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## **Neoliberalisation and 'lad cultures' in higher education**

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*This paper links HE neoliberalisation and 'lad cultures', drawing on interviews and focus groups with women students. We argue that retro-sexist 'laddish' forms of masculine competitiveness and misogyny have been reshaped by neoliberal rationalities to become modes of consumerist sexualised audit. We also suggest that neoliberal frameworks scaffold an individualistic and adversarial culture among young people that interacts with perceived threats to men's privilege and intensifies attempts to put women in their place through misogyny and sexual harassment. Furthermore, 'lad cultures', sexism and sexual harassment in higher education may be invisibilised by institutions to preserve marketability in a neoliberal context. In response, we ask if we might foster dialogue and partnership between feminist and anti-marketisation politics.*

### KEYWORDS

Sexualities, neoliberalism, marketisation, lad culture, laddism, sexual harassment, higher education

## Neoliberalisation and 'lad cultures' in higher education

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### Introduction

In summer 2013, Warwick University students occupied their Senate House in protest against the marketisation of higher education, in part prompted by a £42,000 pay rise awarded to their Vice-Chancellor at a time of austerity (Allen, 2013). This came a few months after Sussex students occupied their campus conference centre for 55 days in reaction to the outsourcing of key services (Phipps, 2013). These actions formed part of a resurgence in student activism, situated within the broader movement opposed to the neoliberalisation of UK higher education which had begun under Thatcher, gathered momentum under successive New Labour governments (Brady, 2012) and has recently intensified, in particular due to competition from 'for-profit' providers (Brown 2011, Richardson, 2011). Also in 2013, a minor media storm erupted around laddish behaviours amongst students. This reached its climax with an incident during the finals of the Glasgow University Union Ancients Debate, when Cambridge debaters Rebecca Meredith and Marlena Valles were subjected to misogynistic heckling and women spectators who came to their defence were also targeted for abuse. Shortly afterwards Meredith and Valles created an anonymous survey soliciting similar experiences, which revealed a widespread problem throughout the UK and elsewhere (Meredith, 2013). Their story provided a focal peak for a variety of articles on activities such as sports initiations, 'pimps and hos', 'geeks and sluts' and 'slag 'n' drag' parties, the sexual pursuit of women freshers (termed 'seal clubbing' in one institution) and the practice of 'slut-dropping' (Bates, 2012; Kingsley 2012; Sherriff 2012).<sup>i</sup> These were brought together under the banner of 'lad culture', seen by some as harmless fun and strongly criticised by others.<sup>ii</sup>

The analysis in this paper brings together these two seemingly unrelated phenomena, exploring resonances between higher education neoliberalisation and student 'lad cultures'. We contend that neoliberal values are reshaping the retro-sexist behaviours which have been identified in student social and sexual life. Our analysis is based on qualitative research conducted in 2013, which amassed evidence from 40 women students in England and Scotland. It intersects with several different literatures, for instance the body of work on 'laddism', discussions about how neoliberalism interacts with sexual subjectivities and

behaviours and analyses of how it shapes higher education, and the budding field of research on violence against women students in the UK (Phipps and Smith, 2012).

Neoliberalism is a value system in which the economic has replaced the intellectual and political and in which the competitive, rational individual predominates over the collective. Within this framework higher education has been instrumentalised as a source of skills supply, with universities located as servants of the 'knowledge economy' and learning replaced by a concern with 'outcomes' (Brady, 2012: 344). Competitive markets have been put in place between and within institutions, and teaching and student support budgets are often diverted into marketing (Matthews, 2013). This has eroded institutional and intellectual autonomy, shaping management preoccupations with league table positions and quality assurance and the personal aggrandisement behaviours of some academics (Brady 2012, p344). In the marketised higher education sector students have been positioned as consumers, which evidences itself in an obsession with degree classifications often to the detriment of learning (Molesworth et al., 2009). The academic has been redefined as the dispenser of a commodity (Brady, 2012: 348); a rather corrupted teaching relationship which plays out in workplaces in which collegial democracy has made way for top-down managerial control (Brennan, 2011).

