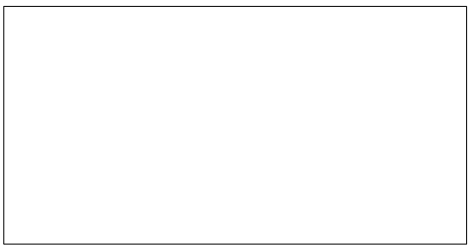

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(Re)theorising laddish masculinities in higher education

Alison Phipps, Sussex University

Abstract
In the context of renewed debates and interest in this area, this paper reframes the theoretical agenda around laddish masculinities in UK higher education, and similar masculinities overseas. These can be contextualised within consumerist neoliberal rationalities, the neoconservative backlash against feminism and other social justice movements, and the postfeminist belief that women are winning the 'battle of the sexes'. Contemporary discussions of 'lad culture' have rightly centred sexism and men[1]s violence against women: however, we need a more intersectional analysis. In the UK a key intersecting category is social class, and there is evidence that while working class articulations of laddism proceed from *being dominated* within alienating education systems, middle class and elite versions are a reaction to *feeling dominated* due to a loss of gender, class and race privilege. These are important differences, and we need to know more about the conditions which shape and produce particular performances of laddism, in interaction with masculinities articulated by other social groups. It is perhaps unhelpful, therefore, to collapse these social positions and identities under the banner of 'lad culture', as has been done in the past.

Introduction

In the past 20 years, critical studies of men and masculinities have burgeoned (Beasley 2012). A broad body of work across the social/biological sciences and humanities, focusing on men's and boys' identities and a variety of social problems such as mental health issues, unemployment, educational underachievement and violence, has been paralleled by the development of a policy literature on how gender issues affect men (Kimmel, Hearn and Connell 2004). Laddism as both an identity performance and social practice has been a key part of this canon, investigated as a phenomenon in itself and positioned as a causal factor in relation to a number of 'men's issues'. Since 2010, the figure of the 'lad' has especially come to dominate discussions around masculinities in UK higher education, and has been associated with concerns about sexual harassment and violence. However, there have been few attempts as yet to (re)theorise and contextualise contemporary laddish masculinities, a space I wish to occupy in this paper.

The contemporary preoccupation with the figure of the 'lad' began with research conducted by the UK National Union of Students (2010, 2013), which showed that

university women are at high risk of sexual harassment and violence that may at least be partly framed by a retro-sexist 'lad culture'. A subsequent wave of grassroots activism and policy conversation was set within an ebb and flow of media stories which incorporated both genuine concern and elements of moral panic (Phipps 2015, Phipps and Young 2015a and b). These debates in the UK paralleled similar ones internationally, for instance around 'eve teasing' in South Asian countries (Nahar et al 2013, Mills 2014), and 'bro cultures' (Chrisler et al 2012), 'hookup cultures' (Garcia et al 2012, Sweeney 2014) and 'rape culture' (Heldman and Brown 2014) in the US.[1] Within much of the discussion there was a sense of a continuum between 'everyday' forms of sexism and more violent sexual assault (see Kelly 1988), and an understanding of violence against university women as a global phenomenon. Indeed, the victimisation of women students has been studied in many countries additional to the ones mentioned above including Japan, China (Nguyen et al 2013), South Korea (Jennings et al 2011), Haiti, South Africa, Tanzania (Gage 2015), Jordan (Takash et al 2013), Chile (Lehrer et al 2013), Canada (Osborne 1995), Germany, Italy, Poland and Spain (Feltes et al 2012).

This paper aims to begin a theoretical discussion germane to these (re)emerging debates about laddish masculinities in the UK and overseas, exploring what we already know empirically and theoretically, making suggestions about potential gaps, and raising key questions to be addressed.[2] It examines the similarities and differences between laddism in classroom and social/interpersonal contexts, and explores how such masculinities relate to other forms and are mediated by class, race, sexuality and other categories of difference. It also considers how some forms of contemporary laddism might be connected to sexual violence. Men's violence against women is often not a priority in critical masculinity studies (Hearn 2012), and the connections between university 'lad cultures' and violence are not established but have been frequently postulated (Jackson et al 2015, Phipps and Young 2015a and b). There is clearly a great deal of work to do: this paper is intended to be a starting point, so will probably ask more questions than it answers.

