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Moving beyond ideas of laddism: Conceptualising 'mischievous masculinities' as a new way of understanding everyday sexism and gender relations

Kitty Nichols

University of Sheffield, The department of Sociological Studies, Elmfield Building, Northumberland Road, Sheffield, S10 2TU, UK.

0114 222 6412

k.nichols@sheffield.ac.uk

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Abstract

This article engages with current debates on 'lad cultures' by questioning how we understand the term in the specific context of everyday sexism and within groups of men varying in age. Further to this, using a feminist and critical masculinity studies perspective, the article will explore how men do not necessarily comprehend their behaviour within the framework of lad culture or within the continuum of sexual violence (Jackson, 2006; Wheaton, 2000). Through discussion of ethnographic and interview data collected over a year at a site historically associated with lad cultures, that of a Rugby Union club in Northern England, an alternative way of conceptualising masculinity and everyday sexism, 'mischievous masculinities', is proposed.

Men in the research practiced what I term mischievous masculinities, whereby they implemented 'banter' to aid in both the construction and de-construction of sexist ideas within the rugby space. Performing mischievous masculinity enabled men of all ages to both engage in and simultaneously challenge everyday sexism in ways they understood to be 'innocent'. However, the continual framing of banter as 'just a laugh' demonstrated that this form of sexism can be construed as problematic, due, in part, to its subtlety, in relation to more overt and violent sexist practices. A key difference between the men in my research and previous theorising of 'lad culture' is the recurring theme amongst older participants that 'I should know better', demonstrating consciousness of the sexist and problematic connotations which could be drawn from this interaction. This notion of mischievous masculinities then, in the context of a life course perspective, can be seen to challenge more established notions of an unreflexive lad culture, thus affording a more nuanced understanding of everyday sexism amongst more diverse groups of men than currently exists, as well as allowing for men's agency in a specific site.

Key words: Sexism, banter, lads, mischievous masculinity, Rugby Union, sport.

Introduction

Lad culture and laddish behaviours have become almost synonymous with British culture, connected to specific historical sociocultural divisions and traditions within society. Current understandings of lads have been informed by both the specific British historical context, as well as contemporary depictions in the media which include 'lads on tour', and commodification of laddishness in popular television programmes and magazines (Willis, 1977). Previous research has shown that there are particular spheres of society in which lad culture is deemed to be more prominent than others, with institutions such as education, the workplace and leisure sites being key spaces in which lad cultures are frequently constructed and reproduced (Kidd, 2013, Dempster, 2009; Schacht, 1996). Within such studies there has been recognition of the significance of place in enabling lad cultures to be practiced, with many men feeling more 'able' to behave in particular ways depending on the spatial context (Robinson and Hockey, 2011). Nowhere is this more visible than in sporting sites, where notions of lads and lad cultures arguably originated, and where discussions regarding the relationship between lad cultures and everyday sexism are growing.

Everyday sexism is becoming more widely recognised understood to have become so embedded within many of our daily lives and routines that it often goes unnoticed, becoming normalised through society (Ronai, Zsembik and Feagin, 2013). Lad culture, though not always overtly recognised in the narratives of everyday sexism, is continually alluded to by the media and occasionally in academic writing, arguably reflecting wider societal understandings of the connections between lads and sexist behaviours. Most problematic, though, is that everyday sexism and laddish behaviours are often passed off as 'just a bit of banter', with the implications and effects diminished. A high profile example of this is a case form 2011 where two Sky Sports News presenters made sexist comments when discussing the ability of a football linesperson to do their job based on their gender. These sexist and derogatory comments were passed off as 'just banter', with the subsequent discussion within the public realm reflecting the idea that lads should be able to have a 'laugh' sometimes, once again demonstrating the normalisation of sexist behaviours.

Recent work has begun to critique humour in society, questioning whether the framing of sexist comments as a joke alters the way we understand and evaluate its meaning (Bishop, 2015; Mills, 2008; Greenwood and Isbell, 2002, Ryan and Kanjorski, 1998). Banter is a fast growing form of interaction within British society, becoming synonymous with lads and laddish behaviours, commonly acting as a way for men to convey discourses of gender relations and sexist ideas. Understood as a type of humour and interactional practice which permeates all spheres of the social world, banter is seen to be a specific form of jocular interaction, with associated styles and strategies, including interaction based upon adopting impolite, offensive and abusive language and tone (Haugh and Bousfield, 2012; Plester and Sayers, 2007).