We argue that the economic discourses which now frame university academic life also shape the social and sexual spheres, informing contemporary student 'lad cultures'. Others have explored how elements of neoliberalism are beginning to influence sexualities, for instance Adam's (2005) research on how 'barebacking' culture in Toronto draws on notions of individualism, personal responsibility, free-market choice and contractual interaction, and Gill (2003, 2008) and Gill and Donaghue's (2013) work on neoliberal/postfeminist 'empowered' femininities. We realise that many of the elements of student 'lad cultures' are not new: indeed, the descriptor 'laddish' has a long history, emerging in the 1950s in reference to *Playboy's* adolescent masculinity, entering sociological parlance in the 1970s with Paul Willis' (1977) *Learning to Labour*, resurfacing in the 1990s to describe the middle class fetishisation of working class machismo embodied in the UK by 'new lads' Noel Gallagher, Frank Skinner and David Baddiel and magazines such as *FHM* and *Loaded* (Benwell, 2002), and being applied from the mid 2000s to publications such as *Nuts* and *Zoo* (Beynon, 2002; Chinn 2006). However, we contend that laddishness in contemporary

student communities displays characteristics which can be linked to recent socioeconomic trends.

Indeed, particular socioeconomic contexts can be seen framing all incarnations of laddism. 1950s laddishness has been positioned as a reaction against the dominant post-war 'family man' role (Chinn, 2006), and the 'new lads' of the 1990s have been located as a cultural retort to the 'new man' and androgyny of the 1960s, 70s and 80s, linked to the backlash against feminism and women's rights (Beynon, 2002). The contemporary 'lad cultures' we examine sit within a continuation of these trends, and can also be interpreted as means of reclaiming territory in the context of recession and increased economic competition. Laddism can be seen as a defensive response to the prevailing misconception that young women are winning the battle of the sexes; and there is a large body of research illustrating how sexism and sexual harassment function to enable men to reclaim power and space (Bennett, 2009; McLaughlin et al, 2012). Laddism has also been linked with 'raunch culture'<sup>iii</sup>, which refers to the incursion of the sexual into popular culture and capitalist markets (Levy, 2006; Walter 2010).

Recent research (Horvath and Hegarty, 2012) found that members of the public could not differentiate between the language used by 'lads' magazines and that of convicted sex offenders. However, another key characteristic of laddism is the inbuilt defence of 'irony', which attempts to deflect criticism of these excesses with disclaimers of humour. As Benwell (2004, 2007) argues, this is often strategically deployed, functioning to give voice to reactionary, antifeminist and homophobic sentiments while remaining ambiguous and evasive. Laddism of course is not attractive to all men, and recent work has identified more inclusive masculinities which do not pivot upon sexism and homophobia (Anderson and McGuire, 2010; McCormack and Anderson, 2010). However, laddism is currently gaining a great deal of social and cultural power, and Dempster (2009, 2011) describes it as the template masculinity for young British men. The activities around which laddish behaviours coalesce, namely drinking, sport, and sex (Dempster, 2009: 482), are integral elements of UK university social life, and similar associations with student cultures have also been documented in the US (see for example Sanday, 2007; Kimmel, 2008).

### Details of study

Concern over the more extreme elements of laddism among students underpinned our commission by NUS in late 2012, to conduct qualitative research on 'lad culture' at UK universities. This was intended to function at least partly as a follow-up to the *Hidden Marks* survey (NUS, 2010), which had revealed a high prevalence of sexual harassment and violence against university women. We were asked to provide a deeper examination of the phenomenon of 'lad culture', through extensive literature review and focus groups/interviews with women students. We conducted four focus groups in 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 universities.<sup>iv</sup> Our report, entitled *That's What She Said* (NUS, 2013), was launched by NUS on International Women's Day 2013 and widely covered in the media, leading to the launch of a national strategy group on 'lad culture' by NUS at a summit in early 2014.

Our participant group was self-selecting, although we attempted to fill gaps in our sample by actively recruiting non-white, non-heterosexual and disabled women, and women studying in all four countries of the UK (the latter we did not achieve). Our request for participants stated neutrally that we were hoping to explore women's views on 'lad culture', about which all our respondents had something to say, much of this less-than-complimentary. With this in mind our sample could be seen as skewed: however, we were not aiming for representativeness but rather for an in-depth exploration of views. We are not claiming that all women find 'lad cultures' problematic, although it is notable that we did not manage to recruit any respondents who had positive things to say about them.

