That's what she said

Women students' experiences of 'lad culture' in higher education

Contents

Foreword

It seems that 'lad culture' is suddenly everywhere in higher education. 'Banter' on social media; student nights at the local club; initiations to join a sports team – all seem influenced by an element of 'lad culture'. For many, this seems an unproblematic trend, just a new way of structuring and understanding the way students have fun. But there have also been worrying accounts, particularly from women students, about the negative impact and harm that 'lad culture' is having on their educational experiences and indeed their lives more broadly.

The student movement is about creating safe, positive, empowering environments for all students and supporting students to shape the world around them. If something is happening on our campuses that threatens our ability to achieve this, or indeed harms our members, then we need to understand it in order to understand how to combat it.

With that in mind, NUS commissioned a piece of independent research into campus cultures and the experiences of women students. Researchers at the University of Sussex undertook a literature review and did qualitative research with forty women students to produce the reports, which are presented here.

It was hard to read the findings and to acknowledge to ourselves the role that NUS has played, alongside students' unions across the country, in allowing this culture to take root amongst our students. It would be easier to pretend that 'lad culture' was not problematic or that the student movement has no power to address it, but the research shows that both of these assertions are false.

The findings of the research have wide ranging implications across the student movement. It is clear from the findings that 'lad culture' affects every aspect of student life, which means that everyone in higher education has a role to play in responding to this. And although we asked the researchers to look specifically at its impact on women students, it is also clear that 'lad culture' is problematic for all kinds of students and in fact is not healthy for the student movement as a whole.
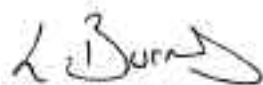
This research is the start of a conversation. It has helped us to understand the size and shape of the problem. It is for this reason that we have chosen the title *That's what she said*, taking this commonly-used phrase within 'lad culture' and turning it on its head so that we can hear what women are actually saying about campus culture. That is the first step on a journey for students' unions, NUS, and the sector more broadly to understand what 'lad culture' really means and how we, as a movement, are going to respond to it.

Solving the problem is going to take more work, and it is going to take involvement from a wide range of stakeholders from inside and outside the movement. It is clear that change will not happen overnight. But if there is anything the research shows for certain, it is that 'lad culture' has to be addressed if we as a movement are going to be consistent our values. There is great opportunity for us to positively challenge ourselves and each other and move towards creating students' unions, institutions and indeed a student movement, that is better for all students.

In unity,

Kelley Temple, National Women's Officer

Liam Burns, National President

Introduction

Introduction

That's what she said is the result of a piece of research around campus culture, the experiences of women students, and the student movement's role in shaping both of these. However, it does not represent the end of the journey. The steps that have been taken so far have been the easy part, discussing the issues and gathering evidence to understand the problem more accurately. What comes next – the hard work of figuring out how to solve this problem – will be more difficult.

In March 2012, NUS invited interested staff and officers from across the student movement to participate in a workshop about how to make campuses and students' unions more positive spaces for women. At this meeting, it became clear that, far from a small project with a few key steps to improve women's representation, what was actually needed was a much larger piece of work to understand how cultures in higher education were operating to make women students feel less comfortable on campus. Only after understanding the problem could we begin to think about how these issues could be addressed.

Following on from this meeting, in August 2012, NUS commissioned the Centre for Gender Studies at Sussex University to undertake a piece of academic research on campus culture and the experiences of women students. The authors undertook a literature review and did interviews and focus groups with forty women students, using recognised qualitative research methodologies, to produce the final reports.

That's What She Said presents the findings of these reports, together with NUS' response to them – what we believe this means for the student movement and for the higher education sector. As will no doubt be clear from reading the research, there are findings here that are relevant here across the entire breadth and depth of the student movement, for both staff and officers, in all areas of students' union activities and services. The issues discussed here also clearly go beyond the realm of the students' union, having implications for higher education institutions; students' sports, entertainments, and alcohol industries; and those invested in the wider equalities agenda.

At the end of the response, NUS makes recommendations for the next steps for this work. The effects of 'lad culture' are so complex and so far-reaching that we have not made recommendations about specific actions that need to be taken, nor would it be NUS' place to tell others what to do when we must acknowledge that we have not always got it right ourselves. Instead, NUS proposes bringing together all those with a stake in these issues to form a commission that will examine what needs to happen next. This is a collective problem, and will involve staff, officers, and students working together to solve it. It will involve challenging each other to think and act differently. All stakeholders in higher education have had a part in allowing 'lad culture' to thrive on campus and all must play a role in responding to the problems it has created.

Read on for an exploration of the state of campus culture, the experiences of women students, and what it means for the higher education community.

Literature review

Literature review: Campus culture and the experiences of women students

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NUS commissioned researchers at the Centre for Gender Studies at the University of Sussex to undertake research into campus culture and the experiences of women students, which are published in full here.

Their research is presented in two parts:

- The **literature review**, which summarises the existing evidence and introduces concepts which are important for the research; and

- The **research findings**, which present the main findings of the qualitative research on women students and their experiences of campus culture.

This section presents the authors' **literature review.**

Executive Summary

Introduction

1. This literature review aims to map the available evidence on 'lad culture', set in the context of gender issues and higher education policy more broadly.

2. The review is structured into four key sections. In the first, 'lad culture' is discussed in the setting of contemporary debates around masculinity. The second section provides an introduction to the concept of 'culture' and its potential applications. The third presents an overview of gender issues in higher education. Section four contains a summary of the policy backdrop, summarising key recent interventions and legislation.

3. This review of literature provides the necessary background to the report on the second part of the research, which consisted of focus groups and interviews conducted with 40 women students from across the UK, exploring their views on and experiences of 'lad culture' and university in general.

Key themes/findings

4. Our review suggests that 'laddism' can be seen as one of many potential forms of masculinity, and that 'cultures' are multiple and fluid and responsive to broader social structures.

5. Contemporary 'lad culture' is understood as one of a variety of masculinities and cultures in UK university communities, which men and women may dip in and out of, but which may shape their identities and attitudes and frame their experience of university life.

6. It has been linked to a broader 'raunch' culture among young people and in popular discourse, and to social problems such as sexual harassment and violence.

7. The context for 'lad culture' includes a discourse of women's success and a linked 'crisis of masculinity'. It can be seen at least to a degree as a renewed form of sexism which is part of a defensive response.

8. However, our review of gender issues in higher education shows that the idea that women have 'made it' is based on an inaccurate representation of their social progress which means that their continued struggles are invisiblised.

9. This is all positioned within a framework in which higher education is being corporatized and privatised in line with what have been identified as masculine values of individualism and competition.

10. This may bolster 'laddish' masculinities, and also detracts from the idea of the university as a community of young people with shared values such as equality, social justice and mutual support.

11. In this context students may feel dismissed and unsupported, especially due to the fact that many universities are outsourcing services such as security and student support. Students may also be suffering due to the dwindling social safety net, and women students especially due to cuts to specialist services.

12. There is no mention of women's issues in current higher education policy, and gender equality policy, including the most recent framework around violence against women and girls, also makes no specific reference to students.

13. Our literature review shows, however, that women students have specific and complex needs which may require targeted interventions.

Introduction

There is a large body of research on higher education, mostly focused on students' experiences and understandings of learning, and socio-cultural constraints on their participation and achievement. There are also studies of students' alcohol consumption and extra-curricular activities, in particular their involvement in sport. Gender is an important theme in higher education research, particularly since the 1990s and partly due to the perceived 'crisis of masculinity' which began to be discussed in the media and government policy from this time. The term 'crisis' was used to evoke a sense of masculinity under attack, by high-achieving women and new forms of gender identity which left many men, particularly those from the working classes, with a sense of insecurity and lack of direction.[1] However, and despite any impression given that higher education is now gender-blind or even operates to favour women, challenges continue for female students in educational, social and personal spheres.[2]

Recently, discussions in the media have seen a renewed focus on problems faced by university women, in a variety of articles on the phenomenon of 'lad culture', evidenced by sexist and misogynist behaviours observed in some student communities. These behaviours can be linked to the 'crisis of masculinity', since there is a large body of research illustrating how sexism and sexual harassment functions to enable men to reclaim power and space.[3] They include activities such as initiation ceremonies, 'pimps and hos',[4] 'geeks and sluts' and 'slag 'n' drag'[5] parties, the sexual pursuit of female freshers (termed 'seal clubbing' in one institution)[6] and 'slut-drops', where male students offer lifts home to women after nights out, but leave them miles away from their destinations.[7] This culture is also represented in websites such as Uni Lad, True Lad and The Lad Bible, which provide spaces for collective banter and identity construction.[8] Seen by some as just a bit of fun, 'lad culture' has been criticised by others as at best being dismissive and objectifying towards women and at worst glamorising the sex industry and

normalising sexual assault. It has been linked to a broader 'sex object' culture which has been identified in student communities, seen for instance in events such as student beauty contests, wet T-shirt competitions and nude calendars.[9] It also evokes more serious problems such as increased student participation in the sex industry, and sexual harassment and assault.[10]

This research was commissioned by the National Union of Students to provide a deeper examination of the phenomenon of 'lad culture', and women students' encounters with and experiences of it, set in the context of gender issues and policy in higher education more broadly. This literature review constitutes the first part of the research, and includes conceptual and empirical background discussion. First of all, there is a discussion of the term 'lad culture', set within contemporary debates around masculinity. The second section provides an introduction to the concept of 'culture' and its potential applications in this research. The third presents an overview of gender issues in higher education, focusing on trends such as educational performance and participation, extra-curricular activities, and sex and relationships. The fourth contains a summary of the policy backdrop to these issues, summarising key recent interventions and legislation and asking questions about the potential impact of changes to higher education frameworks and funding. This review of literature provides the necessary background to the report on the second part of the research, which consisted of focus groups and interviews conducted with 40 women students from across the UK, exploring their views on and experiences of 'lad culture' and university in general.

In order to put together this literature review, we consulted a variety of bibliographic databases and key journals in appropriate fields, as well as 'grey literature' from relevant organisations, policy reports, and media articles on the topic of 'lad culture'. Books, papers and reports reviewed were largely UK-focused and included

both quantitative and qualitative studies, and international material was also consulted if directly applicable. Most of our sources were recently published (e.g. since 2000), but where necessary we turned to earlier material in order to clarify points or provide key citations or additional data. Due to time constraints our search was targeted and not exhaustive: however, we attempted to cover many of the major authors and themes related to our topic. After reviewing the available evidence, we then identified gaps in the literature and data, some of which were explored in the focus group and interview discussions. There were a number of sub-topics we would have liked to examine in more detail but were unable to, for instance the intersections of 'lad culture' with aspects of identity such as race, class and sexual orientation, or the local effects of particular policy interventions. However, we hope to cover some of these in our consideration of the interview and focus group data.

Defining 'lad culture'

The descriptor 'laddish' first emerged in the 1950s, in reference to the uncensored, errant display of adolescent-inspired masculinity seen in the pages of the newly founded *Playboy* and incorporating misogyny and homophobia.[11] It resurfaced in the 1990s in relation to the middle class fetishisation of working class machismo and jack-the-lad behaviour embodied in the UK by 'new lads' Noel Gallagher, Frank Skinner and David Baddiel, and represented in *Loaded*, the first UK 'lads' mag'.[12] In the mid-2000s, it was used to describe 'copycat' magazines such as *Nuts* and *Zoo*, and has most recently been employed in the discussion of 'lad culture' amongst UK student communities, which we take as our focus.

Before we commence our discussion however, it would perhaps be useful to make a few initial comments in relation to the concept of masculinity. First of all, this should be seen as distinct from men as a social group, since not all men embody masculine behaviours or the same types of masculinities, and some masculinities are much more powerful and dominant than others. This is what Connell was referring to in her definition of 'hegemonic masculinity', which is the 'most honoured or desired' form through which some men assert their authority over others and over women.[13] This masculinity is said to include traits such as physicality, muscularity, aggression, violence, misogyny and homophobia, drawn from a cultural library of resources.[14] It is not the property of all men: indeed, many men deviate from this and as a result face subordination.[15]

The concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' has been criticised for being rather simplistic and deterministic, especially in the contemporary context which is thought to involve much more gender fluidity than has previously existed.[16] We allow that masculinities must be seen as complex and multiple, and that the term 'hegemonic masculinity' only allows us to understand a certain pocket of men who have power over others.[17] Similarly, we see 'laddism' as only one of many types of

> **Masculinity** can be seen as a form of gender expression which incorporates characteristics such as physical strength, virility and rationality (with emotions seen as feminine), and in its extremes can be associated with aggression and violence. Usage of the term generally denotes a view of gender as socially constructed, meaning that these characteristics are not necessarily inherent in all men but instead are learned via a variety of social and cultural influences, starting from birth. Theorists usually also refer to 'masculinities' rather than 'masculinity', recognising that there is a great variety of forms of gender expression which might fit under this designation. Sociologists have also recently begun to conceptualise gender as *performative*, meaning that it is expressed through modes of dress, comportment and behaviour which both reflect and create dominant norms of masculinity and femininity: a circular process.

actual and potential masculinities, and do not believe it is performed by all men or that women are immune from displaying and supporting these behaviours. On the contrary, it should properly be understood as a particular cultural or subcultural practice which is engaged in by both men and women.

Secondly, since masculinities are socially constructed, any discussion of the concept should take account of the social contexts in which particular behaviours and gender roles are positioned. For instance, the masculinity of the 1950s can be seen as a reaction against the dominant 'family man' role which developed as the UK and other Western countries attempted to adjust to post-war social and economic conditions.[18] The 'new lads' of the 1990s have been seen as part of the 'crisis of masculinity': a reaction against the 'new man' and cultural androgyny of the 1960s, 70s and 80s, linked to the backlash against feminism and women's

rights. These behaviours also evolved in a post-Fordist economic context in which the consumption of objects (for instance cars and technology) and the 'image industries' began to shape identity, and in which sexuality increasingly underpinned popular culture and identity politics.[19] The contemporary 'lad culture' we examine in this research can be seen as a continuation of these trends, as well as a means of reclaiming territory in the context of recession and increased competition between the sexes.

Described as founded upon a trinity of 'drinking, football and fucking',[20] contemporary 'laddism' can be seen as young, hedonistic and largely centred on homosocial bonding. This often consists of 'having a laugh', objectifying women and espousing politically incorrect views.[21] It has been linked with the phenomenon of 'raunch culture', which has been theorised as an over-sexualised cultural form based on men objectifying women and encouraging them to objectify themselves, and which is associated with the mainstreaming of the erotic industries and the normalisation of sexual violence.[22] 'Laddism' is also thought to be currently gaining a great deal of social and cultural power, and has been described as the template of masculinity for contemporary young British males.[23]

This is obviously highly significant in relation to students: furthermore, 'laddish' behaviours tend to coalesce around activities such as sport and drinking, which are integral elements of student life. Websites Uni Lad and The Lad Bible target students as their primary audience, for features such as 'Cleavage Thursdays',[24] 'Smash or Dash?'[25] and merchandise sporting the tagline 'Beer, Bacon and a Blowjob'.[26] There is also evidence that such 'raunchy' content sometimes collapses into a normalisation of sexual violence: Uni Lad recently received widespread press coverage[27] for their controversial article 'Sexual Mathematics', in which the author stated: *If the girl you've taken for a drink... won't 'spread for your head', think about this mathematical statistic: 85 per cent of rape cases go unreported. That seems to be fairly good odds. Uni Lad does not condone rape without saying 'surprise'.*[28] The links between 'laddism' and sexual violence have been highlighted by recent research which found that members of the public

often could not differentiate between the language used by convicted sex offenders and 'lads' magazines to describe women, and suggested that 'lads mags' functioned to give such violent language a respectable veneer.[29]

Ideas about humour and the notion of irony are often used in order to minimise these negative aspects of 'lad culture'. For instance, Beynon discusses how uncensored displays of masculinity during the 1990s were deemed by those involved to be ironic by their very nature. He highlights how the magazine Loaded consciously reduced working class masculinities to jokes, interest in cars and the objectification of women, and dismissed criticisms as humourless attacks on free speech which failed to see the ironic nature of the representations.[30] Currently, websites such as The Lad Bible and Uni Lad employ similar devices, with features such as 'chubby girls: they need loving too'[31] and 'a medley of minge'[32] presented as inherently ironic forms of 'banter'. This interpretation should not be completely dismissed: for instance, Korobov's work shows how young men's forays into masculinity can be cloaked in a knowing irony and self-reflexivity which complicate analyses as to whether these positions are complicit with gender norms or a parody of them.[33] However, Mooney has also highlighted how claims of irony work to silence critics as 'humourless' and detract attention from the problematic elements of 'laddish' behaviour.[34] It is also useful to remember that there may be a difference between the intention behind particular cultural representations and their ultimate effects.