Studies from other sporting sites including football have conceptualised banter as a traditionally male linguistic insult, deemed to function as a 'regulatory or policing tool' in order sustain masculine identities (Thurnell-Read, 2012; McDowell and Schaffner, 2011; Kiesling, 2005; Kotthoff, 2005). A recent case of so-called banter being placed under a more critical lens in relation to sexism can be seen in the case of the LSE University Rugby Union team, who in 2014 released recruitment material using language which they deemed to be 'banter'. In this case the wording was extremely misogynistic and sexist, acting to separate rugby playing men from other groups in society (Ellis-Petersen, 2014). This relationship between banter and laddism, and the accompanying framing as innocent rather than a form of everyday sexism is important to acknowledge and will be the focus of this article.

This article will begin by engaging with current understandings of lads and lad cultures, exploring what men gain from participation in laddish behaviours, specifically through their implementation of banter to convey sexist ideas. Building on the understandings of laddism and lad cultures within the rugby setting provided, new dimensions to the study of lads will then be presented, moving beyond depiction of lads in the media and sporting sites as static monolithic characters with little agency into their own behaviours, instead further exploring more contemporary work on laddism which examines the nuances and critical stances towards lads and laddism. Whilst I am in no way suggesting that laddish behaviours are positive, or detracting from the contribution of laddism to sexism within society, I also briefly put forward an argument for exploring the ways that men are challenging sexism themselves, on the

grounds that this will provide a stronger foundation from which to develop further discussions and to enable strategies to deal with sexist behaviours. The article will seek to provide new ways of theorising masculinity through thinking of mischievous masculinities as an alternative framework to provide a more nuanced understanding of both the diversity of performances of laddish behaviours within the Rugby Union setting, and acknowledgement of the diversity in terms of men and the lifecourse will be provided.

Understanding the 'Lad'

A prominent cultural narrative of masculinity and gender relations in the 1990's was the emergence of the Lad and laddism as a specific culture (Edwards, 2006; Gill, 2003). Since then lads have become what Rosalind Gill refers to as 'familiar and recognizable stereotypes' (2003, p. 37). Society and the media have become saturated with references to lads and lad cultures, with laddism becoming a highly marketable phenomenon evident in the abundance of television shows and magazines which have become dedicated to reflecting and centring upon lad culture (Walsh, 2010; Edwards, 2006). This type of masculinity is still very much present today with the effects and implications of this culture and gendered identity rippling through society in diverse ways. The current popularity of programs such as *The Inbetweeners* (2010) demonstrates that now, more than ever, lads and lad culture are still significant to society.

Lads and lad cultures have been explored across the social sciences, understood by early writers such as Becky Francis (1999) as having particular features and characteristics including:

> *A young, exclusively male, group, and the hedonistic practices popularly associated with such groups (for example, 'having a laugh', alcohol consumption, disruptive behaviours, objectifying women, and an interest in pastimes and subjects constructed as masculine).* (1999, p. 357)

Since the establishment of such definitions within academia, lads and laddism have arguably become synonymous with specific types of practices and behaviours. These often centre upon the idea of men having fun and behaving in ways deemed to align with historical and hegemonic notions of masculinity. These include displaying masculine characteristics such as strength, aggression, physicality, wit and heterosexuality (Connell and Messerchmidt, 2005; Schacht, 1996; Carrigan, Connell & Lee, 1985). Though all of the characteristics noted remain prominent in our continued understanding and construction of lads, more recently, features such as wit, and the ability to be able to banter within groups has been viewed as significant in definitions of laddish behaviours (Lynch, 2010; Plester and Sayers, 2007). The links between banter and lad cultures will be returned to in more detail in subsequent sections of the article, though it is important to note here that banter, viewed as a traditionally male insult, is often adopted by males to express discourses of gender relations, particularly those which sustain dominant forms of masculinity (McDowell and Schaffner, 2011; Kotthoff, 2005). Arguably, it is through the guise of banter that everyday sexist ideals are presented, a point which will be discussed in depth in further sections of the article.