The majority of our respondents were undergraduates aged 18-25, but some were postgraduates and two were over 30. All identified as women/girls, and although some expressed ambivalence none identified as transgendered. Almost 80 percent identified as heterosexual, while the remainder reported a variety of different orientations. 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. The demographics of the sample are detailed in Table 1. Thirty-two participants were from Russell Group universities, with the remainder split between 3 institutions which had belonged to the 1994 group, 2 ex-Polytechnics and one 'new' university. There was a spread of campus/non-campus institutions, although the majority

were city-based. We are both white and identify as women: as a result, many respondents may have felt more comfortable discussing their feelings and experiences with us, as claimed in much classic feminist methodological writing (Oakley, 1981; Finch, 1984). However, it is dangerous to assume this, as there are also differences and power hierarchies between women, for instance in relation to 'race', class and sexual orientation (Edwards, 1990).

The focus group method allowed us to witness the negotiation of identities and ideas (Wilson, 1999), facilitated agenda-setting by participants and helped to mitigate discomfort or power imbalances due to weight of participant numbers and the fact that they were often already friends. Each group lasted approximately 90 minutes and had between 4 and 6 participants, who were encouraged to share in a semi-structured format. Nineteen students in total took part in the focus groups. The remaining 21 were interviewed, in order to explore issues in more depth and allow each woman space for her own experiences and voice (Kitzinger, 2007). Fifteen interviews were conducted in person (5) or over Skype (10), lasting around an hour and involving one, or occasionally two, participants. Six were conducted via Email, with participants asked to respond as fully as they could to 10 questions (one chose to submit a free narrative).

#### 'Lad cultures' on campus

Laddism is one of many potential masculinities and one which men (and women) may dip in and out of, but our research confirmed it can have enormous sociocultural power and impacts upon identity and experience. For our participants 'lad cultures' were primarily found in the social sphere, which allowed them to dominate university life. Extra-curricular activities (especially sports) and nightlife were particularly prominent, echoing other studies (Gough and Edwards, 1998; De Visser and Smith, 2006; Clayton and Harris, 2008; Dempster, 2009, 2011). For example, one of our interviewees (19) described a member of her university rugby team at a sports social, wearing a vest reading 'Campus Rapist' on the front and 'It's not rape if you say surprise' on the back. She also recounted an episode in which a woman walking home across her campus was accosted by twenty naked rugby players as part of an initiation. Finally, she related a story about a sports team locking a member of her university Feminist Society in a coach toilet, and pelting her with pornography magazines. Her narrative and others echoed recent media stories, for instance about the banning of

Durham's St Cuthbert's rugby club from playing after members dressed up as Jimmy Savile, his victims and police for a night out (Press Association, 2012).

Our participants also cited the objectification of women in clubs, students' union parties and corporate events such as the *Carnage* pub crawl. One focus group participant (P) said:

*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.*

Another (K) referred to a night called 'Horny', which was advertised with leaflets depicting scantily clad or topless women, and an event entitled 'Tequila' which promoted itself through unsolicited sexual texts. A third (Q) described an advert for a student night which depicted a woman with duct tape across her chest and genitals and tied to a wall by her ankles and wrists. Again, such stories echoed similar accounts in the media, for instance reports of a poster for a freshers' week event at Cardiff Metropolitan University which pictured a T-shirt bearing the slogan 'I was raping a woman last night and she cried' (BBC News, 2013).

Two-thirds of our study participants discussed sexual harassment and violence, describing it as a normal part of university life. Participants related experiences of sexual molestation (for example, a focus group participant (K) recalled a nightclub where she and a friend had felt 'literally just hands just groping us as we walked along') and explicit comments, for instance 'with that lipstick you'd make my cock look like a barber's pole' (focus group participant Q). However, many talked about the defence of irony, or as they more commonly put it, 'banter' as a means by which such behaviours were 'cover[ed] up with humour' (Interviewee 12) or excused (Interviewee 7). For our respondents, this functioned to shut down critique: as one of our interviewees (18) put it, 'sexism is trivialised so that people who challenge it are made to seem like kill-joys or people with no sense of humour'. A focus group participant (I) described banter as 'the get out of jail free card': nevertheless, there was a strong feeling that it was normalising problematic attitudes and behaviours. As one of our focus group participants (G) said:

*'The scariest part is where does it end? At what point can you not do that? At what point can you not excuse your behaviour by saying I'm just being a lad it's just banter? Are we going to go as far as rape and is that banter? Because making jokes about it is like one step in the direction of that.'*



While not making overly simplistic links between thoughts, words and actions, many of our participants were concerned that speech acts could potentially 'sink in as a mentality' (focus group participant H).