Theorising gender

Although the notions of masculinity and masculinities are much-used and interpreted, they can, as Hearn (2012, p590) argues, be seen as under-developed, and work in this area has been critiqued for historical specificity, ethnocentrism, false causality, psychologism, a tendency towards philosophical idealism, the reproduction of heterosexual dichotomies, and vagueness. This latter appraisal has been directed particularly at the concept of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 2014 [1987], 2005 [1995]), which can display opacity in terms of what it specifically refers to and how different forms of masculine hegemony interrelate. The discussion in this article will attempt to be mindful of these pitfalls, although theorising gendered forms is a challenging and changing project and perhaps some indistinctions will always remain.

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[1] 'Eve teasing' is a euphemism for street harassment, 'bro culture' often refers to the subculture of US fraternities, and a 'hookup culture' is one which accepts/encourages casual sexual encounters (and has been particularly associated with students).

[2] The article uses the terms 'lad', 'laddism' and 'laddish' interchangeably, and makes reference to contemporary discussions of 'lad culture' (although the latter is problematic - see also Phipps and Young 2015b). These terms are also sometimes used as a proxy for similar forms of masculinity in other countries, although it is understood that these identities and behaviours, and how they are framed, may differ.

Taking inspiration from poststructural approaches which aim to transcend (or at least trouble) binary either/or positions (Lather 1990), but also giving due regard to second-wave feminist insights, it seems appropriate to conceptualise gender as both structure and discourse, materiality and performance. Masculinity is associated with (though not determined by) biological markers which are used to assign 'maleness', given meaning within structures such as family, community, economy, media and language, and institutional settings such as education, the healthcare system, and the workplace. These provide the basis for the development and performance of masculine identities, framed by a (limited) variety of available discourses around what it means to be a man. Such performances can be un- or semi-conscious, but in the context of laddism have acquired a self-conscious irony (Benwell 2004, 2007, Phipps and Young 2015b). However, masculinities do not necessarily stay constant between social settings or over time. For instance, research on 'lad cultures' amongst students (NUS 2013) shows how men engaging in laddish behaviours tend to do this in group settings but can desist when challenged on an individual level.

Contemporary manhood often continues to be constructed in relation to women and sexuality (Sweeney 2014), which means that the *idea* of a gender binary (as well as an explicit gay/straight distinction) is relevant to theorising how masculinities are formed and performed. However, the idealised notions of masculine and feminine do not map directly on to the social categories of men and women, or the medical practice of assigning infants male or female at birth. Furthermore, although they have powerful ideological, political, social and cultural functions, all these binaries are deconstructed by the multiplicity, complexity and messiness of sex and gender in lived experience. Both gender and sex must be understood as a plurality of traits and expressions (Ainsworth 2015, Richards and Barker 2015), albeit discursively shaped in a binary world. Indeed, in the subsequent discussion contemporary laddism is contextualised partly in relation to a loosening of this idea of binary genders amongst student cultures in the West,[3] as a reassertion of normative masculinity and femininity and an attempt to reclaim traditionally masculine/male territory through sexism and violence.

As genders are seen as plural, they must also be understood as intersectional. The concept of intersectionality, codified within black feminist thought from the 1980s onwards (Carby 1982, Crenshaw 1991, Hill Collins 1998), is invaluable in its exhortation to move away from one-dimensional notions, towards ideas of a co-constitution of social categories, positions and encounters which produces important differences in subjectivity, experience and practice. This principle should be foundational to our theorisation of masculinities, and we should also attempt to develop from two-dimensional into more multi-dimensional applications. In the US, masculinity has largely been studied as it intersects with race (see for example Jenkins 2012, Goff et al 2012, McGuire et al 2014, Romo 2014, Wong et al 2014). In the UK, the second part of the equation has often been social class (see for example Willis 1977, Williams et al 2008, Jackson et al 2015, Stahl 2015), although Mills (2014) has identified a 'washing out' of class in recent studies which tend to focus on the cultural rather than the socio-economic. In evolving our theorisations, we should combine