Perhaps one of the most notable features of laddism is that it is linked to the notion and popular narrative that 'boys will be boys' (Thompson, 2002; Connolly, 1997). This narrative describes

and builds upon understandings of masculinity as a gendered identity which is learned through the process of socialization and acts to support social constructionists' understandings of identity. Previous theorising on men has suggested that there is an inevitability regarding the behaviour of boys, building on academic writing which notes that from a young age men learn 'masculine' behaviours associated with stereotypical masculine identities such as aggression, competition, domination and control (Kidd, 2013; Thompson, 2002). This implies that men have limited agency within the construction of their masculine identities, with previous work suggesting that men construct notions of what constitutes a lad through learning what a lad is not and thereby creating binaries and hierarchies in understandings of gender in society (Meth and McClymont, 2009; Hearn, 1994).

Interestingly, this narrative of 'boys will be boys' is also embedded within lifecourse perspectives and can be usefully linked to lad cultures too. Definitions and popular perceptions of lads places an emphasis upon youth, with laddish behaviours deemed to be synonymous with boyishness and a lack of discipline and maturity (Jackson, Dempster and Pollard, 2014; Gill, 2003; Kehily and Nayak, 1997). Within both the narratives of laddism and 'boys being boys', there is the underlying assumption that the behaviours and interactive practices associated with young men, including laddism and associated sexist ideologies, are temporary, and so laddism is understood to be tied up to particular moments of the life course (Walsh, 2010; Thompson, 2002; Middleton, 1992). Furthermore, writing which advocates laddism as specific to adolescence insinuates that 'being a lad' is something which you grow out of, an identity you discard as you progress through the lifecourse, when it is expected that you begin to 'know better' (Jackson et al., 2014; Gill, 2003). Within writing on laddism a clear theme emerges, that this form of behaviour is something which males overcome with time (Walsh, 2010; Thompson, 2002). Such ideas align with work from Sociology which discusses transitioning masculinities, with writers such as Robinson and Hockey (2011) noting that men's identities shift through both space and time.

The Research

This research draws upon ethnographic and interview data collected over eighteen months at a Rugby Union club located in the North East of England. The club was selected due to both the locality and the composition of the team and club as one which comprised men of varying ages and backgrounds. The club has its own ground and a clubhouse which is the centre of pre and post-match social activities. The decision to use this site, and to focus on Rugby Union, was supported by evidence from previous research which has shown that sporting sites are significant in the construction of masculine identities and lad cultures (Van Campenhout and Van Hoven, 2014; Dempster, 2009; Robinson, 2008; Connell, 2008; 2005; Mac an Ghail and Haywood, 2007).

The participants for this research comprised two groups, those who actively play rugby and those who are members of the club and spectators of the sport.[1] The all-male rugby team played on a regular basis and the majority of the group were white and aged between eighteen and

[1] Participation in the research was not reliant upon age; rather the categorization of players and regulars emerged naturally after the early stages of the fieldwork.

forty. The men, who have all been given pseudonyms, were for the most part semi-professional, with professions outside of rugby, including: doctors, farmers, manual labourers, teachers and office workers. Thus, for the players rugby was a leisure activity external to their working lives. Many of the team had been playing at the club from a young age and had long term family ties to the club.

The other group of participants in the research were those who did not currently play rugby. This group of individuals were older, ranging from late thirties to eighties. These participants are referred to as 'regulars' in this research, as they are individuals for whom the routine of attending the club was significant in their everyday lives. This group of regulars were also predominantly male, though there were a few females comprising part of the committee. Most of these participants had historical links to the club, with many of them having played when they were younger. Alternatively, many of them were initially linked to the club through their children. For the regulars, the rugby club is a place where they enjoyed socialising on weekday evenings and weekends, with many of this group drawing comparisons between the club community and family life.

