Carolyn Jackson
Lancaster University, UK

'Lad Culture' and Learning in Higher Education (0212)

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> 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' … 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. (Phipps and Young, 2013, p. 1)

While there have been numerous studies exploring 'laddish' cultures within secondary schools in Britain and elsewhere (for example, Frosh et al 2002; Francis and Archer 2005; Jackson 2006), research on laddism in higher education (H.E.) is scarce (Dempster 2009; Jackson and Dempster, 2009). However, anecdotal evidence, media reports and the recent NUS research project suggest that laddism is rife and problematic in universities (see opening quote). For example, Uni Lad - a misogynist website set up in 2010, described on Wikipedia as a 'website promoting lad culture aimed at male university students in the UK' – claims to have over 35,000 visitors every day, and has just short of half-a-million fans on Facebook. A report in *The Guardian* (UK newspaper) last year suggests that 'the pressure to join [lad culture] is strong – it is almost an unwritten rule that you must ride the drink-laced banter-wagon of laddishness to enjoy university to its full extent' (26/06/12).

This paper presents and discusses research funded by the Society for Educational Studies, the aim of which was to begin to explore laddism in H.E.. The project focussed on students studying sports science in a post-1992 university in England. Research methods included questionnaires, observations of lectures, and one-to-one interviews with students (36) and staff (5). The interviews explored, inter alia, approaches to academic work, social life, disruptive behaviours in lectures, discourses about the value of academic application, and whether students perceived 'lad' cultures to exist and, if they did, how such cultures were regarded.

Drawing on data from the observations and interviews, this paper explores manifestations of laddism, the implications for students and lecturers, and responses to it. In particular, it considers what laddism means in a H.E. context, and the ways in which lad cultures impact on student learning inside and outside of lecture contexts.

References
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