[3] Outside the West, the idea (and reality) of plural or multiple genders has a long history – see Nanda 2014.

gender, class and race analyses with explorations of other pertinent factors, to broaden and enrich our focus.[4]

In light of this, we need to look critically at concepts such as hegemonic masculinity, which has achieved its own hegemony in the field (Hearn 2012) but which can lack complexity and nuance. Similarly, and while acknowledging that male and masculine privileges are real (Hearn 2012), and that the vast majority of sexual harassment and violence worldwide is perpetrated by men against women or people read as women (World Health Organization 2014)[5], we should be wary of one-dimensional and conceptually empty terms such as 'male violence', which both essentialise violence as inherent to bodies assigned as male (Harris 1990) and tell us little about which men commit which types of violence, in which contexts and for which reasons. Furthermore, and especially in light of evidence that 'laddish' masculinities may also have a detrimental impact on men (Anderson and McGuire 2010, Dempster 2009, 2011), it is important to understand violence as a practice which can be experienced by people of any gender, even though it often expresses and upholds masculine power.

Contexualising gender

In order to conceptualise contemporary laddism it is also necessary to set it in a social context. This is especially important given that recent media debates have tended to explain 'lad culture' in relation to issues such as alcohol and pornography, in narratives which have an element of 'moral panic' and give little substantive insight into the phenomenon or suggestions for intervention beyond banning particular materials and activities (Phipps 2015, Wilcox 2014). Although there is no doubt that particular artifacts, representations and practices can be problematic and have a role in shaping, as well as expressing, gender norms (Attwood 2006, Muir and Seitz 2004, Dempster 2011), these arguments may be in danger of confusing symptom with cause. Exploring the structures and social relations underpinning 'lad cultures' should give a broader and deeper understanding, using a wide lens on contemporary cultural, political and social formations, and excavating the meanings and materialities these frame, create and demonstrate.

Previous sociological and feminist-informed theorisations of laddism have given due attention to the structures of patriarchy and compulsory heterosexuality (Arnot 2003, Benwell 2003, Mills 2014, Haywood and Mac an Ghaill 2013, Pascoe 2007, Richardson 2010). However, although contemporary forms of masculinity continue to be constructed in relation to women and sexuality, analyses which focus only on these dimensions risk being monolithic and determinist. Frames of gender and sexuality should be complicated with an intersectional appreciation of how they interpellate and affect different men and groups of men in different ways. Gender articulations informed by patriarchal norms and power relations are also shaped by notions and experiences of class or ethnic superiority or marginalisation, and the practice and

[4] Some contemporary work on laddism has cited the significance of homophobia to the articulation of such behaviours (see for example Jackson et al 2015; Phipps and Young 2015b): however, there is a need for fuller exploration of how sexualities shape these identity performances in the current context. Other factors, for instance disability (especially given the links between contemporary laddism and sporting cultures), would also be potentially fruitful grounds for analysis.

[5] This latter category refers to, for example, some trans men and non-binary people.

performance of compulsory heterosexuality benefits or uplifts different types of men, for different reasons.

Some of these issues have been explored in the field of US scholarship on black men and masculinities, which situates gendered behaviours in relation to the social category of race and the sociopolitical practice of racism. Although some of this work has focused solely on how black men are socialised to claim the values of patriarchal manhood and pressured to perform hyper-masculine gender iterations (Jenkins 2012), it has also been argued that black masculinities have been pathologised and stereotyped as excessive (and often violent) through currents of social and political racism, which serve to limit black men to certain subject positions and invisibilise black masculinities which deviate from these norms (McGuire et al 2014). Furthermore, it has been suggested that black men who experience discrimination may become more vigilant around threats to their masculinity and therefore more likely to engage in hyper-masculine behaviours (Goff et al 2012). Neoliberalism has been analysed as a specific framework of oppression: for instance, Walcott (2009) uses the notion of the 'mask' to denote the profound ways in which this racist and violent structure and rationality has homogenised diverse black masculinities and constructed black men as in need of 'repair'.