A feminist approach to research was utilised as this theorising views gender as a social construction, thus enabling an in depth critique of masculinity (Pini and Pease, 2013; Butler, 2008). In addition to this, feminist theorising is understood to provide a critique of the construction of knowledge, placing emphasis upon situated experiences (Hesse-Biber, 2012; Flax, 1987). Observations and semi structured interviews within the rugby context were implemented to collect data. The participant observations spanned eighteen months, involving visits to the club twice a week, both on training nights and match days, as well as attending the occasional away match. Further to this, half way through the research period I began volunteering on the bar. Though complexities associated with negotiating the insider/outsider relationships and membership roles were acknowledged, overall I felt that through volunteering, I was able to gain insight and understanding of the interactions and practices associated with the rugby culture which may not have been possible through observations as an outsider alone[2] (Bridges, 2013; Schacht, 1996; Adler & Adler, 1987). Observations of interactions, behaviours and language were recorded in a research diary and continued whilst the interviews were conducted.

Interviews were conducted with twenty men, though these did not follow the traditional semi-structured interview format. This was due to the nature of the study, particularly the key themes of the research and complexities highlighted in previous work relating to the challenges of interviewing men regarding their masculinity, including the pressure felt by men in particular contexts to adhere to cultural scripts and to perform masculinity in the research process (Holmgren, 2013; Walby, 2010; Denzin, 2001; Schwalbe and Wolkomir, 2001; Winchester, 1996; Turner, 1982). Instead, the interviews were casual and though a few basic questions were addressed to each participant, the interviews were conducted with both individual and small

[2] It is important to be reflexive of my own gender, recognising the ways in which the men's understanding of my gender and the ways in which I negotiated my own gendered identity influenced the research, however, due to the scope of the article a full discussion of the complexities of this is not possible here (Bridges, 2013; Mckeganey and Bloor, 1991).

groups of men over intermittent meetings, recorded where possible and transcribed or written up as a narrative after the event. Interviews were led by discussion of a particular activity or interaction, in doing so, the participants provided an account and explanation of their understandings of real time events and this acted as a catalyst for deeper reflections. In this way, I was able to explore current understandings alongside reflections through the lifecourse (Wight, 1996).

Continual references to lad cultures in the rugby club: What does laddism offer the men?

Conceptualisations of laddism and lad cultures are particularly associated with sporting spheres, with Rosalind Gill (2003) discussing the significance of the role of sports, such as football, in the increasing visibility and spread of lad culture in society. These ideas are further supported by work which suggests that 'laddishness' and macho behaviours are interlinked (Dempster, 2009; Jackson, 2002). As previously noted, there are distinct overlaps in terms of the characteristics which underpin lad cultures and those which are associated with historical notions of masculinity represented in sporting cultures (Dempster, 2009; Gill, 2003; Schacht, 1996). Within rugby cultures notions of manliness are prominent, with 'rugby masculinity' continually performed by the men through displaying characteristics including being practical, tough, un-emotional, demonstrating sporting prowess and participating in post-match drinking (Van Campenhout and Van Hoven, 2014, p. 1090; Pringle, 2008; Morin, Longhurst and Johnstone, 2001). Sports men, particularly in the Rugby Union context, can be seen to be what Steve Dempster (2009, p. 481) refers to as 'exemplars of laddishness'. Most notably, these 'laddish' characteristics often involve conveying sexist ideologies, as I will explore further through the following sections.

Throughout the fieldwork I witnessed first-hand lad cultures working in ways which we have come to expect through representations and constructions of lads in some academic writing and the media, demonstrating that laddish behaviours and lad cultures are still extremely prominent within rugby spaces. Across the sample the words 'laddism' and 'lads' were commonly referenced. For Jeremy, a teacher aged 36, he noted that '*the club is where it's time to have some fun with the lads, let off steam and have a laugh you know'*. This was echoed by many of the other men, who responded to questioning regarding their enjoyment at the club in ways similar to Will, a 26 year old fitness coach, who commented that time at the club is: *'a bit of lad time isn't it, time for a bit of bants with the guys'*[3]. Here we see that the men view the rugby spaces as one in which laddish behaviours are permitted. Further to this, Jeremy's description of the rugby club as a space which allows him to '*let off steam'* understood alongside Will's framing of time at rugby as different to time spent elsewhere, implies that the men view masculinity as relational, with notions of 'lad time' being viewed in opposition to that which is not, notably time with their families or partners. In doing so, they are aligning with work which discusses gender binaries and social divisions created in sports spheres (Schacht, 1996;

[3] The term 'bants' was utilised by the men as an abbreviation to the word banter, which in itself arguably acted to slightly trivialise the connotations and meanings associated with the practice of banter.

