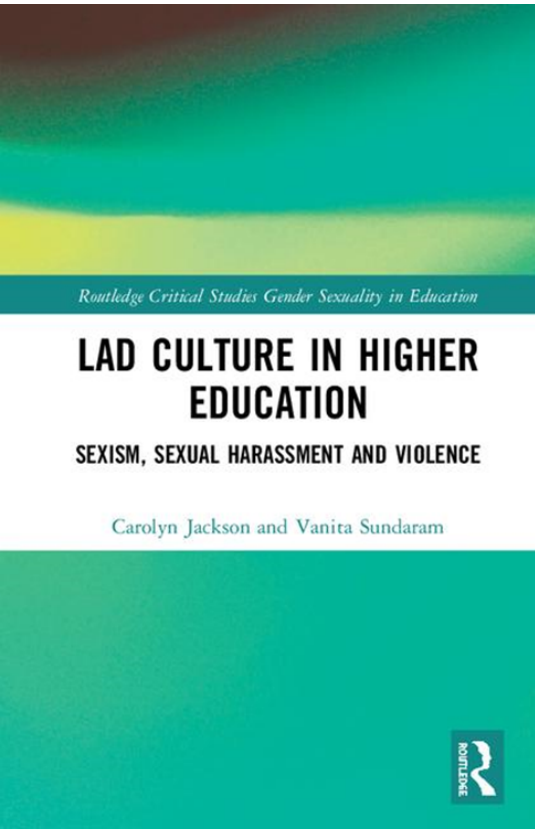


Lad Culture in Higher Education



Professor Carolyn Jackson

Lancaster University



@CarolynPJackson



c.jackson@lancaster.ac.uk

Can universities ever get rid of boozy, sexist lad culture?

Telegraph, 24/2/14

Lad culture: what can be done when it's everywhere at university?

Independent, 16/1/15

SEXIST LADS' CULTURE IS OUT OF CONTROL AT UNIVERSITIES

DAILY MAIL, 16/9/14

**Lad culture's beery, shouty voice is dominating student
life**

and alienating women

Observer, 28/4/13

Lad culture at university strikes again

Telegraph, 10/10/14

‘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. (Phipps and Young, 2013, 53)

Research: Staff perceptions of lad culture in H.E.

- ~10 interviews at 6 Unis.
- 62 individual interviews.
- 3 focus group discussions (3 or 4 people each).
- 72 staff in total.
- Senior managers such as Pro-Vice Chancellors, College Provosts and Deans of School; Student Union officers; lecturers; welfare tutors; college officers; and security staff.

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

Sexism, sexual harassment and violence were at the core of lad culture

Well I suppose it can range from sexist comments, jokes, remarks that kind of thing, from one end of the spectrum to actually physical abusive behaviour (Mary, woman, U6).

A couple of the girls had had their pictures cut out of the calendar and had things put next to them and posted up around the halls, like saying 'dress like this and you're asking to be raped' kind of thing. And you know, 'oh, no surprise you're at the front, you're a right slag! (Rebecca, woman, U4).

Teaching/Learning Contexts

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

Explanations for lad culture

- Fitting in
- They're not really like that
- It's only banter - they don't mean it
- Boys will be boys!
- (Im)maturity
- Alcohol
- Gender, power and competition

'But they're not really like that': authenticity

Some of the people that you're very familiar with in particular, there's an innocence behind them. When they're separated from the rest of the pack so to speak, they actually have a really genuine, it's almost a schizophrenic idea really, because when they're all together they all collaborate in this huge pretension of, oh they have no respect for women, massive tits, go and bang her, blah blah blah. But when they're separate, or they've got their own partner, their respect comes in, they're aware that you can't behave like that, that it's inappropriate, they know deep down. I think it's just when they get together and feed off each other. (John, man, focus group, U5)

'It's only banter': they don't mean it

I think that's where this jokey element to it comes from, that they're educated and privileged enough to be aware that some of this stuff may be distasteful to others. Which is why they've weaved in this jokey element, because it protects them from being accused of the isms we've just talked about ... I think it's just so normalised that actually most people - and many women as well, I'm not saying it's just men - will say, 'oh it's just guys having a laugh, that's what guys do'. And that I think is the biggest challenge really, how do you address that normalisation? (Jessica, woman, U2).

Summary

- Most interviewees narrated and explained lad culture in gender-blind ways.
- Thus, they rendered invisible the gender norms, expectations and structural intersecting inequalities that underpin and sustain sexual harassment and violence.
- There were a few important exceptions: ‘I interpret it as humorous in quotation marks, gendered aggression’ (Lisa, woman, U4).
- We need to make visible the gender norms - as root causes - if we are to tackle lad culture effectively.

Addressing the problems

- We need to acknowledge the structural and systematic gender inequality that underpins lad culture, sexual harassment and violence.
- Pyramid - A culture of everyday sexism – including ‘banter’, gender stereotyping, sexist and/or homophobic language, and benevolent sexism – forms the foundation for practices such as sexual harassment, gender-based violence, and rape, as the pyramid peaks.
- Shift understandings of sexual and physical violence from being about the isolated acts of individuals to thinking explicitly about the wider culture which allows, produces, and reinforces such practices.

Addressing the problems

- Acknowledge gender norms and expectations that sustain harassment and violence, and which are embedded and normalised well before students enter higher education.
- Culture change.
- Phipps (2018, p. 177): ‘When universities do take action, it is usually in an individualistic and punitive fashion which both fails to address the root problems and has tremendous potential to exacerbate additional inequalities’.

Jackson, C. and Sundaram, V. (2020) *Lad Culture in Higher Education@ Sexism, Sexual Harassment and Violence*. London: Routledge. *20% discount with code BSE20*

Sundaram, V. and Jackson, C. (2018) 'Monstrous men' and 'sex scandals': the myth of exceptional deviance in sexual harassment and violence in education', *Palgrave Communications*, vol. 4, 147.

Jackson, C. and Sundaram, V. (2018) 'I have a sense that it's probably quite bad ... but because I don't see it, I don't know': staff perspectives on 'lad culture' in higher education', *Gender and Education*.