In contrast, contemporary white middle class and elite masculinities have frequently been seen as harmonious with the values of corporate neoliberalism (Connell 2005, McGuire et al 2014, Mills 2014). There is emerging empirical research exploring how norms of individualism, competition and consumerism are shaping and reshaping sexualities (Adam 2005, Gill and Donahue 2013), and evidence that laddism in particular embodies neoliberal rationalities through its characteristic modes of sexualised audit (Phipps and Young 2015b). Such analyses could potentially be applied overseas to phenomena such as US 'hookup culture' (see Garcia et al 2012). However, there is a need for more work on how consumerist values and the contemporary imperative for 'compulsory sexuality' (Radner 2008) inform these gender performances. Furthermore, exploration of masculinities in the neoliberal moment should also focus in more depth on socio-economic factors, in particular how austerity economics and politics create or exacerbate fears and social tensions which interact with the meanings of masculinity for both privileged and marginalised groups.

Neoliberalism is also the context for the 'postfeminist' discourses largely perpetuated by the media and corporations but taken up within some feminist debates, which have been shown to inform 'laddish' masculinities (Phipps and Young 2015a & b). These include the idea that women are currently winning an adversarial 'battle of the sexes' (erasing differences between women, and ignoring the fact that institutional power and leadership remain concentrated in the bodies and practices of men). Like laddism, postfeminist forms of women's 'empowerment' tend to be both sexualised and consumerist, and incorporate a re-embrace of normatively feminine bodies and performance of (and identification of power with) 'girliness'. This is linked to the neoconservative reassertion of binary genders and gender roles (Phipps 2014c), but can also be seen as a rebellion against second-wave feminism and exercise of sexual agency within constraints (Gill and Donahue 2013). There is a need for more analysis of the interactions between laddism and the discourse and performance of postfeminism and associated femininities. It is important however, in conducting this,

not to feed moral panic narratives around 'sexualisation' or to evoke forms of disapproval often wielded by older feminists against younger (which frequently betray discomfort with particular sexualities/sexual practices and a wholesale rejection of femininity).

'Postfeminist' genders provide a bridge between the neoliberal values of consumption and individual choice and the 'new gender essentialism' which, as part of the neoconservative backlash, has begun to shape both policy and popular culture in Western countries in recent years (Cameron 2010, Phipps 2014c). This includes a reassertion of immutable differences between men and women, often biologically defined, within the neuroscience- and evolutionary psychology-informed fields of self-help and 'pop sci' literature. Such narratives frame social trends towards 'intensive' stay-at-home motherhood and a related crackdown on women's reproductive rights and freedoms, in Western countries and elsewhere (Thomson et al 2011, Nash et al 2013, Amnesty International 2015). Feminism, frequently positioned as the enemy, is understood as a failed attempt at social engineering by women who are anti-sex, anti-men and anti-fun (Faludi 1992) – and this characterisation has achieved far-reaching impacts in populist and political discourse on both left and right (Phipps 2014c).

Linked to this, sensationalist narratives around the 'crisis of masculinity' thought to have been prompted by gains in women's rights have had a significant purchase on policy within the context of a 'mediatisation' of policy issues (Mills 2014), which tends to rely on moral outrage and simplistic (and often erroneous) causal connections. Such concerns, as well as the contemporary preoccupation with 'sexualisation', underpin ideas about masculinities in higher education. Discussions of 'lad cultures' in the UK and 'bro cultures' in the US are often punctuated by worries about 'sexualised' youth communities and particular artifacts or practices such as pornography or 'promiscuous' sexual activity (Chrisler et al 2012). 'Boys' underachievement' debates in the UK have located the issue in the performance of laddism (Francis and Archer 2005), yet placed the blame on the feminisation of schooling (Skelton 2002), a narrative which is also starting to have resonance in relation to universities. Current concerns about 'lad culture' in the UK have also been linked to anxieties around the opening up of higher education through widening participation (WP) agendas focused on class and race (Phipps 2015).