The role of alcohol

One of the major threads linking 'lad culture' with universities is alcohol consumption. This is both perceived and proven to be a central part of the student experience, with an estimated £940 million spent on alcohol a year by British students.[35] Research by MORI and UNITE in 2005 revealed that over a third of a thousand surveyed students reported consuming more than the recommended weekly limit of 21 units for men and 14 units for women.[36] A Student Drinking Survey administered in 2011 found that at HEIs across the UK, students report consuming up to 26 units every week.[37]

Alcohol consumption is intertwined with gender identity, and research has shown that male students, especially sports players, are perceived as the heaviest drinkers[38] and that heavy drinking is also deeply connected with 'laddish' masculinities in particular.[39] The student bar has been described as the main environment in which homosocial or 'laddish' interactions occur[40] and in which masculinity is negotiated through the consumption of alcohol.[41] Features such as the 'Pisshead of the Year' competition create a hierarchy of feminine men, or 'lightweights' at the bottom and 'real men', or heavy drinkers, at the top.[42]

In Dempster's research on over 200 male students at an English campus university, he noted that levels of alcohol consumption were often used as a means of determining who was worthy of the title 'lad'.[43] This association is not entirely confined to HE, shown by De Visser and Smith's research with men aged 18–21 from London, which found that some participants believed that alcohol consumption was a marker of masculinity and behaved accordingly.[44] Dempster also found that the same groups of male students who were perceived as the heaviest drinkers on campus displayed misogynistic tendencies. Behaviours included making comments to women about their 'tits', grabbing women in night clubs, referring to sportswomen as 'groupies', calling women 'slags' and seeing women as sexual objects.[45] These findings mirror those of earlier research conducted by Gough and Edwards, who found links between alcohol consumption, sexual objectification and antifeminism among 'lads' in the UK.[46]

Sporting masculinities

Like alcohol, sport is an integral aspect of student masculinities and an important means through which normative and dominant forms of manhood are performed.[47] Sporting subcultures can be very powerful: in Muir and Seitz's research on US college (meaning university) rugby players, refusal to conform to team cultural codes was met with ostracism, verbal harassment, or violence.[48] Furthermore, such sporting masculinities, cultural codes and practices of team bonding often involve verbal aggression, much of it misogynistic and homophobic.[49] Muir and Seitz write

that the male rugby players in their sample often subjected their female counterparts to such abuse, for instance referring to them as 'dykes on spikes'. In Dempster's UK based research on male undergraduates who participated in a variety of sports, the cruder the behaviour regarding women and homosexuality the less likely it was that players' actions would be negatively sanctioned by their peers.[50] The words 'faggot' and 'queer' are frequently used against sporting opponents at universities in both the US and the UK.[51] Sporting societies and clubs have also been criticised for minimising or even glamorising sexual violence and abuse: in 2012, a men's rugby club at Durham University was banned from playing after some of its members dressed up as TV star and child abuser Jimmy Savile, his victims and police, for a night out.[52]

An activity which unites alcohol and sport is the initiation ritual or 'hazing'. These use humiliating tests as a means of policing entry to sporting teams and societies and to facilitate bonding.[53] Such activities are usually associated with US colleges, which have reported extremes such as showers of vomit, paddling (spanking with a wooden paddle) and sodomy.[54] Initiation rituals are banned at many UK HEIs, although despite this some do occur and have included swallowing and regurgitating live goldfish, 'downing' cocktails of beer and multiple spirits, and being repeatedly spun prior to running through a railway underpass with a train approaching.[55] In a survey of students at Southampton University, Tinmouth found that 14 per cent reported sexual abuse as part of such 'hazings'.[56] A recent BBC investigation into initiations at the University of Gloucestershire found that despite them being unpleasant and even dangerous, many male students felt pressured to take part to prevent their masculinity being questioned.[57] In 2004, the British Universities Sports Association recommended that Athletic Unions should do more to prevent the humiliation and excessive drinking associated with such rituals.[58] However, in 2006 18 year-old student Gavin Britton died of alcohol poisoning following a golf society initiation.[59] Britton's death, as well as those of another two students as a result of initiations in the UK in recent years, has caused NUS to speak out against such practices.[60]

It is also important to remember that the majority of students do not take part in initiation rituals and hazings: one UK study revealed that 89 per cent of athletes responded negatively to these practices and saw them as humiliating.[61] It is also reported that women's sports teams have initiation activities: sportswomen are expected to carry raw fish inside their bras and later eat them, dress up as babies and crawl around campus bars, and drink concoctions such as vodka, orange juice, milk, chilli, ginger and fish.[62] These women could perhaps be described as 'ladettes', and their existence could suggest that 'lad culture' is perhaps less sexist and more gender-neutral than it appears. However, Jackson and Tinkler have argued that by engaging in behaviours and occupying spaces once regarded as the principal or sole preserve of men, 'ladettes' disrupt appropriate displays of feminine gender identity.[63] This highlights a key difference between men and women in relation to 'lad culture': for men, 'laddism' may constitute a conformity to gender norms while for women it may represent rebellion against them. It may therefore be inappropriate to view men's and women's 'laddish' behaviours in exactly the same way.

What do we mean by 'culture'?

When we examine something like 'lad culture', it is useful to outline exactly what we understand the term 'culture' to mean. It is a complex notion, but can loosely be described as a set of shared values, attitudes, beliefs, behaviours and norms amongst particular social groups or sub-groups.[64] Culture was once seen as static and unchanging, but is now understood instead as flexible, fluid and multiple.[65] This shift in understanding is largely due to the influence of postmodern theoretical approaches, for instance Bauman's reference to society as 'liquid', meaning it is constantly flowing and unpredictable, an insight which has been applied to culture as well.[66]

'Cultures' are often recognised (rightly or wrongly) by visual markers, such as different forms of dress. Stuart Hall argues that such visual signifiers become layered with meaning within particular social contexts, but also suggests that this changes over time.[67] His work traces the development of stereotypes of Black people, from the era of slavery to the present day, and shows the various ways in which difference has become attributed to skin colour. If we apply these ideas to 'lad culture', they highlight how it has become resident in visual objects, modes of dress and stereotypical male interests, but also remind us that these constantly shift and may be different in different contexts and historical periods. For instance, contemporary 'lad culture' can be positioned within what Beck has called the 'risk society', which is characterised by dismantled social safety networks, unstable employment and education opportunities, and the anxiety caused by believing that we must now fend for ourselves.[68] These factors can be seen to frame the contemporary 'crisis of masculinity', which has at least partially produced 'laddism' as a way of preserving and reclaiming male territory.

Within cultural studies, the 'self' is socially and culturally situated and formed, meaning that cultural practices form our identities and self-understandings as they shape our behaviours. Foucault, for example, locates

The term 'culture' can be used to denote shared characteristics and norms of particular nationalities or sub- or cross-national groups. The term can also be used to describe religious, social or identity groups - for example, the LGBT community are sometimes described as sharing a particular culture – within national contexts or transcending them. Particular institutions may also have their own distinct cultures, for example universities or workplaces (Apple, for instance, is thought to have its own corporate culture). One individual, therefore, may belong to a variety of different cultural groups simultaneously and their allegiance may shift over time or in different situations, meaning that the relationship between culture and identity is not always straightforward.

individual selfhood within the network of values and social practices which characterise a culture at a particular time.[69] Cultures are also informed by social, economic and political factors: Habermas' interpretation of society as divided into the 'life world' (everyday experience, social discourse, cultural values, art, politics and science) and the 'system' (state, economy, money, power) is useful here in framing experience within a broader context.[70] Culture, then, works on all sociological planes, from the most micro-level aspects of individual psychologies, through to sub-national, national and supra-national practices and identities, and is structured by macro-level processes of change.

Cultures and the young

Youth culture is a topic which remains relatively marginal in the field, perhaps due to the fact that 'youth' is a socially constructed concept which does not have a comparatively long history.[71] Academic explorations of youth culture have ranged from teddy boys and punks in the 1970s/80s, to transitions into the labour market in

the 1980s, dance culture in the 1990s, and finally, discussions of young people's experiences as 'tribal', 'individualised' and 'post-subcultural' at the turn of the century.[72] This last theme is linked to broader discussions within cultural studies around the fragmentation of geographically based group identities in a postmodern context in which the market and new technologies, in particular social media, have become more influential.[73]

Within this context, consumerism has taken on particular significance as a practice through which identities are constructed and maintained. Deutsch and Theodorou explore how consumption is used by adolescents to mark and mask differences across communities and the intersectional factors of gender, race and class. Young people, they argue, use their bodies and bodily adornment as markers or identity and status: they have been described as 'walking mega-malls forever trying to stay in material dialogue with their friends as well as their enemies.'[74] In Deutsch and Theodorou's study, young women were pursuing consumptive acts which enabled them to perform a feminine gender role, such as purchasing 'pretty' shoes or wearing acrylic nails.[75] This type of acquisition of fashion artefacts has been highlighted by others, as a practice which has been recognised as informing women's performances of femininity across all age ranges.[76] Similarly, we have already discussed how 'laddism' is also often expressed via the purchase or representation of products, such as technological gadgets and fast cars.

In relation to feminine identities in particular, writers such as Levy, Whelehan and Walter all suggest that feminist sexual liberation has been bypassed in favour of a performance-oriented 'empowerment' in which young women's sexual identities are formed through consumption, but largely in response to prevailing constructions of male desire.[77] This is shaped by an increasingly mainstreaming sex industry; in particular, pornography is thought to be supplying many young people with their sexual 'scripts.'[78] It is also a product of pervasive (and increasingly sexualised) mass media, and in particular women's magazines which broadcast messages about 'empowerment' and 'choice', but in

fact present readers with a limited variety of options predefined by the market and often designed to attract the opposite sex.[79] This is significant for our study on 'lad culture', since it helps to explain why young women may sometimes be complicit in the sexual objectification which is part of 'laddish' behaviours.

Intersections: culture and gender

What dominant cultures designate as 'normal' and 'superior' is often deeply inflected with ideas about gender, sex and relationships.[80] For instance, Eurocentric (European, white, capitalist) ideals are often positioned at the top of the hierarchy of cultural forms, and Phillips highlights how in recent years this has incorporated a construction of Western societies as being gender-equal while other cultures (usually Muslim) are not.[81] It is interesting to apply this to our study of 'lad culture', since at this sub-cultural level, dominant masculinities are often informed by sexism and homophobia. The linking factor here is the 'postfeminist' idea of female success (which is not necessarily a reality)[82]: this has been exaggerated in broader discourses about the 'enlightened' West, and can also be seen as provoking a negative reaction from particular groups of 'laddish' men who may feel that their territory is being threatened.

In cultural studies, gender is often seen as performative: the most significant example of this approach is Judith Butler's work in which she draws on Nietszche to argue that 'there is no 'being' behind doing…the deed is everything.'[83] She sees gender as something we 'do' rather than something we 'are' (for instance, wearing a dress is how we 'do' being a girl), and uses the example of dressing in drag to show how gender can be flexible and can shift, and how it is also completed by other components such as sexuality and age. Butler's work has been used by Pomerantz and Raby in their exploration of how girls enact their gender identities in a post-feminist context and a society concerned with ideas about male 'underachievement'. They found that the suggestion that women had already achieved equality posed a danger to girls, as it silenced them in relation to their experiences of sexism and

gender inequality.[84] This is also significant in relation to our study of 'lad culture', since such ideas may work to silence women university students who experience sexism, harassment or violence.

Cultures in higher education institutions

Universities can also be said to have their own 'cultures', and although there is very little literature on this in relation to the UK, we can draw related conclusions from the material on campus culture in the US. With the caveat that of course campus cultures are subject to change and may well contain sub-cultures of their own, we can see student cultures and consciousness as forged through the intellectual values of institutions as well as through social activities, clubs and fraternities, and other non-academic spheres of activity such as student activism.[85] Campus cultures in the US are also informed by corporate principles which are derived from the competitive market in higher education. These include values such as individualism, competition and consumption: values which are being actively resisted by many faculty and student groups.[86]

The corporatisation of higher education is now gathering pace in the UK, and this has caused much concern amongst students and faculty alike.[87] It also has important links with the phenomenon of 'lad culture', since corporate values have been identified as masculine ones,[88] and together with the much-discussed idea of the 'crisis of masculinity', may work to pit men and women against each other to the detriment of developing a shared culture which is based on mutual support, respect and equality. The growing individualism which is an aspect of corporate higher education may also prevent students, female and male, from reaching out for help when they experience difficulties. This could lead to young men adopting defensive forms of 'laddism', and could also silence young women who find these behaviours problematic.

Gender issues in higher education

Despite the fact that 38 per cent of British males aged 18–30 engage in post-school education,[89] Woodfield argues that until very recently, research in education has focused almost exclusively on women – their historical exclusion from universities, their subsequent marginalisation, and their experience of both explicit and implicit discrimination practices.[90] However, despite assertions that HE is becoming increasingly feminised and that male students are the relative losers,[91] gendered meanings continue to permeate in ways that mean women are frequently marginalised.[92] In this literature review we acknowledge that men, women and HE are neither homogenous nor fixed entities,[93] and examine research relating to both genders, covering cognitive and other differences, educational practices, and broad social trends.

Subject choice

Subject choice is a major aspect of education which is divided by gender, with science, engineering and technology subjects seen as traditionally 'masculine' while arts and humanities are considered 'feminine'.[94] This gendered association with certain subjects begins early, and culminates in the 'sorting' of men and women into different disciplinary areas within HE.[95] This occurs despite the fact that girls often outperform boys in stereotypically 'masculine' subjects – such as maths and science – at GCSE level.[96] In 2010, women made up over 60 per cent of arts undergraduates and less than half of those in science. They were particularly under-represented in architecture, building and planning, computer science, engineering and technology, physical sciences and mathematics.[97]

There have been several explanations of why there is a persistent gender divide in subject choice. The first is a rather essentialist interpretation which states that men are inherently better at practical, logical tasks, and because women are more creative, they are more suited to the arts and humanities.[98] As an alternative to

this, socialisation theory focuses on how men and women are slotted into pre-determined gender roles by a number of different factors, including parental expectation, teaching and peer pressure.[99] Gender is often seen as a powerful social structure or discourse which predefines appropriate identities, behaviours and choices. However, in rational choice theory, individual preference is the main focus (although these can be seen as structurally shaped).[100] This is an idea utilised by Storen and Arnesen, who have examined the extent to which individual factors such as students' grades impact on their choice of male- and female-dominated subjects, and found that grades in mathematics affect subject choice amongst men.[101]

The idea that there are distinct educational pathways for men and women is especially problematic due to the fact that 'masculine' subjects and professions tend to enjoy higher status and rewards. For instance, science, engineering and technology subjects are often prioritised in government funding frameworks, partly due to their more obvious relationships with business applications and economic growth.[102] In recent years, cuts to higher education funding have disproportionately affected the 'feminine' fields of arts and humanities, which is likely to have had a greater impact on women students due to subject segregation, as well as potentially weakening the academic study of gender.[103] Various measures have been taken in the past throughout the UK, many supported by the government, to address the dominance of men in certain educational domains. However, it is debatable how successful these have been, and whether such efforts will continue to be prioritised in a context of recession.[104]

Educational performance/participation

Despite the relatively low status of the subjects they are concentrated in, current statistics reveal that women are in fact more academically successful than men in higher education. Since the early 1990s women have

been more likely to start an undergraduate course than men, to successfully complete it and to achieve a 'good degree',[105] although men are more likely to be awarded a first (and also receive a higher proportion of thirds).[106] In 2008–09, it is estimated that 51 per cent of women aged 17–30 were enrolled in university courses, compared to 40 per cent of men.[107] Women comprised 57 per cent of graduates in 2009, and are also more likely than male graduates to undertake post-graduate courses.[108] This trend echoes similar statistics on school education: in 2006, 63.4 per cent of girls and 53.8 per cent of boys achieved 5+ A*-C grades at GCSE.[109]

The fact that girls are currently outperforming boys in both secondary and tertiary education has been subject to two major interpretations. The first is a causal one, suggesting that it has occurred as a result of the removal of previous barriers to girls' attainment.[110] While this is undoubtedly true, girls' educational achievements are also sometimes used to justify the more extreme view that gender inequality no longer exists and we now live in a post-feminist society.[111] Known variously as 'can-do girls',[112] 'amazing girls',[113] 'alpha girls'[114] and 'perfect' girls,[115] there is now an assumption that girls can do anything they want or choose.[116] The second interpretation is a 'zero-sum' response to girls' progress, positing that it has in fact occurred at the expense of boys.[117] There has been a scapegoating of high achieving women in relation to boys' 'underachievement' and the 'crisis of masculinity', which can be linked to the idea that through 'lad culture', territory is being policed in educational environments using a variety of devices which include sexism and violence.[118]

A 'moral panic' around the issue of boys' underachievement began to materialise in UK policy and public opinion in the 1990s.[119] However, Cohen traces concerns about boys' educational success back as far as the 17th century.[120] In higher education men are currently more likely to report difficulty and disengagement, particularly those from working class and Afro-Caribbean backgrounds.[121] Explanations for this 'underachievement' include innate gender differences and parental influences,[122] a lack of male role models for boys,[123] the feminisation of teaching/

schools,[124] coursework-based GCSEs which favour girls' learning styles,[125] and changing employment patterns which result in differential achievement of boys and girls at 16.[126] Interestingly, 'lad culture' has also been cited as a factor due to its dismissal of educational achievement and focus on more physical and sexual forms of masculinity.[127] This is confirmed by research finding that psychological factors such as the need to impress friends, the desire to appear 'hard' or macho, competitiveness, attention seeking and showing off are important, as well as theories about the influence of women's liberation and improved job prospects.[128] Concerns around male educational success have influenced government policy to a major extent: for instance New Labour Secretary of State for Education and Employment David Blunkett was a key proponent of addressing the issue, which he positioned as part of the broader 'crisis of masculinity'.[129]

However, statistical data does not necessarily say anything about gendered experiences of education. It is sometimes assumed that the quantitative domination of higher education by women equals a dominion in the sector of female interests, and that being in a minority automatically renders men disadvantaged.[130] In fact, it is male interests which instead appear to be superior due to the focus on traditionally 'masculine' subjects in education policy and their high status in relation to fields which women tend to be clustered in. Furthermore, qualitative studies have shown how the experience of higher education is often male-oriented, since men tend to be more confident in classroom situations and men's extra-curricular activities are often more numerous and assigned more value.[131]

Furthermore, despite the quantitative dominance of women in HE, there is a smoother transition into the job market for men. For instance, men are more likely to secure graduate level employment after their degree and achieve an above-average salary.[132] Employed women graduates are also marginally less likely to secure full-time work.[133] This mirrors trends in the broader working population, with women concentrated in part-time and poorly-paid employment sectors.[134] In addition, recent austerity measures implemented by the coalition government are thought to have hit women

the hardest, in relation to employment, support with caring responsibilities (which they continue to shoulder to a greater extent than men), and specialist women's services.[135]

Extra-curricular activities (ECAs)

The relationship between gender and extra-curricular activities has not been much-examined, although these are a central part of the student experience.[136] At HEIs across the country, freshers are invited to sign up to societies and sports clubs, creating a major focus for students' unions and a device for the development and maintenance of group bonds and identities. The research which has been conducted has shown that ECAs typically involve a certain type of student, specifically those who are privileged and male.[137] Using a web-based questionnaire with 640 second year students, and 61 interviews (23 male/38 female), researchers at Leeds Metropolitan University found that 76 per cent of male participants declared themselves to be engaged in ECAs, compared to only 48 per cent of female participants.[138]

However, the study went on to suggest that these findings in fact resulted from different definitions of ECAs amongst men and women. Men's definitions were broader than women's, including activities such as playing sports, watching movies with others, going on trips and reading, whereas women did not feel their hobbies warranted the label of ECA.[139] According to the authors of this study, this is because activities are often valued differently according to gender. For example, there is a long history of the decorative arts being undervalued and discursively positioned as an extension of femininity rather than an occupation in themselves.[140] In relation to the discussion above on qualitative experiences of higher education, this piece of research shows that confidence is an issue affecting women students outside as well as inside the classroom.