Indeed, for some harassment had become physical violence: for instance, a focus group participant (I) had been pushed down the stairs on a bus after confronting a group of lads who were exposing their penises. A few had sexual assault stories to tell, most concerning people they knew rather than themselves.<sup>v</sup> One (focus group participant P) 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'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.*

This practice has now become so common it has acquired its own term in popular parlance: 'underhanded' (Young-Powell, 2013). It is a short step from this to the story recounted by one of our interviewees (9) below:

*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 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.*

Another focus group participant (H) said that she knew a number of women who had been 'very drunk...passed out and someone hasn't known when to stop.' Our findings echoed those of the *Hidden Marks* survey (NUS, 2010), in which 1 in 7 university women had experienced physical or sexual violence and over two-thirds had been subject to harassment.

#### 'Lad cultures' and the neoliberalisation of higher education

As we explored these data we began to feel that our gender analysis could be enriched by an interpretation drawing on ideas about the 'hidden curriculum' (Freire, 1970 [1968]; Snyder 1970) of the contemporary university. The 'lad cultures' in our study, as well as being informed by rather tired forms of misogyny, also appeared reflective of the neoliberal context, and in particular the consumerism and masculinism pervading campuses in the guise of reform (Blackmore, 2004). The inegalitarian trends of higher education

neoliberalisation (Lynch, 2006) and its impact on management styles, institutional processes (Deem and Brehony, 2005; Morley, 2006), pedagogies and curricula (Molesworth et al, 2009) have been well documented, but there has been less exploration of its effects on student cultures.

Neoliberalism is a market-political rationality (Brown, 2006) based on an autonomous and calculating subject, which situates competitive individualism as the central requisite attribute for a citizenry of constantly reinventing entrepreneurs; a new morality of self-development which has come to predominate in the academy (Lynch, 2006; Sousa, 2011) as 'regimes of performativity' (Ball, 2012: 19) based on outcomes and targets for students and staff have solidified. Our data showed evidence of similar performative regimes in university social/sexual life, with older practices such as the legendary 'fuck a fresher' race existing alongside more neoliberalised systems of monitoring and measurement such as charting sexual conquests (interviewee 2) and giving women grades for their sex appeal. In the changing environments of higher education, alienation exists amongst students and staff who are constantly measuring themselves against each other and the curve (Lynch, 2006). Similarly, our participants depicted inimical masculine cultures characterised by sexual scoring matrices and appraisal against neo-normative femininities. Competition has long been a 'laddish' value and an element of hegemonic masculinity (Jackson, 2010): however, our data revealed more novel modes of sexualised audit. These were widely exposed in May 2013 when a number of Facebook pages entitled 'Rate Your Shag' appeared, linked to various universities, which were 'liked' by over 20,000 users of the social network in 72 hours before being deleted by administrators (Dattoo, 2013; Duggan, 2013).<sup>vi</sup> In an article for Opinion Panel, student journalist Gregor McCann reported that he had visited student residences with 'sex charts' on the walls, declaring that 'women have so much more to offer than a tick on a piece of paper' (McCann, 2013).

In our focus groups, a participant (J) described a club promotions company searching for new staff and rating women students on their sexiness. An interviewee (17) complained that she was often berated on nights out for not wearing sexy enough clothes. Another (6) defined 'lad culture' as a 'hostile environment where everyone is judging everybody else' and a third (9) related an illustrative story:

*I've got a friend who is part of the rugby society and he came to a party after going on a night out with them...and I said, "how was it?" and he said, "you*

*would have hated it, we spent the entire time talking badly about women and all the girls who walked by, we yelled out their ratings at them”.*

The benchmark here is a type of emphasised femininity (Connell, 1987) embodied in comments made in an article on the Uni Lad website<sup>vii</sup> in 2012 which stated, ‘in an ideal world, we’d all be bedding Barbie’ (Uni Lad Mag Evidence, 2013). As one of our focus group participants (I) explained,