These contemporary economic, social, political and cultural trends (and others) produce, shape and position contemporary laddism, and channel this and similar masculinities to and through different men in different ways. However, while paying due attention to the structures which frame contemporary laddism it is important not to reify these as monolithic (and indeed, to avoid interpreting men as such). In the UK laddish masculinities appear to be predominantly articulated by white men (Jackson and Dempster 2009, NUS 2013), but there are class differences around when and where they are performed and what they set themselves against. There will also be variance internationally, around which groups of men identify or are associated with similar types of masculinities or behaviours. The next part of this paper will attempt to think through some specifics of laddism, in dialogue with established or potential differences between men which should be acknowledged and/or explored further in work in this area.

Exploring contemporary laddism

An early incarnation of contemporary laddism has been identified internationally, in the adolescent masculinity constructed in 1950s Playboy, which provided a hedonistic antidote to corporate, suburban life (Beynon 2002). However, the term became associated primarily with the white working classes in the UK through Paul Willis' iconic study *Learning to Labour* (1977), which positioned 'the lads' as rebels against academia and authority for constructing them as 'failures'. This analysis maintained resonance into the 1980s and 90s, especially given the decline in traditional working class skilled and semi-skilled male jobs linked to the apprenticeship system (Skelton 2002).[6] Also in the 1990s, a more middle class version began to emerge, a 'new laddism' incorporating 'binge' drinking, drug use, casual sex and extreme sports. This was exemplified by 'lads mags' such as *Loaded*, celebrities including Skinner and Baddiel and the band Oasis, and the TV sitcom *Men Behaving Badly* (Phipps and Young 2015a). The 'new lad' has been interpreted as a rebuttal of the softer middle class consumer masculinity of this era, articulated by the 'new man' preoccupied with lifestyle, health and grooming (Attwood 2005).

The main players in the recent theatre of student laddism in the UK appear to be mainly middle class and white (NUS 2013), which perhaps suggests connections with 'new lad' incarnations. However, there are also associations with masculinities which would not historically have been granted the epithet 'laddish' due to its largely working class connotations. The rugby players, drinking and debating society members from elite universities who exemplify contemporary laddism (Phipps and Young 2015b) bring to mind the men and masculinities typified by the Bullingdon Club, a centuries-old all-male exclusive dining club at Oxford University which boasts high-profile former members including British Prime Minister David Cameron. Bullingdon dinners have historically been typified by copious amounts of alcohol and have erupted into violence, and at the club's informal gatherings which have been open to women, they have been made to whinny on all fours while men brandish hunting horns and whips (Phipps 2014a). Problematic practices and behaviours linked with similar elite masculinities are also at the centre of conversations in the US around sexism and 'rape culture' in fraternities (see for example Bennett 2014, Valenti 2014).

In the UK, there have been attempts to both attribute antisocial (and especially violent) manifestations of 'lad culture' to the working classes, and to accuse feminist critics of such behaviours of classist prejudice (Phipps 2014b, 2015), which may be evidence of how privileged men are rendered invisible as perpetrators (Phipps 2009), or is perhaps just a political maneouvre. However, contemporary debates about laddism have also incorporated a strong focus on white middle- and upper class men, which is a welcome opportunity to retheorise these types of masculinities instead of positioning them as universal/default or obscuring their specific behaviours and practices with vague notions of hegemony. While doing this, of course, it is important to be sensitive to differences within the middle classes, and to explore how these masculinities are constructed in relation to those performed by or attributed to other social and cultural groups.

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[6] Willis' work is also particularly pertinent given the contemporary context of socio-economic austerity.

Laddism in the classroom

Laddish behaviours in higher education learning environments have similarities to those observed in schools, involving disruption but not necessarily overt sexism and harassment (Jackson et al 2015), although the latter does occur (NUS 2013, Jackson and Sundaram 2015). 'Lads' in the classroom are loud, attention-seeking, confident jokers, and there are often implied links to alcohol and frequent casual sexual activity (NUS 2013, Jackson et al 2015). In school environments, these behaviours have been symbolically, and sometimes literally, associated with lower educational achievement due to the perception of it being 'uncool' or 'girly' to engage academically (Jackson 2003, Francis and Archer 2005). This is not necessarily the case at university however, and laddism amongst university students has also been seen as an immature identity which lessens with age/progress into 'serious' study (Jackson et al 2015).