Sex and relationships

Research on sex and relationships amongst undergraduates in the UK is relatively underdeveloped in comparison with our American counterparts. Some

US studies have suggested that 'campus culture' appears more sexualised than it was in the past, and that relationships are now built upon 'hooking up' rather than dating. 'Hooking up' behaviours include one-night stands and 'friends with benefits' arrangements, and often involve alcohol and drugs.[141] This means that the amount of sex students are engaging in may not have increased, but understandings of sexuality have changed as Generation Y (those born after 1982) are now negotiating their sexual relationships and early love in an increasingly 'fluid' environment.[142] Such ideas about sexuality have been observed since the 1990s in the student press across America, and it has been suggested that a 'sexual rebellion' has taken place.[143] This can be linked to post-feminist ideas about sexual empowerment: sexual expression is now inextricably linked with sexual equality.

However, the continued high prevalence of sexual violence amongst young people suggests that campus sexual activity is not without its problems. Surveys conducted in the US suggest that boys and girls use similar levels of physical and emotional violence towards their partners, but that girls are more likely to be the recipient of serious physical and sexual violence than boys.[144] A range of risk factors that may increase a teenager's susceptibility to partner violence have been identified, including previous experiences of parental domestic violence, physical and sexual abuse, and violent peer groups.[145] We do not have a large body of data on this issue in the UK, although teenage partner violence has recently begun to move up the policy agenda: the government has lately announced that it will work with a Young People's Panel set up by the NSPCC as part of its efforts to tackle violence against women and girls.[146] A two-year study commissioned by the NSPCC and published in 2009 explored physical, verbal, emotional and sexual violence amongst young people aged 13–16 using self-completion surveys (1,353) and 91 face-to-face, semi-structured, in-depth interviews.[147] This found that physical violence had more of an impact on girls than on boys who took part in the study (76 per cent vs. 14 per cent), as did sexual violence (70 per cent vs. 13 per cent); social deprivation or 'class' did not represent a significant risk factor for

teenage physical partner violence contrary to previous suggestions;[148] having a same-sex partner significantly increased the risk of experiencing physical partner violence, and disabled young people reported a slightly higher rate of physical violence from their partner compared with non-disabled young people.[149]

At present, UK violence against women policy covers young people but does not have a specific focus on students:[150] however, studies from the US have estimated that the proportion of college (meaning university) women experiencing rape and attempted rape is between 14 and 27.5 per cent.[151] Up to 40 per cent of US college women have been stalked,[152] and shockingly, up to 92 per cent have experienced sexual harassment.[153] In the US, college women are thought to be at greater risk for rape and other forms of sexual assault than women in the general population or in comparable age groups.[154] One of the most recent of examples of research on campus sexual violence in the US is Armstrong, Hamilton and Sweeney's study using interviews, ethnographic observation, content analysis and surveys with participants at a large Midwestern research university, using an intersectional approach to the relationship between sexual assault, gender, class and age. They found campus sexual assault to be a predictable outcome of college policies around student housing and security when combined with activities such as 'frat' parties, which can be described as a 'laddish' environment in which alcohol and drugs are readily available to students.[155]

In 2000, Fisher, Cullen and Turner published a nationally representative telephone survey of 4,446 college women in the US, exploring types of victimisation respondents had experienced. Overall, they found that per 1000 female students, there was a 35.3 per cent incidence rate of rape (19.3 per cent) or attempted rape (16 per cent). The majority of these incidents had occurred after midnight, on campus and had been perpetrated by a boyfriend, ex-boyfriend, classmate, friend or someone else known to the victim. It was concluded that a college that has 10,000 female students could see more than 350 rapes a year.[156] Researchers have also found that despite a strong policy framework around it (which contrasts to the lack

of action in the UK), rates of campus sexual assault in the US did not decline between 2001 and 2006, which suggests that this is a very challenging issue.[157]

Research on violence against women students in the UK is still in its infancy: however, in 2010 NUS conducted the first ever UK-wide study of women students' experience of harassment, stalking, violence and sexual assault. Entitled *Hidden Marks*, it involved distributing a survey instrument to 2058 women in further education (FE) and HE in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The study was extensively piloted and carefully worded, and informed by both legal and experiential definitions of violence and consent.[158] It found that 1 in 7 respondents had experienced a serious physical or sexual assault during their time as a student, 12 per cent had been stalked while at university or college, and 68 per cent had been a victim of one or more kinds of sexual harassment while they were at university. Fellow students were the majority of perpetrators. Furthermore, *Hidden Marks* revealed that only a small minority of women students who had been seriously sexually assaulted reported it to their institution (4 per cent) or to the police (10 per cent).[159] The report showed that campus violence is not just a problem in the US, despite the fact that most of the research on the issue has been conducted there.

At around the same time as *Hidden Marks*, other, similar studies began to emerge. For instance, 2011 saw the final reports of a European Commission-funded project involving two rounds of survey investigations conducted in 2010 and 2011 at 35 HEIs in Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain and England. Over 21,000 female respondents took part in the study. It found gender-based violence to be a problem everywhere, as well as limited levels of awareness and policy interventions related to the issue. Worryingly, the project also revealed that the UK had the highest levels of prevalence of sexual harassment, stalking and sexual violence.[160] Almost 34 per cent of UK respondents had experienced sexual violence at university, and a shocking 73.1 per cent had experienced sexual violence during their lifetimes. The majority of the most serious incidents to happen during university studies occurred off-campus and during the victim's first year, and were perpetrated by someone

known to the victim and in the majority of cases a fellow student (except in the case of stalking).[161]

In 2012, helpful findings emerged related to gender differences in alcohol-related non-consensual sex amongst the student population in the UK. Researchers found that alcohol-related coerced sexual activity was a significant occurrence among students, with over a third of 1079 respondents (mostly female) reporting experiences of the phenomenon.[162] The study found that a greater proportion of females who had experienced alcohol-related non-consensual sex since the age of 14 were 'hazardous drinkers' (82.2 per cent), and that men were significantly more likely than women to agree that a significant proportion of rapes reported to the police were false allegations.[163] Also in 2012, a small qualitative study involving interviews with staff in two HEIs, local police officers and community and voluntary sector workers explored a range of forms of violence against women, including forced marriage. It found that these frontline staff saw up to 15 cases per year of violence against women students, mostly domestic violence but also sexual assault, and cases in which family members other than an intimate partner had abused the student. Cases of forced marriage were almost invisible to university staff, but the other respondents who were specialist service providers in the community stated that they worked with student victims of the practice.[164]

Approaches to dealing with violence against students in the US typically take an individualistic and legalistic perspective, separating the institution itself from the 'problem'.[165] However, it has been argued that university communities provide the conditions under which sexual harassment and violence are naturalised, resulting in the silencing of victims and an increased likelihood that abuse will occur.[166] Although it is problematic to draw direct causal connections, it could be suggested that sexualised 'laddish' cultures, with their underpinnings of misogyny and homophobia, could cause particular worries in relation to the 'scaffolding' of sexual violence and abuse.

Gender and higher education policy

"A University is a trust confided by the State to certain hands for the common interest of the nation"[167]
Sir William Hamilton, 1835

This research has clear implications for policy in higher education and in relation to violence against women, since the current UK strategy on the latter does not adequately target students as a particular risk group.[168] Below, we present our analysis of a selection of key policies relating to HE, and especially those which have relevance to gender issues.[169] The expansion of FE and HE has been stated by policymakers across the political spectrum to be an economic imperative.[170] This is problematic if higher education spaces are not empowering for all types of students, and in particular if the most privileged male students are reacting against widening participation by policing what they consider to be their territory.

Perhaps the most important recent policy initiative in Higher Education is the *Independent Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance*, or the 'Browne Review'. This was launched in 2009 in order to review the funding of undergraduate education in England and ensure sustainability. Other aims included examining levels of participation and quality of teaching across HEIs, and addressing failures of the higher education system which had been identified prior to the 2010 election, for instance around widening participation. Recommendations included encouraging HEIs to expand to meet student demand, with a target of increasing the number of places by 10 per cent, and requiring institutions to better inform students about teaching standards and curricula, levels of support and guidance, assessments, facilities such as libraries and IT services, and students' unions. However, the major directive of the review was in relation to student fees: underpinned by the principle that students should 'pay more' in order to 'get more' and see their degrees as an investment, the report recommended that the cap on tuition fees should be removed (it was eventually raised

to a maximum of £9,000 per annum). It also recommended an increase in maintenance support for low-income students, and suggested that upfront costs for part time students should be eliminated.[171]

In 2011, NUS' *The Pound in your Pocket* report addressed the financial significance of this policy change for students in England. 14,500 were surveyed, and 42 per cent indicated that they did not feel able to concentrate on their undergraduate studies because of financial concerns. 70 per cent of the respondents in the sample were women.[172] Recently, there have been stories in the media about women undergraduates dealing with financial insecurity through working in the sex industry, and in November 2012 a businessman was arrested in connection with a website called 'Sponsor a Scholar', which was offering young women up to £15,000 per year to cover their tuition fees, in exchange for sex acts with strangers.[173]

Following the Browne Review, the 2011 Higher Education White Paper *Students at the Heart of the System* was commissioned. Its key aims were stated to be ensuring sustainable funding of the HE sector in England, delivering a better student experience and increasing social mobility. Overall, the paper concluded that the changes recommended in the Browne review were necessary, relating ideas about 'cost-effectiveness' to the principle of spreading equality of opportunity. It also argued that students should be better off following the changes to the higher education funding framework, due to the fact that tuition fees would be based on a 'pay as you earn' scheme and because changes being implemented to HEIs would increase flexibility, diversity and 'choice'. For instance, there would be more user-friendly methods of study such as sandwich courses and distance learning, offered by a wider range of providers (including private universities), and institutions would be made more accountable and innovative through a competitive market and university-industry collaboration. It also

stated that the quality of courses should match the increase in fees in order to provide value for money. The National Scholarship Programme was highlighted as an effort to improve social mobility, and it was promised that the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) would be 'properly resourced.'[174] In early 2012 however, the coalition government appeared to retreat from plans to propose a higher education bill based on the White Paper, although it was thought that many of the more controversial proposed reforms (the expansion of private providers, for example) might subsequently happen 'under the radar.'[175]

Both the Browne Review and the 2011 White Paper conceptualised the university in market terms and focused on matters such as fee income, 'value for money' and student 'choice'. In contrast, the Student Charter Group (SCG) for England, formed in 2011, emphasised the importance of belonging to a learning community and the partnership between staff and students. It consisted of small working groups which brought together HEI representatives and student representatives to explore current best practice in the use of Student Charters and other student agreements. These groups recommended that each HEI should have a Student Charter or similar high level statement to set out the mutual expectations of universities and students and that non-academic topics such as Diversity, Respect, Communication, Teaching, Learning, Research and Assessment, Finance, and Student Services should be included. The report found that there were benefits to providing such clear statements of student rights and responsibilities, including clarity and consistency throughout the institution and across all subject areas, clear signposting of additional information such as appeals and complaints procedures, and a focus for regular engagement with student representatives, alongside other feedback from students and internal quality assurance and management information.[176] The 2011 White Paper endorsed the SCG recommendation that each institution should have a charter, and promised to consider whether they should be made mandatory in the future.[177]

The 2011 Education Act England and Wales focused mainly on schools, following the Department for Education White Paper, *The Importance of Teaching*. However, it was also guided by *Skills for Sustainable Growth and Further Education – New Horizons*, which was published by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) in November 2010. Key elements of the Act included measures to increase the authority of teachers to discipline pupils and ensure good behaviour, giving schools, colleges and local authorities greater freedom over their governance and decisions which affect how they fulfil their functions, and more focused Ofsted inspections and wider powers to intervene. The Act also placed a cap on fees for part-time undergraduate students: however, at the same time it put in place provisions to allow market rates of interest to be applied to higher education student loans, with the intention to set 'real' rates (e.g. above inflation and perhaps even higher).[178]

In 2012 and in response to the Higher Education White Paper, the Wilson Review was commissioned in order to explore how the UK could achieve a world-leading position in terms of business-university collaboration. The report argued that universities were an integral part of the supply chain to business, with the capability to support growth and economic prosperity. It recommended initiatives such as more applied research in advanced technologies, in-company up-skilling of employees, bespoke collaborative degree programmes, science park development, enterprise education and entrepreneurial support for staff and students, higher-level apprenticeships, skills development of post-doctoral staff, and a focus on creative industries, agriculture, bio-pharma and engineering. It also encouraged the development of sandwich degree programmes and undergraduate internships, and recommended that institutions should publish students' job destinations. The Review stated that HEIs needed to make explicit decisions about their domains of operation and that networking with the business community was critical.[179]

In much of this policy framework we can see increasingly close relationships between universities and the private sector, as well as a continuation of the privatisation and marketisation of higher education itself. There is also a focus on students as consumers:

however, ideas about 'choice' and 'value for money' are set within a context of rapidly rising student fees. What is missing from this rather instrumental framework is the idea of education as a social good and end in itself, and in particular in relation to our research, the concept of the university as a community with shared principles and values. In contrast, the dominant contemporary values in higher education are economic ones, and we need to think critically about the impact this may be having upon campus cultures. There are two important themes here which are directly relevant to our research: first, the masculinism of corporate values such as individualism and competition, which could shape a masculinisation of higher education more generally; and secondly, the idea that 'lad culture' is a form of territorialism in an increasingly competitive sector.

An example of policy initiative with an alternative slant is the 2012 *Review of Higher Education Governance in Scotland* (RHEGS). Acknowledging that much funding-focused policy did not address the more important questions of what higher education is intended to achieve, and in whose interests, this report aimed to redress the balance. It recommended a number of measures intended to achieve transparency and fairness, including incorporating a definition of academic freedom into the statute governing higher education, ensuring that bonuses were transparently awarded or abolished, and introducing elected Chairs and including student and 40 per cent female membership in institutional governing bodies.[180] However, these recommendations were challenged by many principals in the Scottish sector, who argued that they were essentially unworkable.[181]

Forbes, Öhrn and Weiner have also critiqued the Scottish system for marginalising gender within a myriad of factors contributing to social inequality.[182] Such 'mainstreaming' can similarly be observed in the Gender Equality Duty (2007) for England, Scotland and Wales, which is particularly significant in relation to our research, being the most major change in sex equality legislation since the introduction of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975. It is also the only policy discussed here which applies to Scotland, England and Wales. The Duty was a legal requirement on all public

authorities (including government departments and executive agencies, colleges and universities, schools, NHS Trusts and Boards, local authorities/councils, police and fire authorities, inspection and audit bodies and many publicly-funded museums). Its aims were to eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment on the grounds of sex, and to promote equality of opportunity between women and men. It covered gender equality in policy- and decision-making, service provision, employment matters, and statutory discretion, and made it an obligation to eliminate discrimination and harassment towards current and potential trans staff.[183]

However, the Duty was replaced by the new single Public Sector Equality Duty in 2011 (part of the 2010 Equality Act), which covered age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.[184] This mirrored the 2006 absorption of the Equal Opportunities Commission into the Equality and Human Rights Commission, which represents a wider range of categories of 'disadvantage.'[185] These developments could be seen in a positive light as a focus on intersecting inequalities, or more negatively as a sidelining of gender discrimination issues.[186] Levitas (2005) identifies a silence regarding gender in favour of factors such as race and religion in education and social policy discourses, and if we consider the Browne Report, Wilson Review and other education policies explored above, it is interesting to note that there is no mention of gender, whereas class and other unnamed factors which lead to social 'deprivation' or 'disadvantage' are mentioned. In terms of general gender equality policy, there is very little focus specifically on students or universities. Furthermore, the recent Violence Against Women policy framework makes no specific mention of women students, although it identifies young women in general as a 'high risk' group.[187] It is also significant that in late 2012 Prime Minister David Cameron announced an end to equality impact assessments, which were also introduced in the 2010 Equality Act as a tool to ensure that public sector organisations and bodies took account of equalities issues in policies and decisions.[188] Together with the

corporatisation and marketisation of the university sector discussed above, this creates a minimal and rather unpromising policy framework for interventions into 'lad culture' and its potential effects.

