest that lad culture in H.E. should be considered beyond its forms and impacts in social spaces. Its occurrence in teaching-learning spaces appears not only to have consequences for women students, but impacts on staff experiences too (see also Jackson et al., 2015). Understanding the varied and in some cases subtle ways in which lad

culture permeates H.E. contexts allows us to think about the settings in which sexism operates in more insidious, less overt ways. A unilateral association of laddish behaviour with alcohol consumption and particular sports teams may mean that other forms of sexism and misogyny go unrecognised or become normalised, and that its impacts become harder to monitor and tackle. The perception of staff overall that lad culture is not particularly widespread in H.E. but that it is confined to particular contexts and (groups of) individuals supports this.

Conclusion

The visibility of sexual harassment and violence in public discourse and in the media has been heightened in the past two years owing to the work of campaigners, increased government focus, and high-profile revelations about serial harassment and abuse in academia, the entertainment industry and in parliament. During the final weeks of writing this article there was an explosion of news internationally about the film producer, Harvey Weinstein, having sexually harassed and assaulted a large number of women. Prompted by this, a social media campaign - #MeToo – was (re)launched which saw thousands of women around the world post #MeToo to signal that they had experienced sexual harassment and violence. Thus, we are at a moment in time when sexual harassment and violence are recognised as being pervasive and are, in many ways, hypervisible.

However, in English university contexts there is a complex picture relating to the visibility of lad culture, sexual harassment and violence. In some senses, lad culture is increasingly visible thanks largely to attention it is receiving by the NUS, UUK and the press. It is now on the H.E. agenda whereas it was largely absent 5 years ago. However, our research suggests that at an institutional level perceptions about the visibility and prevalence of lad culture are strongly influenced by how it is conceptualised and, relatedly, to whom it is visible. We have argued that despite staff acknowledging that sexism and sexual harassment and violence are central to lad culture, dominant discourses associating lad culture with alcohol-fuelled public displays of rowdiness means that many

of the less extreme 'everyday' instances of sexual harassment and violence across a wide range of university contexts are rendered invisible.

Part of the problem may lie with the term lad culture itself. We are ambivalent about its use. In its favour, the notion of 'culture' is important, as it conveys a climate where behaviours and attitudes are fostered and endorsed. It is crucial to acknowledge this in order to avoid reproducing the myth that sexual harassment and violence are conducted by individual 'monsters' in an otherwise utopia of equality. The breadth of the concept lad culture also has advantages: the notion of a continuum which can include sexist comments and 'jokes' and physical assault recognises the ways in which 'seemingly trivial' comments and behaviour all contribute to a culture in which women (and various other groups) are cast as less worthy. It is also important to tackle the whole culture. However, as we have discussed, these potential advantages of the term are typically not evident in dominant discourses.

There are also numerous disadvantages of the term lad culture. As Catherine Nixey writing in *The Times* (19/03/2013) argues, the term lad culture may mask the more problematic elements of it, suggesting that 'laddism' is a 'jolly term' for what is 'sexual harassment'. Indeed, some of our interviewees saw lad culture as largely unproblematic, and highlighted what they saw to be the positive aspects of it, for example, male bonding and 'having a laugh'. Relatedly, its association for many people primarily with alcohol, sports and social activities and spaces compartmentalises and limits it, and in some cases can be used to (uncritically) explain or even excuse it:

and a possible cause is actually ... the camaraderie in these large groups of boisterous males and the camaraderie that that's the done thing, and they enjoy spending time with these guys and behaving in the way they do and having a few too many drinks and saying some things they probably shouldn't. It's a culture of, they might actually think it's quite fun to do these things. And the culture they're a part of, they enjoy being a part of. (Jim, man, U4)

However, some examples of lad culture within teaching-learning spaces and in the academy did emerge; as discussions evolved, it became apparent that once participants moved away from a one-dimensional understanding of lad culture they could recognise numerous examples of this culture in teaching-learning, support and departmental contexts. Interviewees who recognised that lad culture could or did pervade all aspects of H.E. - albeit acknowledging that it is more prevalent in some areas than others – were more likely to conceptualise lad culture as being underpinned by sexism and misogyny. Thus, while acknowledging some of the positives of the term lad culture, we do need to interrogate and problematise the concept, and to name specific behaviours that need to be tackled, and to challenge a wider culture of sexism and gender inequality. Discussion of the ways in which institutions could be addressing lad culture is beyond the scope of this article. However, it is clear that currently the relative invisibility of it to many staff is limiting institutional understandings of, and responses to, lad culture. And, we must not forget that ‘visibility and invisibility are deeply political’ (Woodward, 2015, 2).

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