There is little or no literature on white men engaging in similar classroom behaviours in countries other than the UK and Ireland (see Barnes 2012), suggesting that this may be particular to states with strong social class systems. In the US, there is evidence of fraternity participation impeding educational achievement, but some fraternities facilitate academic performance, so the picture is mixed (Nelson and Engstrom 2013, Walker, Martin and Hussey 2014). There are also indications that African-American and Latino/Latina students of any gender are more frequently defined as 'disruptive' in US classroom environments (Skibo et al 2011), reflecting the primacy of the racial divide in this country. There may be additional pertinent questions around how classroom disorder relates to student fees in the US and other countries with largely privatised higher education systems: indeed, in Jackson et al's (2015) study in the UK, the introduction of student fees appeared to lessen disruptive behaviours. There are also issues to be raised about whether rising fees regimes might divert classroom laddism into other contexts in the UK, perhaps fuelling sexism and sexual violence in social spaces and relationships (assuming that the social context which frames working class laddism, particularly that of austerity, will remain unchanged).

Laddish masculinities in UK university classrooms can be positioned as an expression of alienation from neoliberal, middle class (and allegedly feminised) higher education, since men who engage in these behaviours appear to be working or lower-middle class (Barnes 2012, Jackson et al 2015, Jackson and Sundaram 2015).[7] When laddish masculinities have been reported in the classrooms of more elite universities, these have tended to be characterised by a more domineering demeanor which has been defined as intimidating to women, rather than disruptive (NUS 2013). This perhaps reflects the fact that rather than being alienated, middle class men are more likely to fit the neoliberal notion of the ideal pupil as being 'naturally brilliant' (Jackson and Dempster 2009) and to therefore be less inclined to work or listen, although there are questions around whether the discourse (and in some cases, the reality) of girls' greater educational success is also a factor here.

There may be, then, at least two different types of classroom laddism at work: alienated forms of disruption (which need to be seen in the context of socio-economic austerity) versus more privileged modes of dominance, mediated by class. Although

[7] Research conducted by Jackson and Sundaram (2015) found that classroom laddism was more common in universities with lower entry grades, which tend to be those with a more diverse class intake (Sutton Trust 2000).

important research has been conducted in this area (see for example Jackson 2003, Francis and Archer 2005, Jackson and Dempster 2009, Jackson et al 2015), more is needed around how class relations underpin gender performances in education. We should renew discussions around rebellion as a reaction to marginalisation, while also reflecting on what and who is defined as disruptive. There is evidence that in the context of contemporary consternation around boys' underachievement, middle class parents often see laddish disruption as a threat to the performance of their sons (Williams et al 2008), which raises questions around how power relations between men may play out in classroom contexts.

Both types of classroom laddism impact upon women, who have reported negative reactions to and disadvantages because of laddish behaviour (NUS 2013, Jackson et al 2015). Classed forms of laddism should also be seen in dialogue with and hierarchical relation to other masculinities. For instance, as in the US, black boys in the UK are more frequently defined as disorderly and in school contexts excluded (expelled) at higher rates than their white counterparts (Monroe 2005). This draws on the construction of black masculinities as inherently sinister and problematic, which may grant white laddism a certain amount of impunity. In contrast, norms within some Asian communities for high educational achievement through hard work contribute to the definition of men from these groups as less 'manly' (Francis and Archer 2005) and may both construct and be constructed by the notion of white laddism as a consummate masculine behaviour.

Laddism in social space

In contrast to the classroom, the 'lad culture' which has been identified recently in the social and sexual spheres of university life appears to be largely (although not exclusively) the preserve of privileged men. This is reflected in research findings and recent media reports (NUS 2013, Phipps and Young 2015a & b). This class profile is mirrored in the debate around 'rape culture' in the US, where elite white fraternities have been singled out. In one high-profile story, Delta Kappa Epsilon at Yale was suspended for an incident in which pledges chanted 'No means yes! Yes means anal!' around campus (Burgoyne 2011). Similar episodes have occurred in other Anglo-Western countries: in 2013, students at the prestigious church-run Wesley College at Sydney University won the annual 'Ernie' award for sexism for distributing beer holders branded 'It's not rape if it's my birthday' (AFP 2013).