Conclusion

Our review of the available literature has suggested that 'laddism' can be seen as one of many potential forms of masculinity, which surfaces in major ways at particular times and in response to different social conditions. It has also revealed that 'cultures' are multiple and fluid and responsive to broader social structures, but that that they can have far-reaching effects on identities and experiences. Contemporary 'lad culture', then, can be understood as one of a variety of masculinities and cultures in UK university communities, which men and women may move into and out of, but which may shape their identities and attitudes and frame their experience of university life. It has been linked to a broader 'sex object' culture among young people and in popular discourse, and can also be connected to social problems such as sexual harassment and violence.

Contemporary 'lad culture' is set in a broader context which includes a discourse of women's success and a linked 'crisis of masculinity'. This has caused some men to feel threatened and to scapegoat high-achieving women, and 'lad culture' can be seen at least to a degree as a renewed form of sexism which is part of a defensive response. However, the idea that women have 'made it' is based on an inaccurate representation of their social progress which means that their continued struggles – for instance with confidence, with the higher status accorded to 'masculine' subjects and activities, or at the extremes with sexual violence and abuse – are invisiblised. This extant 'battle of the sexes' intersects with factors such as social class and race, with women and men from working class and some minority ethnic backgrounds more likely to face challenges in education and the workplace. It is also linked to the current economic framework of recession and increasing competition for jobs and resources.

Within this economic framework, higher education is being corporatized and privatised in line with what have been identified as masculine values of individualism and competition. This may bolster dominant forms of masculinity among student communities, and also detracts from the idea of the university as a community of young people with shared values such as equality, social justice and mutual support. In this context students may well feel dismissed and unsupported, especially due to the fact that many universities are outsourcing services such as security and student support.[189] In a wider sense, students may also be suffering due to the dwindling social safety net, and women students especially due to cuts to specialist services.

There is no mention of women students in current higher education policy, which perhaps reflects the mainstreaming of gender issues in social policy more generally and is conceivably also informed by the 'post-feminist' consensus around women's relative success, in public and political debate. Gender equality policy, including the most recent framework around violence against women and girls, also makes no specific reference to students. However, our literature review has shown us that women students have specific and complex needs which may require targeted interventions. In order to understand these needs more fully, further research should be conducted, aimed to fill a number of major gaps in the literature. With the January 2013 comments of Universities Minister David Willetts about white working class boys being particularly disadvantaged in relation to Higher Education, it seems particularly important not to forget the challenges women students also face.[190]

The first of the gaps in the literature concerns our understanding of 'campus cultures' at UK higher education institutions generally. Discussions of the types of values, practices and identities which characterise university life tend to be positioned in the US; and although this country shares a number of attributes with the UK, there are also important differences.[191] There is also little to no research which addresses the impact of different campus cultures, or

'lad culture', on UK women students. Whilst there are explorations of 'lad culture' more generally, these seldom relate this phenomenon with women's university experience. There is also a need to contextualise discussions such as this in relation to the backlash against feminism, the 'crisis of masculinity', the recession and changes in higher education policy.

The social side of UK higher education also presented itself as an under-researched area. Especially given the fact that women's extra-curricular activities are often deemed of less value than those men tend to engage in, and also bearing in mind the fact that some extra-curricular activities function as sites for the operation of 'lad culture', we feel it is important to hear from women students about their social lives. Relationships – whether sexual or otherwise – are also under-represented in the literature. Literature in this area emanating from the US tends to be dominated by the issue of sexual violence, and there is very little material from the UK at all. We therefore do not have much insight into the nature of intimate, consensual relations amongst university students, especially in terms of how these are shaped by the broader contexts described above. Finally, there is a lack of detail in the literature about how all these issues are moulded by differences *between* women, for instance in relation to variables such as social class, race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability and age.

Research findings

Research findings: Campus culture and the experiences of women students

Dr Alison Phipps, Director of Gender Studies, University of Sussex and Isabel Young, Research Associate, Centre for Gender Studies, University of Sussex

NUS commissioned researchers at the Centre for Gender Studies at the University of Sussex to undertake research into campus culture and the experiences of women students, which are published in full here.

Their research is presented in two parts:

- The **literature review**, which summarises the existing evidence and introduces concepts which are important for the research; and

- The **research findings**, which present the main findings of the qualitative research on women students and their experiences of campus culture.

This section presents the authors' **research findings.**

Executive Summary

Introduction

1. This report presents the findings of a qualitative research project conducted with 40 women students (4 focus groups and 21 interviews), focused on their encounters with 'lad culture' and their experiences of university life.

2. Our sample was mostly composed of white, British, undergraduates aged between 18 and 25; most also identified as heterosexual and middle class. However, a significant minority of our respondents did not fit this profile, and our findings reflect intersections with other aspects of identity such as ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation, disability and age.

Key themes/findings

3. Our participants defined campus culture as largely located in the social side of university life, led by undergraduates and significantly shaped by alcohol consumption. They also defined campus cultures as gendered, and saw strong connections between 'lad culture' and the values, attitudes and behaviours evident (and in some cases pervasive) on their campuses.

4. 'Lad culture' was defined by our participants 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. It was also thought to be a sexualised culture which involved the objectification of women and rape supportive attitudes, and occasionally spilled over into sexual harassment and violence. Contrary to much existing research, it was seen as

crossing class boundaries and the particular preserve of the privileged.

5. While many of our participants felt that 'lad culture' had not directly affected their educational experiences, they also described university education as 'gendered' and cited issues such as the characterisation/status of particular subjects, classroom interactions, and negative attitudes towards feminism and gender-related topics. Furthermore, many of these issues could be indirectly linked to elements of 'lad culture', particularly in relation to social and educational privilege and the relationship between group belonging and self-confidence in educational settings.

6. 'Lad culture' was thought to be particularly influential in the social side of university life. Extra-curricular activities and sports in particular were singled out as key sites, and it was reported that sexism in such environments could spill over into sexual harassment and humiliation. 'Nightlife' was described in similar terms, with many participants relating experiences of sexual molestation and identifying pressure to engage in a high frequency of sexual activity with different partners. This was thought to be perpetuated by outside agencies such as club promoters and events companies. The operation of 'lad culture' in social settings had caused many participants to alter or limit their activity, confirming interpretations of 'laddism' as a means by which privileged men police and preserve territory.

7. For many participants, 'lad culture' had been significant in relation to their personal life. Many reported misogynist jokes and 'banter' circulating in their friendship groups which made them feel uncomfortable, and pressures to engage in profuse sexual relationships which made it difficult to establish and maintain commitments. Stories of sexual harassment and molestation were common, and there were also accounts of sexual violence and a sense that students experiencing such behaviours felt unable to challenge them and unsure of where or whom to report to and get help.

8. As well as gender, participants' accounts of university life were shaped by other aspects of their identities such as sexual orientation, ethnicity, culture, social class, disability and age. However, while some of these factors appeared more influential than 'lad culture' in individuals' biographies and experiences, none operated to the exclusion of it.

9. Many participants pointed out that women often participate in, or become complicit with, 'lad culture', and some regarded this culture in a far more serious light than others. There were also moments of contradiction in our data which supported the idea that 'lad culture' is not homogenous or monolithic, and may be subject to change dependent on context. Our findings, then, do not suggest that all men engage in 'laddish' behaviours all the time: indeed, the behaviours discussed in this report may be attributable to a minority. However, these 'lads' seemed to dominate the social side of university life for many of our participants, and many also identified this social sphere as the key site for the formation and operation of campus culture. This suggests that the relationship between campus culture and 'lad culture' should be cause for concern.

Introduction

This report presents the findings of a qualitative research project focused on women students' experiences of higher education (HE). It is part of a larger piece of research commissioned by the National Union of Students to provide a deeper examination of the phenomenon of 'lad culture', and women students' encounters with it, set in the context of gender issues and policy in higher education more broadly. The document contains analysis of data from interviews and focus groups with 40 women students from England and Scotland, exploring how 'lad culture' shaped their experiences in educational, social and personal spheres, and how this interacted with aspects of their identities such as gender class, race, sexual orientation and disability. Our sample was small yet included women from a variety of different demographic groups, so while our findings cannot be classified as representative they do provide an indicative and interesting snapshot of views and experiences across a broader community of women students in HE.

Conduct of the study

In order to recruit participants for the research we contacted Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), students' unions and student groups across the UK. We conducted four focus groups in major cities in the North East, North West and South West of England and in Scotland, and interviews were arranged with students from a range of English HEIs.[192] Our total sample of 40 women was obtained via established sociological methods: for instance, using 'gatekeepers' such as students' unions, sports groups, societies and faculty members, media such as student newspapers, Facebook and Twitter, and snowballing from contacts with individual participants.[193] A variety of issues were faced with regard to accessing participants, but we were ultimately able to achieve a sample which showed a certain amount of diversity. The vast majority were undergraduate students aged between 18 and 25,

although some were postgraduates and two were over 30. All students identified as women, although some expressed ambivalence in relation to their gender identities, which is discussed in later in the report. Almost 80 per cent identified as heterosexual, and the remainder reported a variety of different sexual orientations such as queer, gay or lesbian, bisexual, pansexual and 'undecided'. Most defined their ethnicity as 'white British', and described themselves as middle class, although there were a number of other ethnicities and class positions represented. Six participants identified as disabled. An overview of participant demographics is provided in Appendices one and two.

In our literature review we referred to 'campus cultures' and 'lad culture' as being phenomena which are both co-created and constantly in process, so the focus group method allowed us to witness the negotiation of identities and ideas, and to observe the operation of general consensus in relation to some issues, due to the group interactions involved.[194] Using focus groups also granted a certain amount of participant control, in terms of agenda-setting, ground rules and the tone of the discussion,[195] and helped to mitigate any potential discomfort or power imbalances due to weight of participant numbers and the fact that the groups were often organised for women who already knew each other.[196] Each group lasted approximately 90 minutes and had between four and six participants, who were encouraged to share their experiences and ideas on a variety of different topics in a semi-structured format. 19 students in total took part in the focus groups.

The remaining 21 participants were asked to take part in semi-structured interviews, which were useful in terms of exploring issues in more depth and allowing each woman space for her own experiences and voice.[197] Questions were adapted to suit the needs of participants, for instance by shortening the discussion in some areas in order to focus more intensively on others. Most of the interviews were conducted in person

(5/21) or over Skype (10/21). They lasted around an hour and involved one, or occasionally two, participants. The remaining six interviews were conducted via Email, with participants asked to respond as fully as they could to 10 structured questions (one participant chose instead to submit a free narrative). We adopted a feminist approach to the research, viewing our participants as collaborators[198] and attempting to establish a friendly rapport.[199]

Due to the potentially sensitive nature of some of the topics covered, following appropriate ethics procedures was extremely important. This was achieved by providing full information about the nature and process of the research, and making it clear to participants that their involvement was fully voluntary, and that they could choose to withdraw at any time with no negative consequences. We also put in place procedures to ensure confidentiality and anonymity, for instance removing any names and other identifiers from transcripts and keeping all research data in a secure location. Consent forms (which contained real names) were kept separately from the data itself. In the writing of this report, we have replaced participant names with numbers (for interview participants) and letters (for focus group participants), and have also omitted names of particular cities and HEIs. We developed materials and a process for signposting any participants to support services if necessary (although these were not used). We responded openly to any questions about our intentions and methods, and underwent a continual process of reflexivity during the conduct of the study.[200]

The data were analysed using thematic colour coding,[201] relating back to any relevant topics in the literature review whilst also remaining open to new themes and issues.

Defining campus culture

The first question we asked of all our participants was 'what does the term "campus culture" mean to you?' As stated in our literature review, there has been very little research on campus cultures in the UK, and the concept is not static or universal, making it important to explore it with our participants. In our discussions, campus culture was defined as a collection of shared ideas, values, attitudes and behaviours which resulted from large numbers of young people living in close proximity with one another. It was also thought to be largely created by undergraduates rather than postgraduates. Social activities were put forward as key sites, and as a result alcohol played an important role. Interestingly, the intellectual and political aspects of university life, highlighted in our literature review as shaping campus cultures in the US, were not mentioned. There was also no discussion of the corporate values which are thought to accompany privatisation, which could signal an important difference between the two countries (or could also reflect the slower pace of corporatisation in the UK). The main theme explored in our focus groups and interviews was gender, with many of our participants seeing campus cultures as similar to, if not inextricable from, 'lad culture'. This could also be a factor limiting the influence of the intellectual and political spheres upon campus life.

Socialising and alcohol

Our participants' definitions of campus culture largely emphasised social activities and drinking.[202] For one interviewee, this was what the first year of university was all about:

"In the first year it was very much going out, it was drinking, it was socialising, it wasn't so much [focused] around work." (Interviewee 15)

Another interviewee expressed frustration about the lack of alternatives, for instance political and creative activities, on offer:

"I came to university thinking 'wow! Everybody's going to be my age, everybody's going to be politically aware, there's going to be loads of activism, I'm sure there'll be loads of creative groups, there's gonna be loads of stuff to get involved with' and yeah, you can get involved with drinking. Everybody's desperate to be integrated with the group and join in and be popular and not be lost, because they're very far from home, most of them, that the pressure to do everything you're asked to join in with is so great that people don't feel able to say 'I don't want to go out and get drunk'."
(Interviewee 13)

A third interviewee similarly suggested that the pressure to drink and be 'one of the lads' was one of the 'defining things' in the initial experience of university.[203] Intersections with ethnicity and culture were apparent here, with one focus group participant from China saying:

"The Chinese students [who] live [here] struggle because the Western campus culture encourage[s] you to explore [your] own identity. But they also have their own pressure, their own cultural identity."
(Participant O)

Another participant, this time British-Chinese, agreed that 'home pressures' could actively conflict with the emphases of life on campus.[204]

Based on these statements, questions perhaps need to be raised about levels of institutional and students' union investment in the political and creative aspects of university life, and the status of intellectual values in our HEIs. However, some of the women in our sample described the social basis of campus culture more positively, feeling that it encouraged the formation of friendship networks; and alcohol was explicitly mentioned by one interviewee as a useful tool in reducing social anxiety.[205]

In our literature review, alcohol was identified as a key property of 'lad culture' and a contributing factor to the

'sexualisation' of life on campus. This was echoed by several of the women who took part in our study, with one focus group participant linking 'drinking more than you probably should' with 'that culture of wearing less clothes than you probably should'.[206] This will be discussed in more detail in Section two of this report.

The 'gendering' of campus cultures

Half of our participants identified their campus cultures as gendered, with six describing this in general terms and a further 14 elaborating that campus cultures were the preserve of white, Western, middle to upper class, privately educated men. One interviewee said:

"It's very male, and it's bizarrely high class. It's not the way normal people live, at all…I met [people] in the first week and we sort of bonded a bit over the fact we'd been to normal further education colleges for our A levels." (Interviewee 14)

Campus culture was described as a 'bubble', which both magnified existing sub-cultures and intensified behaviours and gossip. This 'closed environment' for one interviewee, was definitely 'more of a male thing'.[207] The fact that campus cultures were not necessarily tailored to women students had at times led to feelings of discomfort. Expectations of women and the 'sexualisation' of campus life were mentioned, with one interviewee identifying 'a pressure on the younger students, undergrad students, to look their best all of the time'.[208] Other interviewees echoed this, with one highlighting the university gym as a site where women are expected to 'pose' and look their best,[209] and another stating that women students were even expected to look 'effortlessly good' in academic settings. She elaborated:

"The girls spend so long getting ready. Most of them are privately educated. Myself and who I live with aren't, but we find the other girls spend so long doing these top-knot things with their hair, and they come in as though they haven't spent that long doing it, in their jeans or a jumper, and their hair is in that kind of just-got-out-of-bed look, but actually that's taken a really long time." (Interviewee 14)

Outside influences were also thought to play a role here, with three focus group participants mentioning of club promoters and one relaying an anecdote about a promoter recruiting new staff and 'marking' women walking past the students' union on their 'sexiness factor'.[210] This was recalled by another member of the focus group, who said:

"You go to a club and you are judged by your looks, you're marked on your looks. You walk down the street to uni…and the club has managed to infiltrate you walking to university and then you are still being judged by looks instead of by character, instead of who you are. It's just slowly slowly seeping in to every aspect. And it is a very very slippery slope until people are just valued on looks alone." (Participant H).

Half of our participants also identified a prevailing sexism, 'laddism' and potential culture of harassment at their HEIs. This can be seen in one interviewee's description of life in 'halls':

"The boys in my halls used to sing a drinking song about rape, which obviously was just disgusting. I think there are a lot of jokes about women and a lot of 'innocent' groping that goes on, which actually serves to make you feel very embarrassed, nervous and uncomfortable." (Interviewee 20)

Another interviewee, who grew up in France, reported that she was shocked by the extent of this in the UK:

"France is quite notoriously bad with sexism and stuff so I thought 'oh I'll get to the UK and it'll be better and everybody will be young and enlightened' and they're not." (Interviewee 13)

These aspects of campus culture had left one interviewee very disillusioned, since she felt that university was 'meant to be a place of learning and enlightenment'.[211] This statement links into points made in our literature review about the purposes of the university, and how these could be eroded by both the introduction of corporate values and the growth of 'laddism' in campus life.

Heterogeneity and change

The discussion above illustrates that there was a consensus among many of our participants that UK campus life largely revolved around social activities and drinking, and that these environments were also gendered and could create and support 'laddish' behaviours. However, a minority did not share these views; for a few of the women we spoke to, campus culture was not homogenous but made up of various subcultures united by the shared status of being a student. One focus group participant said:

"I don't feel like there is one campus culture. For a start there is such a variety of people at [my] uni. It's very mixed. I think every group has a different campus culture in a way. So I think it's hard to put a finger on one thing that people do in general."
(Participant P)

This participant, together with others, also felt that campus culture was subject to a process of change as university life wore on, going from being social-focused at first to increasingly academic. Another focus group participant said:

"Now I'm doing this postgrad degree, you do a lot of group work and we are all based in this one building. We kind of see campus culture in that more academic sense, like people who are working together as opposed to just going to the pub."
(Participant S)

These complexities in our data illustrate the fact that 'campus cultures' are various and shifting, and not experienced in the same way by all students who encounter them. This means that the findings we present in this report may not be generalisable to all potential settings, although they will undoubtedly be broadly relevant and useful due to the high level of consensus on key issues.