Connell, 1995). Significantly, Will also introduces the idea that laddism is linked to banterous interactions.

As the research evolved I began to see banter as significant in order for the men to convey their laddish identity and to show belonging to the group. The ability to 'do' banter was viewed by many of the men as a significant marker of being able to 'make it' as one of the lads and to be included in the group. This was exemplified in a conversation with Shane, a 28 year old bus driver, who shared his experiences of moving to the area and becoming involved in the club: '*When I came I thought, these are a nice bunch of lads and I learnt that if I got in on the banter, that was my way in. So I teased Jimbo*[4] *...and boom I was in.'* This idea conveyed by Shane supports Belinda Wheaton's (2000) work on male windsurfers, which highlighted that banter was often a way that the men demonstrated their allegiance to the group and their masculinity. Further to this, Connell's (2000) work on iron-men usefully helps to understand Shane's ideas, as here banter is tied up with expectations of sporting practices, with participants in her study suggesting that banter is central to achieving a successful sporting masculinity. With the example of Shane, it is clear that being able to participate in the banter was deemed as important in order to successfully achieve the rugby masculinity which is valued within the rugby space.

Laddism and sexism in the rugby setting

During my observations and interviews I also witnessed performances of laddishness of a sort that has been problematized in recent writing on lad cultures (Jackson et al., 2014; Phipps and Young, 2013). An example of this was when banter was adopted to draw attention to the styling of one of the player's hair. Gerry aged 42, an IT consultant, made one particular comment: '*Alright mate, you want me to bring my wife's hairdryer so you can sort that mop out post-match?'* This was in reference to a young player who was wearing his hair in a top knot, the only one of the team of fifteen to have longer hair. Many of the men felt that this styling was not "*manly enough*" (Ted, 45) and "*not in-keeping with the rest of the lads*" (Kit, 32). Here through making comparisons between the player and his wife, Gerry is legitimizing the rugby masculinity which was valued in the field and positioning himself as an 'exemplar of laddishness' (Dempster, 2009, p. 481). Kit's comment here demonstrates that the historical characteristics associated with masculinity and lad cultures, as outlined in previous sections, are still very prominent within these spaces. The banterous tone was implemented to frame the comments as light hearted, when arguably the meaning was serious[5] and sexist, acting to sustain and protect the masculine ideals valued in the setting (Barrett, 2008; Kiesling, 2005).

Interestingly, Gerry's comments did not go unnoticed and through my observations, I was able to see that not all of the men necessarily agreed with Gerry's statement, though on this occasion did not challenge him. What appears to be significant is that through the tone of the delivery, and framing of the comment as banter, Gerry is able to make the comments freely (Garde,

[4] 'Jimbo' refers to the nickname the men gave to one of the other men who regularly visited the club called Jim.

[5] It is also important to acknowledge cultural and potentially racist undertones to the banter, which there is not space to explore within this article.

2008). This aligns with Robin Lakoff's (1990) work on language and power, in which she asserts that:

> *Saying serious things in jest both creates camaraderie and allows the speaker to avoid responsibility for anything controversial in the message. It's just a joke, after all-can't you take a joke? In a lite and camaraderie society worse than being racist or mean-spirited is not getting a joke or being unable to take one. (Lakoff, 1990, p. 270)*

Here Lakoff highlights that the inability to be able to take a joke is judged and criticised within society, with joking viewed as a harmless pursuit. Building on these ideas, Sara Mills (2008, p. 12) offers a further understanding of Gerry's behaviour, presenting the idea of 'indirect sexism', describing this as 'sexism which is undercut by humour or irony, signalled by exaggerated or marked intonation or stress.' Drawing on both the ideas of Lakoff and Mills we can understand Gerry's banterous comments within the context of sexism which is permitted within the rugby club under the guise of humour.