This type of sexist 'banter' often spills over into sexual harassment, and may create a context in which more serious forms of sexual violence could occur (NUS 2013). Behaviours such as these cannot and should not be interpreted using the same ideas of alienation and resistance which are pertinent to discussions of classroom-based laddism. In contrast, the aggressive sexism perpetrated in social spaces by privileged men can be seen as an attempt to preserve or reclaim territory, contextualised in relation to the backlash against feminism more broadly, and the idea of higher education 'feminisation' in particular. Related to the performances of educational dominance mentioned in the previous section, it is possible to see hostile sexism in the social sphere as a defensive response from men accustomed to topping the ranks. Broader 'widening participation' agendas in higher education may also be pertinent, since extant laddism often incorporates classism and racism as well (Wong et al 2014).

The middle class 'lad' is not one of the marginalised; he is closer to the elite. In a classroom context, 'effortless achievement' rather than alienated disobedience constitutes this type of masculinity. However, the assumed location of these young men at pole position has become unsteady, and the young women who are seen to be vying for it may have become the enemy. It has been argued that white middle class women are ideal neoliberal educational subject, outperforming boys and young men and embodying the confident adaptability which is a contemporary employment requirement (Skelton 2002, Harris 2004, Williams et al 2008). Related to this, the idea that women are winning the contemporary 'battle of the sexes' is popular in many Western countries (Phipps and Young 2015b, Harris 2004). Of course, this disregards evidence that educational success tends to be restricted to the white middle classes, that these achievements are not yet being translated into the workplace, and that women from minoritised groups continue to experience discrimination in education and employment (Ringrose 2007, Karamessini and Rubery 2013). It also fails to account for the fact that the masculinised values and power structures of education persist (Skelton 2002, Leathwood and Read 2008).

Nevertheless, in the context of these 'backlash' ideas, there is evidence that white middle class boys are being hothoused by parents who see them as frail and imperiled (Williams et al 2008). Questions need to be raised about how this feeds entitlement (including sexual entitlement) and a propensity to feel threatened, and there may also be issues related to the postfeminist rhetoric (rather than reality) of women's sexual self-actualisation. Although postfeminist 'raunchy' sexualities are often central to laddish discourses and behaviours, there is evidence of a double standard which allows men to be sexually aggressive while women are expected to be purely responsive: indeed, when presented with evidence of women's sexual agency, laddish men can respond with fear and judgment (Phipps and Young 2015a). There are a variety of factors, then, which support the idea that contemporary middle class laddism is primarily an attempt to put women back in their place.[8]

Viewed more sympathetically, performances of laddism could also be seen as a pressure release for white, middle class men who may be struggling to occupy neoliberal educational subjectivities, or a reaction against being cossetted by over-protective parents. This potential element of rebellion provides continuity with working class forms, although a sense of victimisation on the part of the privileged is not equivalent to the alienation of marginalised men in mainstream educational environments. There is also the possibility that laddish resistance may be directed towards campus cultures and politics perceived to be excessively politically correct, pertinent in the UK and the US where debates about 'free speech' on campus have featured defenses of 'lad culture' as a form of sexual self-expression (Hayes 2013, O'Neill 2014a & b, Palmer 2015, Rawcliffe 2015, Schulevitz 2015). It should be acknowledged that feminist initiatives around laddism and sexual violence can risk being co-opted by moralistic and carceral agendas (Phipps 2015), evoking the historical association of feminist anti-violence activism with neoconservative and neo-imperialist projects (Phipps 2014c). However, to acknowledge this is not to discount the deeply problematic and violent manifestations of contemporary laddism.

[8] There is an established body of literature showing how sexism and sexual harassment function to preserve power and space for men through making women feel inadequate, uncomfortable, unwelcome or unsafe (Bennett 2009, McLaughlin, Uggen and Blackstone 2012).