Defining 'lad culture'

As described in the literature review, 'laddism' can be seen as one of a number of available formulations of masculinity which is responsive to and reflective of prevailing social conditions. Some researchers have linked it with the phenomenon of 'raunch culture', which refers to the mainstreaming of the erotic industries and the 'sexualisation' of young people and popular media, and at the extremes it has also been associated with the normalisation of sexual violence. As noted above, half of our participants felt 'lad culture' was omnipresent on their campuses (although not limited to campus environments), which is highlighted in the following statements from the focus groups:

"[Lad culture is] really pervasive, I think it's everywhere around the university. It's within sports clubs, you hear it within lectures. It's almost entered into every day vocabulary; a lot of people would understand like, 'oh you're such a lad'." (Participant G)

"I think it is really actually very very difficult to keep on track with your uni and to come and do a degree and to not get dragged into lad culture, not get dragged into staying up till three when you've got an essay due." (Participant H)

'Lad culture' was thought by our participants to involve the following;

- Sport and heavy alcohol consumption

- Group or 'pack' mentalities

- 'Banter'

- Sexism and misogyny

- Homophobia

- Sexualisation and the objectification of women

- Rape supportive attitudes, sexual harassment

While a few participants felt that this culture was exclusive of women, a more common opinion was that it could involve students of any gender. Almost a quarter of the women we talked to characterised 'lads' as wealthy, upper-middle to upper-class students from single-sex public schools. This challenges previous research, which has positioned 'laddism' as largely a working-class phenomenon, or a middle class exploitation of a working class 'jack-the-lad' persona. As one of our interviewees said:

"I think that's the misconception, that they're these rough lads from rough backgrounds who have no respect for women, well they're not, they're everywhere, they're in all parts of the country." (Interviewee 10)

It was thought that privileged men lacked an understanding of how to interact appropriately with women, as well as having the dispoable incomes and freedom to engage in 'laddish' activities and behaviours. One focus group participant related the following story:

"The one guy in my group of friends who went to an all-boys school, we went out fresher's week and… I was like 'go in and buy some jugs' and he grabbed my boob and said 'I'll have this one'…he's one of my really good friends now…but I just found that so unacceptable. I was shocked, I slapped him quite hard actually. I just didn't know what to do." (Participant C)

The idea that 'laddism' operates across men from different social classes and can even be the preserve of the elite adds a dimension to the 'crisis of masculinity' thesis, which posits that it is largely engaged in by working- and middle-class young men who are threatened by women's success. There are a number of possible interpretations to explore: that in a context of recession, upper-middle and upper-class men are also perceiving themselves to be at risk in relation to high-achieving women; that widening participation in higher education has provoked territorial behaviour amongst

the elite men who were originally the sole beneficiaries of university instruction; and that the backlash against feminism and 'sexualisation' of young people and popular culture is a phenomenon which cuts across all social spheres.

Drinking, sport and 'pack' mentalities

For more than a third of the women in our study, 'lad culture' entailed drinking, clubbing, 'having a laugh' and playing sport, and implied a certain disregard for the academic side of university life. One interviewee recounted:

"We had neighbours last year, who I'm glad to say have left, and they were typical of the lad culture as I see it…they hadn't been to lectures in weeks and they were always going out drinking, even though they were in their second year so they had loads of work to do. And this is really gross, but they'd go out about four nights a week, which is pretty heavy-going, and sometimes they'd not get up until 3pm and then they'd play music all the time and it was so loud and annoying, and then at about 8pm they'd go down to Tesco Express to get more booze, and sometimes they'd be sick outside their door. Because they were still hungover, and they would go out and get more booze and they'd be sick. And that is disgusting. And that's lad culture." (Interviewee 15)

Rugby teams were identified as key sites for 'laddish' activity: a number of participants had either encountered 'rugby lads' directly on nights out or observed rugby cultures on their campuses. Nearly all perceived rugby players in a negative light, and university rugby players were often immediately defined as 'lads' whether they participated in 'lad culture' or not. As one interviewee explained:

"If you are seen as a rugby guy then you are different automatically…you talk to any girls and they know, 'oh yeah it's a rugby guy thing'." (Interviewee 9)

Behaviours related to 'rugby lads' ranged from sexist comments to the normalisation of sexual violence, highlighted by one interviewee in an anecdote about how a group of rugby players at her university had gone

out dressed as rape victims, imitating a similar stunt by a rubgy team at another institution.[212]

Also linked to sports, the notion of the 'pack' mentality was important in our participants' perceptions of 'lad culture', with a third feeling that 'laddism' was a primarily a group characteristic and almost a quarter suggesting that 'lads' could be pleasant individuals who were transformed by alcohol and peer pressure into disrespectful and difficult groups. This is illustrated by the following quotes from the focus groups:

"There are a lot of people that are kind of lad by night, but then are decent guys by day." (Participant H)

"I've seen lots of groups of lads doing horrible things that I don't think any of them would do by themselves. Or if they were by themselves and you said 'actually that's not okay' they would probably say 'oh sorry'." (Participant I)

"If you saw one guy in a bar behaving the way the group were, he would most likely be kicked out, be avoided. You can imagine if there was one guy there shouting 'wahaay!', or encouraging going 'drink drink drink!' It's because of them being in a group that that's okay." (Participant H)

Sexism, Misogyny and Homophobia

Such group mentalities were thought to be particularly dangerous in terms of producing or exacerbating derogatory attitudes towards women and LGBT people, and normalising sexual violence. Many of our participants explained how 'lads' regularly referred to women using terms such as 'gash', 'wenches', 'dykes' and 'frigid', and commonly made sexist and homophobic jokes and remarks, as highlighted in the following interview quote:

"[It's a] culture in which misogyny and sexism is seen as cool or masculine. A lot of it revolving around sexist jokes and banter so that the sexism is trivialised so that people who challenge it are made to seem like kill-joys or people with no sense of humour." (Interviewee 18)

One interview drew attention to the expectations of women she felt were an important part of 'lad culture', especially in terms of fitting into male-defined ideals of femininity:

"All women should look a certain [way], all women should be waxed, really thin, have big boobs and should be there to service the man and it should all be about the man, and if you don't look that way they're like 'what's wrong with you? Are you a freak?'" (Interviewee 10)

For this particular interviewee, pornography played a key role in normalising sexist attitudes and the objectification of women. She related that she had 'lots of very nice male friends', who nevertheless watched forms of pornography which she found problematic. She said this had led her to think, 'oh my god, no wonder people think its ok to grope you on a night out if that's what's becoming the norm to view'.[213] She also felt that this could easily shape chauvinist sexual expectations:

"They think it's going to be this great thing where the girls going to be up for doing whatever they want and the style of the sex as well, I think they imagine it's going to be all them just proper going at it and the girl is just there for them to just go at and it's just like 'yuck, noo!', kind of objectifying, like women are the object, they are there just for them to use as they feel fit." (Interviewee 10)

For almost half the women in our study, 'lad culture' was highly sexualised and involved pressure to engage in a high frequency of sexual contact with a number of different partners. Participants noted the dominance of sexual themes, some derogatory towards women, in 'laddish' conversations, with one interviewee reciting 'banter' about 'notches on the bedpost' and phrases such as 'I'd tap that', and another stating:

"[Conversations are] generally around sex. They're generally about whether a girl is fit enough to warrant having sex with. As if these men are god's gift to women! It's like they think, 'if you're going to get into my bed you have to be a certain way', without even thinking that actually women can be just as picky…it's more like it's completely the man's

choice, and it's down to them and that's what's going to happen. It's like the women don't play a part in this kind of exchange." (Interviewee 10)

There was also thought to be a prevailing double standard, with men venerated as 'studs' while women were denigrated as 'slags' or 'sluts', for engaging in profuse sexual activity. As one interviewee said:

"I've got a friend who likes sleeping around, she likes having sex with lots of people. And I think that's fine, because if you enjoy that you enjoy that. But everyone around her, all the guys and even the girls would immediately think that 'oh well we have to make fun of her for this'. But when a guy does it, it's fine. When a guy does it they sort of get a high five and 'oh yes you are such a lad! Well done for doing that'." (Interviewee 9)

A quarter of our participants also felt that such sexualised cultures and double standards could easily lead to sexual harassment. One interviewee explained her view as follows:

"I don't think if somebody's in a big group of lads they think that it'd be ok to have sex with a girl who doesn't want it but I think definitely with sexual harassment they think its ok to grab a girl's bum or try and kiss her when she doesn't want you to, so I think sexual harassment is quite a part of lad culture." (Interviewee 11)

Confirming points made in our literature review, some participants also made reference to the links between 'laddish' behaviours and the normalisation of sexual violence. Interestingly, much of the sexually violent 'banter' recounted had taken place in social media environments, perhaps due to perceptions of such settings as somehow removed from everyday life. Nevertheless, the impact of these representations on the participants who described them suggested that they could be experienced as very 'real' indeed and could also influence the types of behaviours defined as acceptable. This is illustrated by the following quotes from our focus groups and interviews:

"Facebook has a Uni Lad group which regularly posts demeaning things about women and rape jokes, which I and my fellow female students find appalling. I have seen many male university Facebook friends have 'liked' this page." (Interviewee 16)

"[The netball team] put [naked calendar pictures] up on Facebook and the comments off the guys were just horrendous: 'One on the left's a munter' and 'one in the middle would get it'… It was basically like really rapey comments." (Participant A)

"If you've seen enough Facebook pages or whatever in your time with rape jokes where people are making comments…jokes for example if a girl's passed out….[you think] oh well, you have to have a 'sneaky feel' or something like that." (Interviewee 9)

Linked to this, the word 'banter' came up in our discussions with high frequency. As explained in our literature review, the concept of humour or 'banter' is often used to minimise the more offensive or damaging aspects of 'lad culture'. This was referred to by almost half our participants, many of whom saw the term as being almost entirely misused:

"Banter usually implies a two-way rapport. An exchange of jovial comments. But when it's one sided against someone's gender or sex [it's not], because we don't have a choice about whether or not we have a vulva or a penis." (Participant Q)

'Banter' was described as an excuse,[214] a means of getting away with being offensive,[215] a disguise for misogyny, sexism and homophobia,[216] a way of shaming those who felt offended,[217] and a way to refrain from taking topics such as sexual violence seriously.[218] Only one participant referred to it as 'just boys being boys'.[219] There is very little academic research on the use of the term 'banter' to downplay problematic aspects of 'lad culture', yet this was obviously a device that many of our participants found frustrating.

Some also expressed annoyance at women who participated in 'laddish' behaviours and activities, as the following interview quote shows:

"It's other girls that succumb to campus/lad culture that make a bad name for other females, we are not all the same and the majority of us respect ourselves on a night out to cover ourselves up so we don't look like prostitutes…some girls flaunt themselves as if they are starring in a burlesque show. Guys will take advantage of this, and because some girls do it they all assume that all females are this 'easy'." (Interviewee 21)

However, the majority of participants did not hold other women responsible, and opinion was divided when it came to the question of women's complicity. Almost a quarter felt that women could be a full part of 'lad culture', although a smaller number suggested that men saw women involved as a threat or merely as 'fair game' for sexist banter. Interestingly, the term 'laddette' was rejected, with participants preferring instead to refer to female participants as 'lads'. Interestingly, this gender-neutral terminology contradicted a broad agreement amongst our participants that 'lad culture', whether inclusive of women or not, incorporated clear-cut gender roles.

Educational experiences

Despite finding it challenging, many of the women we spoke to did not feel that 'lad culture' had directly impacted upon their studies. There was an overall sense that universities were positive academic environments for women, and also a belief that 'lad culture' was in many ways a culture of educational 'underachievement', something which is confirmed in the literature. However, during the course of the discussions many participants went on to raise issues such as the gendering of particular subjects and classroom interactions, sexism in the classroom, and negative attitudes towards feminism and gender-related topics. These could be linked to issues around gender in higher education more generally, as covered in the literature review, but could also be associated with 'lad culture' in some instances. For example, there was much discussion of the impact of drinking and going out on both male and female students' abilities to apply themselves. Several participants mentioned friends whose attendance had dropped due to heavy socialising and alcohol and drug use, illustrated in the following interview quote:

"[My friend] might be going to drop out because she's not managing to turn up to even half of her lectures and she's very tired but she never feels able to say 'no' ever, and because she's joined half the societies in the uni and is invited out every night, she always goes." (Interviewee 13)

Some of the women in our study had chosen to refrain from alcohol and drugs entirely, or had decided to curtail such activities in order to concentrate on their studies. One interviewee said:

"I was pretty heavily into drugs in 2010 I think, and that whole process definitely changed me a lot…[then] I just got a bit sick of it and I had some exams to do that I needed to buckle down to." (Interviewee 7)

The 'gendering' of higher education

Almost all our participants saw higher education as gendered in at least some respects. Subject segregation was discussed in our literature review: maths, sciences and engineering subjects are typically constructed as 'male' and arts, humanities and social sciences as 'female'. This was mentioned by over a third of our participants as having a direct effect on their educational experience. Most were studying 'feminine' subjects such as sociology, history and languages, with only a minority taking mathematics or sciences. This had not affected their enjoyment of their courses, but many felt it had influenced how their academic credentials were perceived by their male friends and acquaintances, as seen in the following quotes from the interviews:

"[My boyfriend] does stats, so there's a bit of a sense that what I'm doing is less valid. There have been a few instances with his friends, who also do stats, that my degree is 'not a real science'. They like to use that word. Not a 'real' science. And that has upset me on a number of occasions." (Interviewee 1)

"I've got a lot from guys outside [my course] saying 'you are just doing Philosophy' and so on, 'it's not a "real" degree'. Or it's, 'you must be more stupid if you are studying it than if you are studying something like Engineering or Physics'. And again, that's sort of 'we are guys and we are studying Physics and Engineering and you are a girl and you are studying Philosophy'." (Interviewee 9)

One of the focus group participants also referred to the fact that there seemed to be 'appropriate' courses for 'lads':

"For example bones, orthopaedics or something, is a really laddish area and there is a huge lad culture in competition within that bit of the hospital and within that bit of the student [population]." (Participant I)

If female-dominated fields are not viewed as equally meritorious with traditionally 'male' subjects, it seems that this could potentially contribute to a discourse of male superiority and the positioning of women as valued primarily for their appearance and sexuality, which has been identified as part of 'lad culture'. Furthermore, and confirming points made in much of the literature, male dominance was even identified on courses in which women were significantly more numerous, as reported by one interviewee:

"I find it interesting, on my politics course where the majority are girls, we are focusing on five thinkers and four of them are blokes. At one point we were talking about Machiavelli and we did a demonstration where everyone got into little groups and we had to pick a spokesperson to speak for them, I found it really interesting that out of a room that is majority women, 3 out of 4 groups picked a guy to speak…despite the fact that in most of the conversations the girls had been vocal or analysing the texts, people were still choosing guys to speak for them." (Interviewee 3)

Over a third of our participants reported that their male peers tended to be domineering in classroom environments, and/or that women students felt insecure. As one interviewee explained:

"It felt like a lot of the men were a lot more comfortable talking than the women were. There's always one guy that won't shut up in a seminar, there's always one. And it's almost always a man." (Interviewee 1)

Direct links were made by one focus group participant between this and 'lad culture': being part of a group of 'lads', she suggested, gave some men the confidence they needed to monopolise discussions:

"Being really loud and arrogant amongst their friends and then once they get into the lecture it's no different to them. They don't mind putting an idea out and getting a knock back because they are kind of used to this…this group culture almost makes them more confident because they achieve within that little group and then once they get to lectures they are
used to being loud and then they are used to putting ideas out there." (Participant P)

For many of the women we spoke to, challenging such behaviours was extremely difficult. Indeed, the only anecdote we were told related to a student asserting herself in relation to another woman:

"The only time that I have [confronted someone] was when it was a woman that had taken control of the class and had interrupted me repeatedly. And in the end I got so annoyed I said 'I don't think you should be doing that'. But then I'm not sure I would have felt comfortable saying that to a man." (Interviewee 1)

This ties in with the insecurity and low self-confidence many of our participants reported feeling in educational settings, especially in comparison with their male counterparts. One focus group participant talked of being 'terrified' of making a 'fool of herself',[220] and another mentioned the need for a 'safe space'.[221] Such self-doubt was thought by many to negatively impact on women students' engagement with the academic side of university life. There were also links made to themes evident in 'lad culture' by one focus group participant, who associated women's insecurities in educational settings with expectations around their appearance and body image:

"A lot of my female friends who are cripplingly quiet in lectures, they tend to be more insecure about the way they look and they don't want to draw attention to themselves in that way because they don't want everyone in the class to be looking at them, because there is so much focus on a girl's appearance. I sometimes feel girls who don't feel themselves attractive don't feel like they are allowed to be a centre of attention in the classroom. I don't think guys have that issue. They don't really care how they look. They don't mind people looking at them for that reason." (Participant P)

Our data, then, showed clear gender divides in terms of subject choice and status, classroom contribution, and self-confidence. A few participants also explicitly stated that despite the fact that women are now the majority group in many HEIs, their presence is not directly felt in

the culture of the institutions. There was some disappointment evident in relation to a lack of inspiring women educators, and one interviewee recounted an incident where she had felt uncomfortable addressing a sensitive topic with a male tutor.