*There is no place for a diversity of attraction. You get shit from the other members of your group if you get with someone who they consider to be ugly. So it’s very narrow minded to what a woman is...‘here is the image that you find attractive. Go and find it attractive’. Emphasis on the ‘it’ and not ‘them’.*

Such femininities, produced by consumerist ‘technologies of sexiness’, require women to be white, heterosexual, slim, and constantly sexually available (Evans et al, 2010). Although traditionally misogynistic double standards were also evident in our data, the discussions foregrounded these neo-normative expectations of young women to perform the ‘confident, knowing hetero-sexiness’ (Gill, 2012: 737) which has replaced virginity as the dominant currency of women’s desirability (Gill, 2012: 743). An interviewee (17) confessed that ‘lad culture’ had made her feel she ‘should be getting out there and having more sex’, and another (13) identified a ‘race to be the person who’s the most open about sex, and the person who talks about it most.’ A third (4) reported judging other women ‘on how sexually available they are [and] how they dress’ and a focus group participant (H) chronicled being ‘hit on all the time and a lot of the time if you say “no”, people are like, “oh why are you frigid?” Neoliberalised sexualities require women to look (and be) constantly ‘up for it’ (Gill 2008, p40) but conceal within constructions of the liberated, desiring subject forms of regulation that draw upon ‘the most predictable templates of male sexual fantasy’ (Gill, 2008: 45). Reflecting this, the ‘Shag at Uni’ website was set up in 2012 to ‘offer a space for students to get laid any night of the week and not have any of the strings attached with dating’ (Shag at Uni, 2014b). In 2014 the site awarded the title ‘Lad of the Year’ to Kevin O’Flanagan, who confessed to watching pornography for several hours a day and asking girls to bring him takeaway before he would have sex with them (Shag at Uni, 2014a).

Marketised universities exist within (and perpetuate) a culture based on ‘having’ or ‘getting’ (grades and/or jobs), which develops a sense of entitlement and in which education becomes a transactional exchange (Molesworth et al, 2009). Students’ lives are directed

towards economic self-interest and credential acquisition rather than connection (Lynch, 2006: 7; Jackson and Bisset, 2005: 196). Such market-based views of personhood threaten the existence of community (Sousa, 2011), defined by Bauman (1993, cited in Brady, 2012) as residing in the ways in which we relate to the Other. Indeed, neoliberalism has produced defensive strategies here, with Others seen in adversarial terms and apolitical notions of 'difference' taking precedence over relationality and solidarity. Echoing this, our participants bemoaned the estranged 'lad cultures' they identified, with one interviewee (8) telling us:

*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" – [and then] throw these tissues away.*

Ideas about 'having' – mainly related to women – were central, with the same interviewee relating how girls were 'passed round friendship groups' and 'everyone [had] a go', and describing 'a concept of ownership' which meant that once a girl had slept with a 'lad', he automatically had 'a right to sleep with her again' regardless of whether she wanted to. Another (10) referred to an 'unspoken rule' that

*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 [her].*

Such notions of male entitlement obviously have a long history: however, they have been rejuvenated and reframed within youth cultures in the neoliberal university. Contemporary marketised modes of 'having' suggest that the goal of 'maximising intellectual capital' (Brady, 2012: 348) has been replicated in the sexual sphere. Furthermore, the idea of maximum outcomes for minimal effort which now underpins educational consumption (Molesworth et al, 2009), and the 'effortless achievement' which characterises laddishness in educational contexts (Jackson, 2003; Jackson and Dempster, 2009) animate the quest for an easy lay. Conventional heteronormative expectations have acquired a neoliberal gloss, evoking pornographic representations of heterosex which incorporate increasingly 'hard-core' practices, always gendered (Maddison, 2012), and depict 'a consumptive rather than a relational act' (Gilbert, 2013: 6). Perhaps self-consciously deploying the market lexicon, one of our interviewees (10) described laddish sex as requiring the woman to 'service' the man, elaborating:

*They think...the girl's 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...like women are the object, they are there just for them to use as they feel fit.*