In addition to gender and class issues, it is necessary to examine how assertions of racial dominance underpin performances of laddish sexism by the white middle classes. For example, the jokiness and self-conscious irony of this form of laddism could be viewed as a counterpoise to the construction of black masculinity as more menacingly sexual (Williams et al 2008), functioning to both invisibilise the violences associated with white privileged men and preserve the idea of black men as inherently more dangerous. In contrast, the 'raunchiness' that laddism incorporates could be examined as it relates to perceptions of Asian men as both fragile and sexually inadequate (Wong et al 2014). In racialised terms, white laddism may be an assertion of superior virility which nevertheless positions itself as less threatening than (and therefore also superior to) the black hyper-masculine Other.

Homophobia is a central component of laddish cultures and behaviours (Muir and Seitz 2004, NUS 2013), and contemporary laddism can also be seen in relation to ideas about 'inclusive masculinity' or 'hybrid masculinity', which incorporates elements of gay masculinities, as a new middle class norm (Anderson and McGuire 2010, Warin 2013, Bridges 2014). Retro-sexist performances may be undertaken in reaction to this softening of masculinity, as well as the potential blurring of gender lines which has accompanied the greater visibility of trans, genderqueer, non binary people and others, especially within student communities (Dugan et al 2012, Rankin and Beemyn 2012). In the contemporary 'lad', and of course also in relation to gains in women's equality, traditional binaries attempt to reassert themselves. Inclusive masculinities may be more style than substance, and thus obscure continued gender oppressions (Bridges and Pascoe 2014, Sweeney 2014). Celebrations of these masculinities should additionally be related to geopolitical discourses constructing Western men as evolved and Other cultures as inherently misogynistic and homophobic (Bhattacharyya 2008). However, the effects of the representation, if not the reality, of these masculinities may be significant in understanding contemporary laddism in social and sexual spaces.

Conclusion: laddism, sexism and rebellion

Consumerist neoliberal rationalities, socio-economic conditions of austerity, the neoconservative backlash against feminism and other social justice movements and the postfeminist belief that women are winning the 'battle of the sexes' all frame contemporary laddism in higher education. As practiced by white working class men in the classroom, it can be seen as resistance against an education system in which they are often positioned as 'failures'. In contrast, the laddish sexism of white, middle class men in social spaces and personal interactions can be interpreted as a reassertion of superiority in reaction to perceived or real lost privilege. It is this type of laddism which appears more likely to spill over into sexual harassment and scaffold more extreme forms of sexual violence.

Classed incarnations of laddism share similar themes: both incorporate sexism and have been reported as problematic by women, although this is less prominent in classroom contexts. Rebellion is another consistent aspect, whether against 1950s suburbia, middle class academia, the 'new man' of the 1990s, or feminism, progressive politics and gender fluidity in the contemporary context. However, it must be remembered that some forms of laddish rebellion proceed from *being dominated* in cultural and economic class terms, and others from *feeling dominated* due to a loss of

gendered (and classed, and raced) privilege. We must be wary, then, of collapsing these subjectivities and motivations into one another under banner terms such as 'lad culture' as has been done in the past (including by myself). The iterations of laddism examined in this paper are not the same and must be analysed separately, as well as the interactions between them examined. Our explorations should be detailed, allowing for the fact that there is heterogeneity even within particular forms of masculinity (Beasley 2012).

The points made here have been based on existing evidence about laddish and other types of masculinities, and their relationships with femininities and with each other. However, there are many gaps in our knowledge around which men are performing laddism in which situations, what these performances entail, and how they are contextualised. There are also important questions to raise about the interactions between laddish masculinities and other forms, such as those articulated by men of colour, gay men, trans men, non-binary people and women. Of course, there is a need to preserve a focus on the binary gender hierarchy which continues to structure experience and discourse and which is underlined and maintained by sexist and harassing performances of laddism. However, while acknowledging that violence is still overwhelmingly perpetrated by men against women and people read as women, understanding why this occurs and how it relates to different expressions of masculinity requires more nuanced study.

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