"For my first term I had exclusively male supervisors, one of whom was very open with talking about sex, which in a literary context I am now fine with but it took time for me to get used to that and in my second ever supervision we were suddenly talking about what sex meant to Victorian women and various sexual acts and I was in a supervision with a male student and a male supervisor and I do remember thinking actually, I went back and said to my friend, 'I've never felt so female'. Because I just felt really uncomfortable, basically being made to talk about pretty explicitly sexual things with two men… my boyfriend who I was with just before university sexually harassed me and so I was at that time particularly uncomfortable with talking about sexual things, I'm much better about it now. So the combination of that and the fact that it was two men with me, I did feel really intimidated and I remember feeling really really glad when in my second term I had a female supervisor, I felt it made such a difference." (Interviewee 14)

For some participants there was also direct classroom sexism, emanating from both students and tutors, as described in the following quotes:

"As Co-President of Feminist Society, I have received multiple reports from students accounting explicit sexism and unnecessary highlighting of gender differences. I have also seen a lot of everyday, casual sexism in lectures and seminars. Normally people aren't even aware they are being sexist." (Interviewee 18)

"I've been silenced in a classroom environment by someone who is one of the lads if you like, because I didn't agree with something he said. He essentially did a repeat of what David Cameron did, the whole 'calm down dear' thing. Even the teacher who was female didn't challenge it. She just looked at her papers, shuffled them, looked really awkward. I knew she had heard, everyone had heard." (Participant Q)

"In lots of tutorials I've had lots of banter…I do Politics and History and within that there tends to be a slight focus on feminist theory at some point. It's always the time when the lad comes out. It's just like shit jokes and stuff like that. For example, if you try to make an announcement in [a lecture], everyone will immediately start shouting stuff…Something along the lines of being a 'shit feminist' or something. That kind of 'another one of those man haters.'" (Participant I)

Almost a quarter of participants complained about the lack of attention to feminism and topics related to women's issues in their departments. Gender studies was described by one interviewee as an 'obligatory week' which was 'just stuck on the end' and was 'not taken too seriously by some people'.[222] Furthermore, it was said to provoke negativity, from both male and female students alike:

"We did a gender and development module at uni… a couple of my female friends were like 'oh yeah well we did a bit of gender last term, not going to do a whole module on it. You know, I kind of feel like it's been covered'. And I was just thinking 'really? That's such an important thing to learn about, what women's lives are like in a developing world, how can you just think an hour on it was enough and now it's done?'" (Interviewee 4)

Most of the women in our study described themselves as feminists, which suggests that their academic interests were not being appropriately served by their curricula. This is a potential limitation of our sample, although there are reports of a resurgence of feminism amongst young women in the UK which suggest that it may be more representative than it appears.[223] Furthermore, given that women are now in the majority group in many HEIs, it is rather worrying that university curricula continued to be perceived as disproportionately focused on men by many of the students in our sample.

In addition to gender, ethnicity impacted on some participants' educational experiences, and age was also noted as a factor, particularly in relation to confidence. One disabled student reported that her hearing impairment had affected her educational experience in a major way. Class privilege was highlighted as a major

theme, with discussion around expectations for students to use laptops for note-taking in lectures and seminars, and the ways in which hobbies and interests infiltrated educational debates and emphasised different class positions. Class was also raised as an issue impacting upon confidence, as illustrated by the following interview quote:

"Some of them definitely look down on state education, I got loads out of [uni] and I don't think that was really affected by where I went to school, but there were times when I felt really small, certainly. For example, we were never really taught what the Enlightenment was at school, and I remember bringing that up in a supervision in first year, and both the public school educated boy who was in the supervision and the supervisor turned on me and were like, 'how did you even get into this university without knowing that?'" (Interviewee 14)

Social life

Perhaps partly because of their definition of campus culture as primarily sited in social activities, our participants felt that the effects of 'lad culture' could chiefly be seen in the social side of university life. Discussion mainly focused on extra-curricular activities and sports in particular, nights out, and social media. 'Laddish' behaviour in the social sphere included 'banter',[224] 'team bonding malarkey'[225] and heavy alcohol consumption.[226] Alcohol was mentioned by 38 of our 40 participants, and implicated in all the issues raised. Student drinking was also thought to have broader effects in terms of the relations between university cultures and 'host' cities, as described by one interviewee:

"Students behave appallingly on a night out and they wreck stuff and break things and they get into fights and if you walk around [my uni city] at night, it's terrifying if you're not drunk, if you haven't got those goggles on to ignore the violence going on, people are fighting and puking up in the streets and I can understand when I talk to people who are not at uni, they say 'I hate being in [the city] at night'. And it is really aggressive. Because during the day, culturally, there's so much going on, there's art gallery and cinemas and all kinds of things. But at night, it's just ugly." (Interviewee 13)

A quarter of our participants identified 'freshers' week' as the peak of student alcohol consumption, and some felt that this operated to the detriment of other forms of social engagement, as illustrated by one focus group participant, who said 'the activities were every night: going out, going out, going out.[227] Another member of the same group argued that this set the tone for the rest of the first year, saying:

"You start [going out] in fresher's week because you've been told what to do then. You automatically carry it on through the year." (Participant B)

Although many of our participants described freshers' week as a time of great enjoyment, for others the heavy drinking and socialising involved created anxiety, as described by another focus group member:

"It's like you are expected to go out. If you don't go out on freshers' then nobody will speak to you ever again." (Participant D)

A number of the women we spoke to identified peer pressure to consume alcohol within campus cultures. This was manifest in a number of activities, such as 'pennying' (a game where, if a penny is slipped into one's drink, one must then 'down' it), forced alcohol consumption or 'chugging', and insistence from fellow students to go on nights out. One of our interviewees recounted an anecdote about a friend who had asked for some water on a 'social', and instead was 'laid upside down and had vodka poured in her mouth',[228] and a focus group participant said:

"If you live with students you get pressured, 'Come out! Come out! You've got to come out with us! You've got to come out with us!' I have a flat mate who has on numerous occasions come home drunk because he didn't want the other person to be on their own." (Participant H)

However, not all the women we spoke to were susceptible to such pressures, and some, like the focus group participant below, had found ways to avoid 'compulsory' group behaviour:

"Last year I actually went and didn't do any of the things because I was like 'I'm not doing this. I'm not eating baby food. I'm four years older than all of you anyway. So you are not going to force me to do that'." (Participant G)

Social media sites such as Facebook were identified as a key tool for organising student social life, and a number of participants also pointed to their use by club promoters and other agents in targeting advertising.

However, such media were also seen as exclusive to those with the requisite resources and knowledge, which was a particular problem for international students. Additionally, they were described by a number of participants as key sites for the operation of 'lad culture', as illustrated by the following interview quote:

"They have fancy dress discos at [my uni]…the lads always used to try and come as naked as possible, relating to whatever the fancy dress theme was. And to one where I wasn't there, I was away for the weekend, apparently most of them went completely naked, and I was then added to a Facebook group which was for the appreciation of one of their naked bottoms." (Interviewee 14)

Extra-curricular activities (ECAs)

ECAs were discussed by all our study participants, with society involvement and other activities such as volunteering and part time work described as valuable sources of enjoyment and personal development. Only two students (one international) were more circumspect, pointing out that the idea of becoming 'well-rounded' through such activities was a peculiarly Western phenomenon.[229] However, several of the women we spoke to felt that ECAs were male-dominated, and also reported that feminist activities and activism were not well positioned or regarded on their campuses, as seen in the interview quote below:

"Some close friends from our feminist society have been violently verbally attacked by a group of lads while having a drink in the student union bar for simply being from the feminist society." (Interviewee 16)

One focus group participant, who was at the time president of her university's Gender Equality Movement, reported that the negative attitudes and behaviours directed towards her in this role had caused her to take time off from her studies due to mental illness.[230] An interviewee related a story about a sports team locking a member of her campus Feminist Society in a coach toilet on a trip, and pelting her with pornography magazines.[231] This incident illustrates the prevailing 'laddism' which many of our participants identified in

sports teams and societies especially: over half had such stories to tell, and there was frustration with the sexism which seemed to underpin activities so central to university social life. One interviewee in particular identified extreme levels of misogyny and rape supportive attitudes, which she linked with incidents of sexual violence at her institution. She told us:

"The phrase 'I'm going to put you in half' (that's fuck you 'til you can't walk, for anyone not in touch with lad language) was a phrase constantly shouted at female sports teams, whether it was during one of our matches whilst trying to concentrate on a game of sport or on a night out accompanied by a boob grab." (Interviewee 19)

She also related an incident in which she attended a 'sports social' and saw a member of the rugby team dressed in a vest reading 'Campus Rapist' on the front and 'It's not rape if you say surprise!' on the back.[232] Finally, she recounted an episode in which a woman walking home across her university campus had been accosted by twenty naked rugby players, as part of an initiation. The woman in question had been 'terrified', stated the interviewee, 'and reported that she didn't feel comfortable stepping foot on campus months later'. Furthermore, the interviewee could not recall any substantive action being taken by the university, despite the fact that the incident had been in the newspapers and reported to the police, apart from 'a few missed matches and a patronising fundraising event thrown by the team in aid of a domestic abuse charity'.[233]

Many of our participants mentioned sports initiations, which is interesting due to the lack of research on such activities in the UK and indeed, the belief that these are commonly confined to the US. Despite being banned by many UK HEIs, there was clear evidence that initiations were taking place, albeit under alternative nomenclature in order to avoid falling foul of institutional regulations. As one focus group participant told us, 'every single sports club still has initiations'.[234] There was a clear gender divide apparent, with examples of men's initiations including students drinking until they were sick and then being forced to drink their own vomit,[235] urinating on their teammates,[236] licking beer from each

other's testicles[237] and inserting hard-boiled eggs into their rectums.[238] Some were more extreme, as described by a focus group participant below:

"They got the new freshers to line up in a row completely naked. Then the three guys with the smallest penises were taken five miles away and abandoned and they had to find their way back. [In another example] someone had to take loads of roofies,[239] go take the entire bottom half of their clothes off, and run through this famous anal rape area of a park. And if they got to the end without passing out, it was impressive. And if they didn't, then they would just pass out and be left. They can be really brutal." (Participant K)

In comparison, women's initiations appeared relatively tame, with activities including having half a squash ball 'suckered' onto one's forehead,[240] and 'downing' a pint containing a live goldfish.[241] Nevertheless, there was discomfort and some distress involved, as related in the below quote from one of our focus groups:

"We got them all to line up on the floor on their hands and knees and they just got pelted with eggs, flour, oil, water, washing up liquid, silly string, squirty cream by all the older girls, the girls who were second and third year. We made them do bobbing for apples in a thing of baked beans, cat food, Worcester sauce, chilli powder. It was revolting, it was really really disgusting and I felt so uncomfortable but there's is nothing I could really do about it because they had done things last year that I voiced opposition to and it didn't make a difference." (Participant G)

The same focus group participant also related the story of a racist initiation which had made her feel uncomfortable:

"Last year it was our club captain's twenty first birthday and she's black and she's actually the only black person in our hockey club. Seven teams and fourteen people each and she's the only black person. It was her twenty first last year and they decided that the theme of her twenty first would be that we would all dress like her. But not only dress

like her, we would black up. And nobody saw a problem with this. I was the only person that was saying 'you can't do this. This is really really wrong.' And they were like, 'Why? she's okay with it.'" (Participant G)

Other women recounted upsetting experiences as a result of becoming caught up in or targeted by men's initiations, as seen in the following interview quote:

"It was the rugby night initiation and they stood on either side of the pavement so you had to walk through them, they were creating like a bridge thing with their hands, and they started shouting really loudly, in the main street, 'U.G.L.Y. – she's ugly, she's ugly' and I was just stood there, I was on the phone, I just didn't expect it, and maybe if I had been dressed like I was today, but I was dressed up, and maybe that's what they had to do, pick out the girl who was on her own, but there was a whole group of them, of rugby lads shouting it on the main street, and it was mortifying…some of them then saw I was a bit upset or taken aback as I was on the phone and so one of them was like 'ah it's just a joke' and I was like 'well it's not a joke, because you just humiliated me on a night out when there's loads of students about'…and I was actually quite upset by it because it really caught me off guard and I wasn't expecting it, I wouldn't say I get upset very much but I literally ran off… it ruined my night, I went home after that." (Interview 10)

Overall our data suggested sports initiations as an area of concern in relation to some of the more problematic aspects of 'lad culture'. They can be seen as a way of policing social space and preserving territory for the privileged, since the boundaries between 'in' and 'out' are often being drawn via racism, homophobia and misogyny.

Nights out

Going out was discussed by over half our participants as a key component of university life, and many of them pointed to the objectification of women in campus-based and independent social spaces as an issue

significantly affecting their experience. Club nights, students' union themed parties and nationwide events such as the commercial pub crawls were described in particularly negative terms, as being 'cattle markets' which were often just focused on 'preying on freshers'.[242] One of our interviewees recalled:

"I remember going into this nightclub and there were these rooms where men would stand around the edge and they were watching the women, and it was like a cattle market. They were picking the women, and it was like they were trying to pick the best steak, if you like. It's as if in this environment people don't see other people as people. They only see what they look like, whether they're wearing false nails, if their hair is perfect." (Interviewee 6)

Many participants felt that nightclub promoters and student night advertisers were major proponents of 'lad culture', through publicising cheap alcohol, the objectification of women, and the promise of sexual activity. It was thought that such 'laddish' themes were often used strategically in order to attract business from young men, as seen in the following quotes from the focus groups:

"In first year there were definitely club nights which were advertising this image of slutty girls… trying to have this image of girls who are going to put out whatever, using them as bait for the guys to come." (Participant P)

"There is a night in [my uni city] which is just called 'Horny' and the leaflet for it was three pages…it was just girls in bikinis or topless in Jacuzzis with guys. Two girls kissing. Then there's a night called Tequila where they send you sexual texts… really explicit. And that's just the advertising campaign." (Participant K)

One focus group participant referred to an advert for a student club night which depicted a woman with silver duct tape across her chest and genitals and tied to a wall by her ankles and wrists:

"They were handing these out, advertising this 'anything but clothes concept'…Most people go dressed [as] the picture suggests, [in] duct tape… I challenged them, "do you not think this is

degrading to women?" and I was laughed at by this cheerleader squad." (Participant Q)

Fancy dress themes and activities such as jelly wrestling were a recurring point of conflict for the women in our study, with nights such as 'pimps and hos' and 'steak and blowjob' being depicted as particularly problematic and reflecting an attitude of male ownership of women. One focus group participant, discussing a 'Carnage' themed pub crawl, said 'it's kind of your lads are your pimps and they're are the people in charge and the whores are the girls [who] are there to stand and look pretty'.[243] Another participant described a popular bar crawl night in her university city entitled 'The Fox Hunt', in which women dressed as foxes and men as huntsmen.[244] One of the reasons students were thought to buy into these types of events was the prospect of a 'pull', which links to our earlier discussion about the sexualised basis of 'laddish' behaviours and activities. Almost a quarter of our participants expressed discomfort with this aspect of student nightlife, particularly in relation to ideas about the disposability of women and their status as little more than sexual objects, as seen in the following quotes:

"One particular group used to compete to see how many numbers they could get of girls in a night – they used to put them on tissue paper "so the girls can't text us and get clingy" – [they then] used to throw these tissues away." (Interviewee 8)

"One of the guys had to go into the middle of this massive circle, get down on one knee and he was given the 'dunce of the day' [title] or something. And he had to recount a tale of taking some girl back to his, and I think they had anal sex or something, and he had to announce this in front of the whole thing and everyone was just laughing and jeering." (Participant K)

Some participants also identified a hierarchy amongst groups of 'lads', based on levels of sexual experience. One focus group participant said:

"There was a guy who arrived at uni a virgin and he'd been telling everyone this and telling everyone how he disliked this. And the day he lost his virginity he

got bought a pint and it was 'captain virgin is no longer!' and he downed a pint in front of everybody… At the end of the night he collapsed and was brought home to the hall [and] carried up to his room… because of all this pressure from all of the people in the boys' hall, from all the people in that bar…You had watched this guy come in as this shy person and I kind of felt really sorry for him…at that moment in time there was no choice for him." (Participant H)

However, other participants pointed out that women students also engaged in 'pulling' culture, seen in the focus group excerpts below:

"The Chino Challenge is that you get 5 points if you pull a boy wearing chinos. You get 2 points if you pull a boy who's in fancy dress. You get points taken off you if you pull a boy that isn't on a sports team. But this is very much like a 'lad o meter'. It's like, 'oh yes you've got so many lad points'." (Participant G)

"We have this event in Law School, it's called Mummies and Daddies. You get random people from different years all put together in a family. So the fourth years are the 'parents' and the first years are the freshers. But it definitely goes both ways. Fourth year mums will pull first year boys." (Participant S)

This is interesting in light of the double standard discussed earlier, through which women who engage in profuse sexual activity are denigrated as 'sluts' and do not enjoy the same position at the top of the social hierarchy as their male counterparts. It is possible for such 'slut-shaming' to operate alongside the behaviours described above however, echoing the findings of our literature review that 'lad cultures' may be subject to change and may incorporate different activities, behaviours and values dependent on context.

Despite some of the difficult experiences related in this section, most of the women we spoke to valued their social activities. However, a quarter felt that 'laddish' behaviours had prevented them from fully engaging with the social side of university life. One interview participant said that her university experience would have been more 'integrated' if she had not been discouraged from participating in society activity.