There was evidence that this lack of mutuality could be conducive to sexual harassment and violence: one of our interviewees (11) said, '[lads] think its okay to grab a girls bum or try and kiss her when she doesn't want you to', and another (9) was of the opinion that 'guys feel it's okay...if there is someone who is drunk, for them to just do what they want.' In 2012, the rape-supportive nature of certain laddish discourses was highlighted when the Uni Lad website temporarily went offline after posting an article entitled 'Sexual Mathematics' containing the statement:

*If the girl you've taken for a drink... won't 'spread for your head', think about this mathematical statistic: 85% of rape cases go unreported. That seems to be fairly good odds. Uni Lad does not condone rape without saying 'surprise' (Morris, 2012).*

Other articles on the site had housed similar content, for instance a piece describing slamming a woman's head into a wall during intercourse 'to knock some sense into her', a characterisation of non-consensual sex as 'fun for one' (Bloomfield, 2012), and a Facebook update containing the phrase, adapted from comedian Frankie Boyle, 'I'm gonna shag her so hard her gynecologist [sic.] will think she's been in a car crash' (Uni Lad Mag Evidence, 2013). In our interviews, we heard the phrase 'I'm going to put you in half', which a participant (19) translated as 'fuck you till you can't walk', and a focus group participant (Q) said that men she knew referred to women as 'gash', complaining: 'they don't talk about us like we are human beings. They talk about us like we are just our genitals.'

These statements simultaneously evince both the extremes of hypermasculinity and the callousness of the contemporary socioeconomic context (Lynch, 2006; Lakes and Carter, 2011). Indeed, the intertwining of these within the phenomenon of contemporary 'lad cultures' was recently demonstrated in a spate of media discussions highlighting a widespread perception that 'new' forms of sexism appear to be particularly nasty (Phipps, 2014). We do not believe laddish sexism to be especially new, but it can be argued that it has become more brutal in a neoliberal context. Neoliberalism is a culture of 'cruelty and harsh competitiveness' (Giroux in Polychroniou, 2013) often imposed through repression, which has been blamed for increasing global inequality and social unrest that creates the conditions for physical/sexual violence (Oksala, 2011; Smith, 2012). In higher education,

neoliberal systems of performance evaluation and university ranking are underpinned by values such as dominance and marginalisation rather than the urge to communicate and empathise (King, 2011: 26, 31). Although sexual violence is certainly not new, the neoliberal university provides an environment in which it can both flourish and be normalised.

### Conclusion

Our study suggested that conventional modes of competitiveness and misogyny which characterize 'lad cultures' have been shaped by neoliberal consumerist and sexual values in the university environment. The laddish ability to 'game the system' in both academic and social/sexual terms reflects the intertwining of certain masculinities with the subjectivities produced in a neoliberal age. 'Lad cultures' also intersect with neoliberal/postfeminist femininities in problematic ways: our participants' narratives showed how neoteric sexual scripts, just like established ones, can scaffold harassment and violence. Our research highlights contradictions around neoliberalism's intersections with gender, showing how the successful middle class 'future girls' described as the primary beneficiaries of neoliberal opportunities (Harris, 2004; McRobbie, 2007) are also being penalised for their success. Laddism, of course, pre-dates neoliberalism: however, it is shaped by prevailing social conditions, and contemporary (real or perceived) threats to male privilege, situated in financial crisis and recession, have produced attempts to put women in their place which are nurtured by the rather callous environment of the higher education sector. Our findings contribute to a growing trend to identify laddish behaviours in groups other than the working classes (Dempster, 2009), although many university men also disidentify with laddism or disapprove of it entirely as a bogus performance of machismo which masks anxiety (Dempster, 2009, 2011; Anderson and McGuire, 2010). This was seen recently in a Twitter chat curated by NUS Scotland and the White Ribbon Campaign under the #ImNotThatLad hashtag, in which young men posted their objections (NUS Scotland, 2014).