The type of behaviour exemplified by Gerry here was typical of many interactions witnessed at the club and it became apparent that this type of laddish behaviour was normalised, through framing it as playful. A further example, taken from a conversation I had with a group of men during my observations, effectively demonstrates the ways in which men continually utilised indirect sexism in order to legitimize masculinity and demonstrate laddism in the space, doing so without regarding this as problematic (Mills, 2008). I was talking to a group of regulars about the rules and ways of playing sports other than rugby and we were discussing similarities and differences between these, speculating as to which ones we felt to be most technically challenging. The following excerpt from my research diary provides an interesting narrative of the interaction:

> *We were talking about the regulations and laws of Aussie Rules when Lewis came over. I was unsure how exactly this sport worked, and so made the gesture of handballing[6] with my hands to the group. He asked me to repeat the action, which I naively did. Then he said, "well I probably shouldn't say this should I, but you don't half have a good hand action there". He said that I would be able to practice that anytime I wanted. I responded with "you know exactly what I mean, stop lowering the tone" to which his response was "well I have to get my kicks from somewhere, and a bit of naughtiness and banter is allowed here."*
>
> *Research diary 8th April 2014*

The idea conveyed by Lewis, a 37 year old welder, of knowing better is prominent here and will be explored further in the next section. However, for the moment the focus will remain on how through the framing of his comments as banter, Lewis legitimates his masculinity and laddish behaviours within the setting. Within this discussion I was showing knowledge of sport and in this way disrupting the hierarchy of gender relations associated with the club and wider

[6] Handballing is a specific way of passing the ball executed by holding the ball on the flat palm of one hand and hitting it with the other clenched fist.

sporting spheres, in which women are rarely included in discussions relating to the technicalities of sport (McDowell and Schaffner, 2011). Lewis implements banter heavily laden with explicit sexual connotations to, arguably, re-assert his masculinity and to perform laddish masculinity for the benefit of those around him (Schrock and Schwalbe, 2009; Gutterman, 2008; Hearn, 1994; Goffman, 1959). He is presenting himself as 'manly' through his use of banter and the positioning of me, a female, in an inferior position through innuendo relating to sexual gratification (Schrock and Schwalbe, 2009; Curry, 1991). Through examining the example of Lewis it is clear that he utilises banter, peppered with sexist connotations, in order to maintain his position of power within the rugby club. Further to this, through analysing the way that Lewis utilised banter we can begin to view this as having damaging implications due to the nuances of meaning it involves.

Limitations of theorising of the 'Lad'

The account of my research presented so far leaves no doubt that lad cultures remain prominent within Rugby Union settings and that through banter men are continuing to construct and sustain laddish identities and behaviours. Furthermore, the men are utilising banter within this context to convey sexist ideas, in doing so fitting into the stereotype of laddish behaviours which have developed through time. It appears that the continued existence of lads is undeniable; however, throughout the course of the research, having spent time observing the interactions, practices and behaviours of these men in detail, I began to find problems and restrictions to existing theorising of the lad. Specifically, I became frustrated with the limitations of how some conceptualisations of the lad hinders our understanding of everyday sexism and the ways in which sexist ideas are both constructed/deconstructed by the men of different ages. Our current understanding of lads, and laddism more widely, particularly through depictions in the media, carry with them monolithic ideas of men and men's behaviours, which include very specific notions of behaviours and practices (Connell and Messerchmidt, 2005; Francis, 1999).

It is important to acknowledge that alternative views of lads, which provide a more nuanced conceptualisation of laddishness have been developed and are growing in number. Utilising the work of writers such as Walkerdine (1981) and Connell (2005) who suggest that identities are constantly shifting as a foundation for their argument, current thinkers have indicated that laddism needs to be understood as being something which men (and women) can 'dip in and out of' (Phipps and Young, p. 2015, 310). Further to this, Warin and Dempster's (2007) work on UK male undergraduates' conceptualisation of laddism highlighted that laddish practices should be viewed on a continuum, whereby there is a spectrum of laddish identity ranging from 'proper lads' to the 'non-lad', changing according to varying sociocultural contexts. Work such as this, though extremely useful to theorising on lads and lad cultures is limited and though these more complex notions of the lad are gaining prominence, the concept of laddism itself remains normatively loaded, with the framework of laddism immediately inviting condemnation. However, in my research I found that this condemnatory move blocked a nuanced understanding of the interactions amongst the men, in doing so aligning with the new body of work which acknowledges the complex nature laddism. Far from seeking to excuse everyday sexism, my concern is precisely that in bypassing the complexities of interactions

labelled as 'laddish', we miss out on opportunities to better understand and prevent these forms of sexist behaviour.