Another interviewee said:

"[Laddish behaviour] generally makes me not want to go certain places, [or] talk to lads I'm friends with on their own." (Interviewee 8)

Some participants actively took measures to evade situations where they might encounter 'lad culture'. This included arranging nights out to bypass certain clubs, not joining university societies which were seen as particularly 'laddish', crossing the street if they saw a large group of men on a night out, avoiding being alone with particular male friends when drunk, staying 'on the move' in social spaces in response to unwanted attention, or sometimes leaving a social setting entirely. As one of our interviewees explained:

"You kind of stay away from certain bars on certain nights, so I wouldn't ever go on a Wednesday to [name of club night], I'd go to more, I hate the word alternative, but the smaller bars that you're less likely to bump into sports teams in." (Interviewee 12)

This supports the findings of our literature review, confirming that within the social sphere 'lad culture' can operate as a means of making women students feel uncomfortable and has the direct or indirect function of reserving certain territories for men. Bearing in mind the importance of social activity to university life and the fact that our research participants defined 'campus culture' as primarily located in the social realm, this is a potentially serious problem in terms of women's university experience.

Sex and relationships

In addition to its impact on educational and social spheres, our participants identified a profound influence of 'lad culture' on personal life. Issued raised included misogynist jokes or 'banter', pressure around sex and disdain towards committed relationships, and sexual harassment and violence.

Verbal misogyny

Over a third of our participants referred to jokes or 'banter' which they perceived as misogynist and which made them feel uncomfortable. Themes ranged from 'everyday' sexism and objectification and ideas about male ownership of women, to more extreme statements which were felt to reveal rape-supportive attitudes. One interviewee referred to jokes made by male friends, such as 'you're a woman, make me a sandwich',[245] while a focus group participant related 'banter' about women such as 'body like Baywatch, face like Crime Watch'.[246] Another interviewee explained:

"If a guy decides a girl is his, whether she likes him or not, no one else is going to get with her because they all know that the leader of the pack has decided, he kind of owns them, so sometimes that can be quite weird in social situations when you're like 'well who said I like you or that I want to go out with you? So that kind of thing is quite bizarre." (Interviewee 10)

It was felt that such verbal misogyny could easily spill over into jokes about sexual violence, as illustrated in the following anecdote from the focus groups:

"I was on a bus once…there's a lot of buses in [my city] with a lot of lads …they started making quite horrific rape jokes and [there were] quite a lot of individual women on the bus and you could see that everyone on the bus was really uncomfortable with this as you would hope most people would be. They could kind of sense it, but they were like 'wahaay blah blah!' like firing them off. And someone made a particularly horrible one… and there was kind of like

a mood change and one of the guys was like, 'Don't worry ladies none of us have been convicted yet!' and… [it was] like 'you guys just can't take the banter.' And it's not banter, it's people's real lives." (Participant I)

Participants also described difficulties with challenging such behaviours, with one focus group member saying 'you get shouted down and told that you are talking crap and that you are obviously in need of sexual release', adding that she was told 'all the time how I don't have a sense of humour and all this kind of stuff and how I hate freedom of speech'.[247]

Pressure around sex, disdain towards relationships

As seen in our literature review, sex is an integral part of student culture, and many of our participants reported seeing university as a place to experiment with sex and sexualities. However, there was also a sense of pressure around engaging in a high frequency of sexual activity, and a disdain towards committed relationships, identified by a third of the women we spoke to. This was directly linked to 'lad culture', with one interviewee identifying a 'race' amongst groups of 'lads' to be 'the person who's the most open about sex, and the person who talks about it most'. She also recounted that men and women who expressed discomfort around overtly sexual topics and behaviours were often dismissed as being 'squares' and 'virgins'.[248] A focus group participant referred to pressure on women to be receptive to sexual attention, saying:

"If you go out and you're told all the time, like being hit on all the time and a lot of the time if you say 'no', people are like, 'oh why are you frigid?' was the word that was used." (Participant H)

Perhaps linked to this obligation to accept and participate in sexualised behaviours and 'banter', some

of our participants described women as being complicit in this culture, as seen in the following interview quotes:

"We were a corridor of girls in halls, and you do talk about sex a lot, and you do judge the other women a lot on how sexually available they are, how they dress, how many people they'd slept with."
(Interviewee 4)

"I know a few examples of girls with quite low self-esteem and they think that a way to boost it, I suppose as well to make themselves feel wanted, they go out, they get drunk and they get with guys. What they don't realise is that the guys don't treat them very well, don't talk about them very well behind their back." (Interviewee 9)

For many participants, the emphasis on both talking about and engaging in numerous sexual interactions influenced the dynamics of personal relationships, in ways such as pre-defining who should be found attractive, positioning committed partners as an inconvenience or 'extra baggage',[249] and shaping sexual expectations. One focus group participant said:

"There is no place for a diversity of attraction. Because as a pack you have to have the same mentality because otherwise you are not a pack. It kind of feeds in. You get shit from the other members of your group if you get with someone who they consider to be ugly. You get teased or other stuff. So it's very narrow minded as to what a woman is." (Participant I)

An interviewee recounted an anecdote about a friend who had experienced several men being 'forceful' or 'insisting on doing certain things', because 'that's what girls are supposed to do'.[250] This normalisation of particular types and/or frequencies of sexual activity intersected in potentially problematic ways with ethnicity and culture, and was identified by a British-Chinese focus group participant as being a particular issue for some international students. She said:

"Most Chinese girls didn't [sic.] want to have sex too early. But if they have Western guys as their boyfriends then they have a struggle like that because the boyfriends want to have sex, but the girls didn't want to." (Participant L)

Other participants also reported feeling uncomfortable or restricted in their personal relationships as a result of prevailing sexual norms and values amongst student communities. One interviewee explained:

"I think it's held me back a lot in terms of relationships at uni, I'm very wary, that's my kind of personality as well, I'm not as openly free as my friends, but even what I consider 'nice guys', guys that are very friendly, you get on really well with, when it came [sic.] down to sex and relationships, you actually realise that you just think 'oh my god!', the kind of things they would say or expect,. You'd just think that's not normal, that's not appropriate, that's not how you treat someone." (Interviewee 10)

Another recounted her history with an ex-boyfriend who seemed to have a 'split personality', recalling 'there was the way he was with me, and then the way he was when he was with his friends'. She went on to say:

"He managed to keep the two very separate, and he managed to keep myself and his friends very separate, until he couldn't because he went to a wedding. The way he behaved with his mates was quite frankly shocking and appalling, and I just thought 'you are one of the ugliest people I have ever met' because his personality came through and I didn't like what I saw at all. And it was this horrible mentality, this judgemental way of behaving, especially around women and about women. The conversations they would have were just vulgar. They weren't funny, they were horrible. And I just looked at him and thought I didn't want to be with him anymore." (Interviewee 6)

Many of our participants expressed the opinion that 'lad culture' positioned committed relationships in negative ways, with one focus group member reporting that students in relationships could be 'ostracised',[251] and an interviewee identifying pressures from 'lads' she knew to avoid or end committed relationships and 'play the field'.[252]

Sexual harassment and violence

Two-thirds of our study participants talked about sexual harassment and violence, describing it as a 'normal' part of university life and making links between these

experiences and the sexism and misogyny evident in 'lad culture'. As one interviewee said:

"I don't know anyone, any of my female friends who haven't had some kind of encounter that was harassment whether it be verbal or physical since they've been at university." (Interviewee 10)

There were a variety of examples provided of verbal sexual harassment, and it was a common experience for most of the women in our study. Indeed, one interviewee asked:

"Why can't I just walking [sic.] down the road without someone shouting at me, it's just degrading, it ruins your day, you can't be walking to where you're going 'cause someone verbally assaults you because of your gender and nothing else." (Interviewee 5)

She also described a hill in her university city as the 'catcall hill that you go to get beeped at' and went on to say that 'almost every other time' she walked up or down this particular hill 'there's someone who like, beeps their horn, or shouts out the window, or does something ridiculous'.[253] Participants also made reference to specific sexual comments which had been directed at them, for instance 'with that lipstick you'd make my cock look like a barber's pole'[254] or 'get [your] minge out'.[255] One focus group member reported being told she needed a 'good hard shag' after she challenged such verbal harassment.[256] This type of sexual harassment was thought to be more likely to emanate from a 'pack', as explained by another of our focus group participants:

"They will start in a pack sort of way maybe picking on a girl or something and being like 'show us your tits love' or whatever. Or kind of being really quite not okay and then if you say anything it's kind of 'wahaay!' There's no reasoning it's like 'we've got our pack so whatever'." (Participant I)

In some of the women's experiences, verbal harassment had become physical, for instance in the following incident described in our focus groups, which involved both indecent exposure and physical violence:

"I've been pushed down the stairs of a bus before because I stood up for a girl that a pack of lads were picking on in quite a sexually violent way and then no one did anything and then all the guys started chanting, 'she doesn't want to have sex with you' about me because I was standing up for this woman who they got their penises out on the bus [in front of] and started being 'wahaay' and I was like 'I'm sorry, fuck off! That's not okay,' and then they pushed me down the stairs and then I had to get off the bus, I can't really do anything." (Participant I)

Sexual molestation was also reported by some participants, and often positioned as just part of a 'normal' night out. One focus group participant reported an evening in a club where both herself and a friend experienced 'literally just hands just groping us as we walked along'.[257] An interviewee similarly said: 'many times I have been out and either been groped by groups of lads on a social or things like that, or actually insulted as I am not wearing 'sexy enough' clothes.'[258] Another interviewee reported that a nightclub doorman had offered to let her into a club without identification if she showed him her breasts. She also said there were 'guys in the queue going 'wahayy!' like that, and egging me on'.[259] This type of sexual molestation and harassment was a cause of distress for many of our participants, as voiced in the following interview quote:

"It makes me feel angry that someone would invade my personal space like that, and just take it upon themselves to think that this is ok." (Interviewee 6)

However, many also reported that this type of behaviour was often minimised or dismissed, which made it difficult to challenge or report it. As one interviewee said:

"It's 'take it as a compliment' is what everybody says when you complain about it, 'it's a compliment, you should be pleased, you get to complain the day it stops, not now!' but it does happen a lot and it's just normal, and it doesn't just happen to women who are skimpily dressed or young, it happens to all the women on the streets when the students are drunk, it's just what happens." (Interviewee 13)

One of our focus group participants described a male friend who would 'start getting really handsy' when drunk, but who would 'try and laugh it off' when sober. She recalled a conversation with this man and another mutual close male friend, where both men had told her: 'well you know guys don't inherently know that it's not okay to touch girls without their consent'.[260] This suggests potentially serious levels of disrespect and a disregard for sexual consent which can be seen as a risk factor for sexual violence, as also highlighted in the following quotes from the interviews:

"There's this culture of 'she's say no because she's playing hard to get' when actually no means no and the amount of friends I've had who've had to repeatedly say 'no' or like 'no I don't want to go home with you' or 'I don't want to sleep with you' or 'just because I've invited you into my house doesn't mean'. This constant wearing someone down. And I have actually had friends who in the end they just went along with it because they didn't know what else to say." (Interviewee 10)

"I have heard a lot of reports of girls feeling obliged to kiss/sleep with a guy if he has bought her a drink, drinks, dinner." (Interviewee 18)

Sadly, a few of our participants had sexual assault stories to tell. Most of these concerned people they knew rather than themselves, although it is possible that the focus group setting in particular was not conducive to personal disclosures of sexual violence. One focus group participant referred to:

"…a friend who had some guy that even put his hand down her pants on the dance floor. And she was a really quiet girl and she didn't say anything. She told me when she got out of the club. I was so angry I wanted to go and punch him, but I couldn't find him in the club. I've heard of a few friends who have had things like that happened that have gone past a joke. I think guys think it's okay to do that." (Participant P)

Another participant in our focus groups said that she knew 'a lot of people that have sort of been very drunk and up for it and passed out and someone hasn't known when to stop.'[261] One of our interviewees

discussed sexual violence in detail, telling a story about two mutual friends which encapsulated many of the difficult aspects of violence which occurs within closed communities:

"We are friends with this guy and [my friend] fell asleep in his bed when she was quite drunk and she woke up to find him fingering her…she was obviously extremely distressed about this, left immediately, came over crying…but she doesn't want anyone to know about it…she doesn't want anyone to feel negatively about him…She says 'oh well he's still your friend…I don't want it to become my word against his or [have] anyone turning their back on him or anything like that'. She says that quite a few of her friends especially from other universities have had situations like that." (Interviewee 9)

This particular interviewee made a direct association between this incident and the 'lad culture' she had observed on her campus:

"It shows that the whole lad culture, people making these sort of jokes, people taking it not seriously, it can lead to things that are serious...I think there is definitely a correlation between all the jokes all the inappropriateness… if you've seen enough Facebook pages or whatever in your time with rape jokes and where people are making comments…for example if a girl's passed out…'oh well you have to have a sneaky feel'…it's quite uncomfortable when you realise it may not all be just laughs." (Interviewee 9)

These quotes corroborate some of the themes discussed in our literature review, illustrating the ways in which misogyny and the objectification of women at attitudinal level can shape behaviour and create a culture conducive to sexual violence. Furthermore, there was a consensus amongst our participants that action in relation to such incidents, especially within their institutions, was rare. Some said they would be unsure where to go at institutional level in order to report a crime, and others expressed a belief that universities expected women to take responsibility for such incidents and 'keep themselves safe', with little effort to improve campus security or tackle perpetrator behaviour. As one interviewee said:

"The uni are trying to tell girls so much to protect themselves, they're not for boys…[we] make sure we stick as a group or stick to light areas, avoid dark streets and stuff like that." (Interviewee 2)

There were a handful of positive stories: when two sexual assaults and a rape occurred in a focus group participant's HEI city last year, she explained how 'the uni was good, it started 'walking buses' from the library back across the campus'.[262] One interviewee, who had experienced sexual violence on a night out, described how studying feminism had helped her to deal with her feelings:

"I had quite a bad experience with a guy on a night out and it just made me feel quite vulnerable… because I never told anyone and I felt quite a lot of shame about it…so when I studied psychology, I started looking into a lot about victim blaming and it was around the same sort of time that Slut Walk started and the Minister of Justice in England said that some rapes are more important than others… so it sort of hit home…[academia] helped me a lot… you read psychological analyses and stuff and you see that you're allowed to have those feelings, and that's quite good because you're like 'I'm allowed to have these feelings for a little while and then I can move on from them'." (Interviewee 12)

Nevertheless, the data presented in this section show a bleak picture of high levels of sexual harassment and molestation, and 'laddish' behaviours and values which can construct an environment conducive to sexual violence. Given the information presented in our literature review, about the high prevalence of sexual harassment and violence on campuses and amongst student communities in general, this gives cause for concern.

Conclusion

Our qualitative study of 40 women students found that they defined campus culture as largely located in the social side of university life, led by undergraduates and significantly shaped by alcohol. Campus cultures were also defined as gendered, and strongly connected with if not inseparable from 'lad culture'. '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.

'Lad culture' affected our participants in educational, social and personal spheres of their university lives. While many felt that its impact was limited in educational settings, they also described these environments as 'gendered', and during our discussions it became evident that many factors in this gendering could be linked to elements of 'lad culture'. This was particularly the case in terms of the operation of privilege and the mutually supportive relationship between belonging to a group of 'lads' and feeling confident in class. 'Laddism' was thought to be particularly influential upon the social side of university life, which our participants saw as the major site for the creation of campus culture. Extra-curricular activities and sports in particular were singled out, and sexism and sexual harassment/molestation were also identified as common on nights out, where our participants reported pressure to engage in profuse sexual activity. This had caused many to alter or limit their social lives. Participants also felt that 'lad culture' had infiltrated their personal lives through misogynist jokes and 'banter' and sexual values which made it difficult to begin and sustain committed relationships. Stories of sexual harassment and molestation were common, and there were also accounts of sexual violence.

Through this research we have begun to fill identified gaps in the literature in relation to campus cultures in the UK and especially the social side of UK campus life and students' intimate and sexual relationships. We have also continued existing work towards a definition of UK 'lad culture' and explored its impact upon women students, and have started to contextualise this within broader themes such as the backlash against feminism, the 'crisis of masculinity', the recession and the gendering and policy landscape of higher education. The experiences of women students have also been examined where they intersect with other aspects of their identities such as social class, ethnicity, culture, sexual orientation and disability. Indeed, it is significant that the conversations in the interviews and focus groups did not solely focus on gender. For almost a quarter of our participants gender was not a significant component of their identities, with one interviewee saying:

> *"My gender's never at the forefront of my mind. I just generally feel like a person unless I feel like something's being done that's infringing upon my rights or I'm being patronised and that might have something to do with my being a woman…I felt like a person first and a woman second."* (Interviewee 4)

Others had ambivalent relationships to femininity and the term 'woman': for one interviewee, being queer and identifying as butch was significant, and she reported that she had 'played with the idea' of transitioning.[263] Social class was mentioned by six of the women we talked to, with one focus group participant saying: *'I notice more like, I'm a poor kid and you're a rich kid more than you're boy I'm a girl.'*[264] Age was highlighted by seven participants, and one interviewee referred to the 'sense of wanting to fit in' as being more related to this than to 'lad culture'. One of our six self-identified disabled students described her disability as having affected her educational experiences in a major way. However, for all these participants this was not to the exclusion of other factors, including elements of 'lad culture' such as heavy drinking, sexist attitudes and

sexual harassment.[265] This perhaps speaks to the importance and relative influence of 'lad culture' as a phenomenon which can affect women students across a variety of different social and identity categories.

Some participants reported that women could also engage in or be complicit with 'lad culture', and some undoubtedly viewed the issues we discussed as more serious than others. There were also moments of contradiction in our data which supported the idea that 'lad culture' is not homogenous or monolithic, and may be subject to change dependent on context. Our findings, then, do not suggest that all men engage in 'laddish' behaviours all the time: indeed, the behaviours discussed in this report may be attributable to a minority. However, these 'lads' seemed to dominate the social side of university life for many of our participants, and many also identified this social sphere as the key site for the formation and operation of campus culture. This suggests that the relationship between campus culture and 'lad culture' should be cause for concern.