The neoliberal threat to critical and political values and subjects (Lynch, 2006; Molesworth et al., 2009) is relevant to the existence/persistence of retro-sexism in student communities (see also Danvers, 2013). 'Lad culture' was defined by many of our participants as a 'pack mentality', with one focus group discussion (participants G, I, and J) characterising it as a group behaviour which would not necessarily be attractive or accessible to individual men. The contradictions between this and its individualistic discursive framings situate it firmly within the milieu of neoliberalism, as a form of 'groupthink' which does not recognise itself

as such and offers freedom of choice and expression in pre-packaged and predefined ways. Echoing the ways in which the neoliberal academic exists simultaneously within concepts of individuality and performance regimes drawing upon normalised practices of the self (Morrissey 2013), the university 'lad' is an individualist but not an individual. Indeed, responsibility for the worst excesses of 'lad cultures' must also be shared with student societies and clubs, and in particular sports teams (Sanday, 2007; Kimmel, 2008; Clayton and Harris, 2008; Dempster, 2009, 2011), as well as being situated within the massive commercialisation of student leisure and the night-time economy, the latter of which is also heavily gendered (Roberts, 2006; Shaw 2010).

In addition, neoliberalising institutions themselves are complicit in overlooking the harassment and violence which can be part of 'lad cultures'. In the US, where higher education markets are well established and despite a legislative framework mandating the publication of campus crime statistics (Phipps and Smith, 2012), institutions have been criticised for covering these up, or encouraging students to drop complaints, in order to preserve reputation in a competitive field (Sack, 2013). It is likely that this will increasingly occur in the UK, and the privatisation of essential services such as campus security and student support and counselling (Williams 2011) will threaten student safety and the quality of pastoral care. Additionally, the developing 'pressure-cooker culture' amongst academics (Grove, 2012) and fears about casualisation (Lynch, 2006) are already creating an individualism which may mean that academics turn a blind eye while trying to keep our jobs (at best) and advance our careers (at worst). Research has also shown that students who endure institutional betrayal after violence suffer the most trauma (Smith and Freyd, 2013).

Unfortunately, the neoliberal values which support sexism and violence against women students could also ensure that universities are less likely to tackle it. There are no easy answers here: in the US, although education markets have been mobilized politically to demand that institutions address crime as part of their student experience package, this solution remains locked within the neoliberal frame. Alternatively, we could attempt to politicize the links between the violence of neoliberalism and the misogyny and violence in our student communities. Recently and alongside the anti-marketisation movement, there has been a rise in student feminist activity related to sexual harassment and violence (Hilton 2013). The two might be encouraged to become dialogic with one another, exploring commonalities in the kinds of values and practices they wish to oppose. This would also be a

productive way to develop discussions of sexism within contemporary left-wing politics: for instance, the influence of feminist activists was felt in early 2014 in the Sussex Against Privatization decision to ban Socialist Workers' Party materials from demonstrations due to its culture of rape apologism (Sussex Against Privatisation, 2014). As neoliberalised subjects ourselves, academics could play a role by speaking out about sexual harassment and violence and linking neoliberal rationalities and 'lad cultures' in our own thinking, teaching and politics.

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#### SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

Due to issues around confidentiality our research data cannot be accessed, but we are happy to provide details of our research instruments and design via Email request.

#### BIOGRAPHIES

Alison Phipps is Director of Gender Studies and Senior Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Sussex. Her research focuses on debates around women's bodies, including topics such as sexual violence, sex work, childbirth, breastfeeding and abortion, and explores how the contemporary neoliberal/neoconservative coalition frames and circumscribes feminist and left-wing politics. She is also interested in the issue of violence against women students and its intersections with 'lad cultures' and neoliberal sexual subjectivities. She is author of *The Politics of the Body: Gender in a Neoliberal and Neoconservative Age*, published by Polity Press.

Isabel Young has a BA in Sociology and an MA in Gender Studies from the University of Sussex. Her research has explored black and minority ethnic women's experiences of anti-Muslim racism, constructions of sexual violence on Facebook 'banter' sites, and women students' views on 'lad cultures'. Isabel has worked closely with Survivor's Network and UK

Uncut on issues around violence against women and girls. She currently works for a migrant women's social inclusion project in East London.