NUS responds to the research findings

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It is difficult to read of the way that 'lad culture' has affected women students and to consider the role that the student movement may have had in allowing this culture to thrive on our campuses. However, it is important to acknowledge that this is happening, to take responsibility for whatever part we have played in it, and to take action to respond to this problem.

The research findings presented above have wide ranging implications across the student movement, and indeed outside of students' unions as well. It is clear from the research that 'lad culture' affects every area of student life to a greater or lesser degree.

An important frame for this discussion, established by the literature review, is that we are talking about 'lad culture' and not 'lads'. 'Lad culture' is a set of values and behaviours, which individual people may dip in and out of, participating in it and subscribing to its beliefs at some points in time and not at others. This means that 'lad culture' and its damaging effects will only be overcome by a cultural shift in higher education communities, not by demonising or targeting certain groups of students.

Campus culture

It is interesting to note that the literature review found examples of studies of campus culture in the US which are centred on intellectual values and a learning community in addition to social activities and other areas of university life. The campus culture described by the women students in this research is almost exclusively focussed on the social side of the student experience, with alcohol as a major component to students' social activities.

Although this was perceived as the dominant form of campus culture by the research participants, it was also clear that there is not universal satisfaction with this state of affairs. Dissatisfaction and a feeling of frustration came both from students who had a specific

reason for not wanting to engage with that version of campus culture (such as a cultural objection to drinking excessive amounts of alcohol) and also from students who have no particular objection to alcohol, but would have preferred a more political, intellectual, or creative culture as part of their experience of higher education.

Although clearly institutions and students' unions do not have the power to dictate the culture on their campus, it seems that both institutions and students' unions can do more to make their campus cultures more positive and inclusive.

The role of gender

As the literature review has demonstrated, 'lad culture' is fundamentally a form of masculinity. In light of this, understanding the experiences of women students in particular is an important task in combatting 'lad culture'. From the literature, it is clear that although women may now make up the majority of students in higher education, it does not follow that their experiences as students is unproblematic, or that higher educational cultures are now responsive to women's needs.

The research findings show that, along with other parts of their identity, students' gender is a key factor shaping their experience in higher education. Women students' experiences in the classroom, in extra-curricular activities, and in their social and personal lives, are all shaped by their gender and by 'lad culture' in particular. Furthermore, the research shows that these areas cannot be treated as distinct but in fact all interact with one another so that what a student experiences at a nightclub and how they think about their course are inextricably linked. It is clear that a joined-up approach will be needed to tackle the problems associated with 'lad culture'.

The role of other facets of students' identity

Despite the importance of gender in understanding lad culture, it is also clear that 'lad culture' can affect a wide variety of students. The research found evidence of the way that 'lad culture' also endorses homophobia, for instance in the way that sexual acts between men are positioned as inherently demeaning in many initiation activities, and the valuing of 'banter' which is often homophobic. The research also found at least some evidence of the way that racism can also manifest itself within 'lad culture', in the examples of students 'blacking up' as part of a birthday celebration, and of Black international students who expressed discomfort with the sexualised elements of 'lad culture.'[266]

Similarly, although the research did not specifically address this, it is easy to see how the dominance of 'lad culture' could impact upon students with religious beliefs or faiths that emphasise modesty or do not allow alcohol consumption (or only allow it in moderation), issues which have been identified in previous research by the Equality Challenge Unit.[267] Similarly, 'lad culture' raises concerns for the treatment of disabled students, who (depending on their disability) may not conform to 'lad culture's' prescriptive expectations of physical appearance and ways of being.

There is a need to tackle the problems presented by 'lad culture' and the set of values it represents, not only to improve the experiences of women students but in order to enable all students to study in a safe, positive, empowering environment.

'Lad culture' in the nightclub

The research established that socialising and nightlife are a key part of campus culture. Given this, the extent to which 'lad culture' shapes students' experiences on nights out is particularly disturbing. It does not seem to be possible to go on a night out without encountering 'lad culture' and the sexism and misogyny associated with it, both verbal and physical.

We know from previous NUS research into women students' experiences of sexual harassment and violence that these experiences are alarmingly prevalent on campuses across the UK.[268] However, the current research has revealed the extent to which verbal misogyny, sexual harassment, and violence are normalised in student nights out. For a student to view being groped in a nightclub as a 'normal' part of a night out is clearly an unacceptable state of affairs and underlines the damage to students' well-being that is represented by 'lad culture'.

In some cases, the research does not establish whether the experiences being described are occurring in a venue run by the students' union or in an independent establishment. However, there is no doubt that incidents like the ones described in the research do occur in students' union bars and clubs. Many students' unions have taken strong steps towards responsible retailing and zero tolerance to sexual harassment, but it is clear that 'lad culture' is an opposing force to these initiatives and must be addressed.

Some of the examples cited in the research suggest that commercial nightclubs and promoters are amongst the worst offenders in terms of perpetuating 'lad culture'. It seems as if some businesses find exploiting this culture to be a convenient way of advertising to students. However these companies may not be aware, as the research shows, that other students are actually being put off from going to these establishments precisely because of the prevalence of 'lad culture' there.

'Lad culture' in clubs, societies, and sports teams

Extra-curricular activities such as clubs, societies, and sports teams are one of the primary ways that students engage in their campus communities and their students' union. They can also be very important creators of future opportunity as the networks and experience that students build by participating in extra-curricular activities can be transferred into the world of work. The research demonstrates that 'lad culture' also operates in this arena, where it is creating an alienating environment and restricting students' choices.

In the research, 'lad culture' was most commonly associated with sports teams, and especially with

initiations. As with the discussion of nightlife above, initiations and sports teams' social events were seen as major contributors to 'lad culture' on campus as they are closely associated with consumption of excessive amounts of alcohol as well as with activities that involve misogyny and homophobia as a matter of course.

Previous research from NUS has shown that initiations and the prevalence of 'lad culture' in sports teams can prevent lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans (LGBT) students from joining sports teams;[269] this research confirms a similar situation for many women students, regardless of whether they define as LGBT.

While it is disappointing to read the findings around initiations, they are not surprising. Institutions and students' unions have been aware of problematic initiations for some time now and many institutions and students' unions have taken action in recent years. In some cases initiations are banned outright, while in others policies are put in place to attempt to tone down the problematic elements of initiations. Most recently, British Universities and Colleges Sport, the national governing body for sport in higher education, will now require each of its members to provide a code of conduct on initiations and alcohol abuse in sport.[270] These initiatives are important, but the research presented here demonstrates that initiations can continue to happen in practice even when they are banned or restricted in theory. This underscores the importance of understanding 'lad culture' as a phenomenon needs to be combatted through cultural change in addition to robust policies and procedures.

However, going beyond the role of initiations in restricting student choice in extra-curricular activities, the research has uncovered other ways in which 'lad culture' is shaping student participation in clubs and societies. The research included many participants who were active in feminist societies and activities, and the extent to which they are ridiculed or otherwise treated negatively as a result of their passion for gender equality and women's rights is troubling, and again, is at odds with the values of the student movement, which unequivocally believes in equality and liberation.

'Lad culture' in the classroom

As academic achievement is so intricately linked with students' future success, it will be important to understand whether 'lad culture' is affecting students' education itself. In this research, 'lad culture' was viewed as primarily existing on the social side of university, and many participants in the research did not directly link their experiences with 'lad culture' to any negative impacts on their education. However, they did clearly describe their educational experience as gendered, and many of the experiences they described are in fact closely related to 'lad culture'. The fact that many women students were reluctant to explicitly identify 'lad culture' as impacting upon their educational experience, when their accounts of classroom experience so closely mirror the experiences they described outside of the classroom, may point to a further way in which 'lad culture' has been normalised and invisibilised within educational settings.

The research found evidence that class discussions can be intimidating environments for women students, who sometimes refrain from participating in discussions due to feeling embarrassed or uncomfortable. Worryingly, these feelings often came from experiences of being 'silenced' by men classmates during discussions, which apparently go unchallenged by the lecturer leading the session. Participants linked this behaviour from men students to 'lad culture' and the 'pack' element of it, which makes people feel emboldened to be publically disrespectful because they are part of a group.

The research showed, however, that silencing is not only a case of being shouted down by a student in class, it also happens when women's and feminist issues in the curriculum are ridiculed as a form of 'banter'. This kind of dismissal is counterproductive to learning, and alienates women students who identify as feminists. It is clearly linked to 'lad culture' and its use of 'banter' in a way that denies inequalities and oppressions.

It is also worth noting that the research identified 'lad culture' as explicitly anti-educational achievement. Its presence in higher education could clearly be affecting the achievements of those students who do participate in it as well as those who experience its effects from the outside.

Recommendations and next steps

Recommendations and next steps

As should be clear from the above discussion, the student movement must take action to combat the emergence of 'lad culture' in higher education and the negative impacts this is having on students. This is not something that NUS can accomplish alone. We will need to work with partners inside and outside the student movement to determine how best to respond to this culture that is at odds with our values and is damaging to our students. We know that this cannot be achieved overnight, and it will require a nuanced and thoughtful response rather than a rush to judgement.

To that end, we recommend convening a summit of stakeholders to identify next steps in addressing the research findings.

We will work towards convening a commission to develop a national strategy to respond to 'lad culture' in higher education.

The commission will be chaired by NUS and will feature representatives from students' unions and institutions, student sports and societies organisations, the student entertainments, nightlife, and alcohol industries, and equalities and women's organisations. Its national strategy will lay out a clear path to tackling 'lad culture' and creating a safer, more positive, more empowering culture on our campuses.

Endnotes

Endnotes

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[205] Interviewee 20

[206] Participant K

[207] Interviewee 15

[208] Interviewee 6

[209] Interviewee 15

[210] Participant J

[211] Interviewee 6

[212] Interviewee 8

[213] Interviewee 10

[214] Interviewee 7, 10, 14, Participant G, I

[215] Interviewee 9, 12, 15, Participant I, K, M

[216] Interviewee 2, 8, 17, 18

[217] Interviewee 9, 11, 12, Participant N,

[218] Interviewee 12

[219] Interviewee 11

[220] Participant R

[221] Participant Q

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[227] Participant C

[228] Interviewee 14

[229] Participant K, O

[230] Participant Q

[231] Interviewee 19

[232] Interviewee 19

[233] Interviewee 19

[234] Participant G

[235] Participant D

[236] Interviewee 20

[237] Participant I

[238] Participant H

[239] Roofies or Rohypnol is an intermediate acting benzodiazepine used as a hypnotic, sedative, anticonvulsant, anxiolytic and skeletal muscle relaxant drug and commonly used in drug-facilitated sexual assault.

[240] Participant C

[241] Participant G

[242] Participant I, K

[243] Participant H

[244] Interviewee 18

[245] Interviewee 11

[246] Participant J

[247] Participant Q

[248] Interviewee 13

[249] Interviewee 8

[250] Interviewee 10

[251] Participant K

[252] Interviewee 14

[253] Interviewee 5

[254] Participant Q

[255] Interviewee 8

[256] Participant Q

[257] Participant K

[258] Interviewee 17

[259] Interviewee 7

[260] Participant J

[261] Participant H

[262] Participant R

[263] Interviewee 3

[264] Participant D

[265] Interviewee 2

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview participants

Participant number	Sex/ gender	Subject	Study status	Age	Sexual orientation	Relationship status	Ethnicity
1	Female	Politics	Full-time	22	Heterosexual	In a relationship	White British
2	Female	History	Full-time	21	Heterosexual	In a relationship	White British
3	Female	Sociology and Politics	Full-time	19	Bisexual / asexual	Single	Eastern European Jewish
4	Female	Decelopment Studies	Part-time	32	Heterosexual	In a relationship	White British
5	Female	Media Arts	Full-time	20	Heterosexual	Dating	Black British
6	Female	Social and Cultural History	Full-time	32	Heterosexual	Single	White British
7	Female	Sociology and Social Policy	Full-time	22	Queer	In a relationship	White British
8	Female	English and Communication Studies	Full-time	20	Heterosexual	Single	White British
9	Female	Philosophy	Full-time			In a relationship	White British
10	Female	Neuroscience	Full-time	22	Heterosexual	Single	British Asian
11	Female	Sociology	Full-time	18	Heterosexual	Single	White British
12	Female	History and Italian	Full-time	22	Heterosexual	Single	White British
13	Female	Mathematics	Full-time	20		Single	White European
14	Female	English Literature	Part-time	22	Heterosexual	Engaged	White British
15	Female	Sociology	Full-time	20	Heterosexual	In a relationship	White British
16	Female	Philosophy	Full-time	21	Heterosexual	Single	White British
17	Female	Anthropology and Spanish	Full-time	20	Heterosexual	Single	White British
18	Female	Philosophy and Economics	Full-time	20	Bisexual	Single	Mixed – half Chinese, half white British
19	Female	Psychology	Full-time	25	Queer	In a relationship	White British
20	Female	Mathematics Evironmental technology	Full-time	24	Heterosexual	Single	White British
21	Female	Education and social science	Full-time	22	Heterosexual	In a relationship	White British

Nationality	Class	Geographical origin	Uni Year	Caring responsibilities	Disability	Feminist?	Institution location
British	WC & MC	South West England	PG PhD	Yes	Yes	Yes	South West England
British	LMC	South Wales	UG Y3	None	Yes	Yes	South West England
British	MC	South England	UG Y2	None	None	Yes	North Central England
British	MC	South England	PG Y2	None	None	Yes	South East England
British	WC	South England	UG Y3	None	Yes	Yes	South East England
British	WC	North East England	PG PhD	None	None	Yes	North East England
British	MC	South West England	UG Y3	None	None	Yes	North Central England
British	MC	North Central England	UG Y3	None	None	Yes	North West England
British		South England	UG Y3	None		Yes	North West England
British		Central England	UG Y3			Yes	North West England
British	LMC	North West England	UG Y1	None	None	Yes	South West England
British	UMC	South England	UG Y4	None	None	Yes	North Central England
European		Europe	UG Y1	None		Yes	North Central England
British	MC	North West England	PG PhD	None	None	Yes	North East England
British	WC	South East England	UG Y3	None	None	Yes	South East England
British		South East England		None	None	Yes	South East England
British	MC	South East England	UG Y2	None	None	Yes	South East England
British	MC	South East England	UG Y3	None	None	Yes	South West England
British	MC	England	UG Y2	None	None	Yes	South East England
British		South East England	PG Y1	None	None	Yes	South East England
British	WC	South East England	UG Y3	None	None	No	South East England

Appendix 2: Focus group participants

A) Focus Group 1: South West England

Participant letter	Sex/gender	Subject	Study status	Age	Sexual orientation	Relationship status	Ethnicity
A	Female	Sociology	Full-time	19	Heterosexual	Single	White British
B	Female	Politics	Full-time	20	Heterosexual	In a relationship	White British
C	Female	Politics					White British
D	Female	Sociology	Full-time	19	Undecided	Single	Mixed – White and Black Caribean
E	Female	History	Full-time				White British
F	Female	Psychology and Zoology	Full-time	20	Gay/lesbian	Single	White British

B) Focus Group 2: North West England

Participant letter	Sex/gender	Subject	Study status	Age	Sexual orientation	Relationship status	Ethnicity
G	Female	Economics and Politics					White British
H	Female						White British
I	Female	Politics and History					White British
J	Female	Anthropology					White British

Nationality	Class	Geographical origin	Uni year	Caring responsibilities	Disability	Feminist?
British	MC	South East England	UG Y2	None	None	Yes
British	MC	South West England	UG Y3	None	None	Yes
British			UG Y4			
British	WC	North East England	UG Y1	None	None	No
British			UG Y1			
British	UMC	South England	UG Y2	None	None	Yes

Nationality	Class	Geographical origin	Uni year	Caring responsibilities	Disability	Feminist?
Northern Irish		Northern Ireland	UG Y2			
British		South England	UG Y1			
British		South England	UG Y3			
British		South England	UG Y4			

C) Focus Group 3: North West England

Participant letter	Sex/gender	Subject	Study status	Age	Sexual orientation	Relationship status	Ethnicity
K	Female	Sociology	Full-time	19	Heterosexual	In a relationship	White British
L	Female	Sociology and Social Policy	Full-time	23	Heterosexual	In a relationship	Chinese
M	Female	Sociology	Full-time	21	Heterosexual	Single	White British
N	Female	Geography and Sociology	Full-time	19	Heterosexual	In a relationship	White British
O	Female	Sociology	Full-time	20	Heterosexual	Single	Asian

D) Focus Group 4: Scotland

Participant letter	Sex/gender	Subject	Study status	Age	Sexual orientation	Relationship status	Ethnicity
P	Female	Legal Practice	Full-time	22	Heterosexual	In a relationship	White British
Q	Female	Business	Full-time	22	Heterosexual	In a relationship	White British
R	Female	Arabic and Spanish	Full-time	22	Heterosexual	Single	White British
S	Female	Politics and Philosophy	Full-time	22	Pansexual	In a relationship	White British

Nationality	Class	Geographical origin	Uni year	Caring responsibilities	Disability	Feminist?
British	MC	Midlands	UG Y2	None	None	Yes
British	WC and MC	North East England	UG Y2	None	None	Undecided
British	MC	East England	UG Y1	None	None	No
British	MC	North West England	UG Y1	None	Yes	No
Chinese	MC	Chine	UG Y1	None	None	Yes

Nationality	Class	Geographical origin	Uni year	Caring responsibilities	Disability	Feminist?
British		Scotland	PG Y1			No
British	MC	Scotland	PG Y2	None	None	No
England	MC	South East England	PG Y3	None	Yes	Yes
British		Scotland	PG Y4	None	Yes	Yes

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national union of students