Table 1: participant demographics

ID	Sex/gender	Age	Sexual orientation	Relationship status	Ethnicity	Nationality	Class	Disability?	Year
1	Female	22	Heterosexual	In a relationship	White British	British	Working/middle	Yes	PG
2	Female	21	Heterosexual	In a relationship	White British	British	Lower middle	Yes	UG 3
3	Female	19	Bisexual/asexual	Single	Eastern European Jewish	British	Middle	No	UG 2
4	Female	32	Heterosexual	In a relationship	White British	British	Middle	No	PG
5	Female	20	Heterosexual	Dating	Black British	British	Working	Yes	UG 3
6	Female	32	Heterosexual	Single	White British	British	Working	No	PG
7	Female	22	Queer	In a relationship	White British	British	Middle	No	UG 3
8	Female	20	Heterosexual	Single	White British	British	Middle	No	UG 3
9	Female	-	-	In a relationship	White British	British	-	-	UG 3
10	Female	22	Heterosexual	Single	British Asian	British	-	-	UG 3
11	Female	18	Heterosexual	Single	White British	British	Lower middle	No	UG 1
12	Female	22	Heterosexual	Single	White British	British	Upper middle	No	UG 4
13	Female	20	-	Single	White European	European	-	-	UG 1
14	Female	22	Heterosexual	Engaged	White British	British	Middle	No	PG
15	Female	20	Heterosexual	In a relationship	White British	British	Working	No	UG 3
16	Female	21	Heterosexual	Single	White British	British	-	No	-



ID	Sex/gender	Age	Sexual orientation	Relationship status	Ethnicity	Nationality	Class	Disability?	Year
19	Female	25	Queer	In a relationship	White British	British	Middle	No	UG 2
20	Female	24	Heterosexual	Single	White British	British	-	No	PG
21	Female	22	Heterosexual	In a relationship	White British	British	Middle	No	UG 3
A	Female	19	Heterosexual	Single	White British	British	Middle	No	UG 2
B	Female	20	Heterosexual	In a relationship	White British	British	Middle	No	UG 3
C	Female	-	-	-	White British	British	-	-	UG 4
D	Female	19	Undecided	Single	Mixed (White and Black Caribbean)	British	Working	No	UG 1
E	Female	-	-	-	White British	British	-	-	UG 1
F	Female	20	Gay/lesbian	Single	White British	British	Upper middle	No	UG 2
G	Female	-	-	-	White British	Northern Irish	-	-	UG 2
H	Female	-	-	-	White British	British	-	-	UG 1
I	Female	-	-	-	White British	British	-	-	UG 3
J	Female	-	-	-	White British	British	-	-	UG 4
K	Female	19	Heterosexual	In a relationship	White British	British	Middle	No	UG 2
L	Female	23	Heterosexual	In a relationship	Chinese	British	Working/middle	No	UG 2
M	Female	21	Heterosexual	Single	White British	British	Middle	No	UG 1
N	Female	19	Heterosexual	In a relationship	White British	British	Middle	Yes	UG 1
O	Female	20	Heterosexual	Single	Asian	Chinese	Middle	No	UG 1
P	Female	22	Heterosexual	In a relationship	White British	British	-	-	PG
Q	Female	22	Heterosexual	In a relationship	White British	British	Middle	No	PG
R	Female	22	Heterosexual	Single	White British	English	Middle	Yes	PG

<b>ID</b>	<b>Sex/gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Sexual orientation</b>	<b>Relationship status</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Class</b>	<b>Disability?</b>	<b>Year</b>
S	Female	22	Pansexual	In a relationship	White British	British	-	Yes	PG

Year – PG = postgraduate, UG = undergraduate (followed by year number)

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<sup>i</sup> This is where men offer women lifts home, but abandon them miles from their destination; however, it should be noted that there has only been one reported incident.

<sup>ii</sup> 'Lad culture' is a potentially problematic term, implying a homogeneity and cohesiveness that does not exist across communities or over time, suggesting deterministic links to masculine beliefs which we do not necessarily wish to endorse, and giving sexism a veneer of respectability. Nevertheless, this became a media buzzword and was the focus of our commission from NI. We use the term here (changing it to 'lad cultures' where we can).

<sup>iii</sup> Again, this is a problematic term which we do not necessarily endorse.

<sup>iv</sup> Despite our best efforts, we were not able to access participants from Wales and Northern Ireland.

<sup>v</sup> It is possible that the focus group setting in particular was not conducive to personal disclosure.

<sup>vi</sup> These pages were used by students of all genders and so speak to cultures which do not necessarily exclude women: however, our research suggests that normative masculinities and femininities play a significant role in the evaluative criteria being used.

<sup>vii</sup> Uni Lad is perhaps the most popular such site currently operating in the UK: at the time of writing, its associated Facebook page had been 'liked' by almost 600,000 users.