New directions: mischievous masculinities

I propose that in order to move forward with more productive theorisations on men, and to engage with, and challenge everyday sexism, we need to begin to understand lad cultures using a broader concept that I term 'mischievous masculinity'. This new framework for theorizing about men, which draws heavily on lifecourse perspectives, differs from laddism in that it is not normatively loaded or tied to a particular 'type' of person in the way that 'laddism' is tied to the figure of 'the lad'. The term mischievous reflects the agency men have in constructing and 'doing' their gender, conveying the ways that men are playfully and knowingly negotiating their notions of masculinity (West and Zimmerman, 1987). Notably, though the term 'mischievous' has particular connotations associated with frivolity and play, I am not using the term to perpetuate or reinforce pre-existing notions of the lad which this article critically engages with, nor am I denying the power relations which underpin theorising on gender. Rather, through using the term 'mischievous' I aim to depict the ways in which the men in my research understood themselves to be playfully negotiating their gendered identities, encompassing the agency displayed within the process of identity construction.

Maintaining notions of masculinity as socially constructed and performed, mischievous masculinity differs from laddism in the way that it accounts more comprehensively for men as reflexive, self-aware agents, therefore preventing pre-existing assumptions about lads. Moreover, the fact that mischievous masculinity is not associated with a particular figure means that it is more effective than laddism at dealing with themes of age and transition, thus allowing for the diversity of performances of laddish behaviours to be explored. Instead of being viewed separately, I advocate laddism as being viewed as a species of mischievous masculinities, fitting within this wider theoretical framework. Some instances of mischievous masculinities align with the notion of laddism as previously theorized, whilst others diverge from it. Arguably, this new approach affords a richer understanding of the construction of masculinity, thereby providing a more stable foundation on which everyday sexism can be addressed.

Men displaying agency through banter

Returning to the ideas conveyed by Lewis in an earlier section, the interaction I had with him acted as a catalyst for a critique of lads as un-reflexive. Previous writing on lad and laddism implies that lads have little agency in their actions. Coté and Levine (2002) define agency in terms of the sense of responsibility an individual has for their actions. In utilising the expression '*I probably shouldn't say this should I, but…'* Lewis is showing that he knowingly participates in laddish behaviours, taking responsibility for his actions and therefore has agency within the lad cultures he is part of at the rugby club.

I became interested in the idea that men knowingly utilised banter to convey ideas, even if they were aware of the potential problems this may cause. The men repeatedly referred to the idea of 'knowing better', in particular, the phrase '*I should probably know better but…'* was utilised by many of the men to acknowledge that they were, as Terry a 61 year old retired plumber put

it, '*up to no good, being a little bit naughty'*. This notion of behaving mischievously at the club, in ways that the men may not do so elsewhere, was extremely prominent in conversations and challenged the dominant concept of lads as static monolithic characters as instead we begin to view laddish masculinity as shifting through space (Robinson and Hockey, 2011).

Upon reflection of my initial interaction with Lewis I decided to ask him further about his use of banter, questioning why he enjoyed using banter and the reasoning behind teasing me. His response was as follows:

> *I am just up to no good, being a bit mischievous, I know I shouldn't but I can't help myself, it's only a bit of fun, I guess I don't always mean it, but it's a bit of a laugh for the others. (Lewis, 37)*

Significantly, within the example from Lewis it is evident that when undertaking banter he understands this to be a performance of laddish masculinity for the benefit of others (Schrock and Schwalbe, 2009; Gutterman, 2008; Hearn, 1994; Goffman, 1959). Through the language Lewis uses here, as well as that from the first example, we can see that he views banter as something fun, arguably allowing him to play with his understandings of masculinity within the setting more freely. Furthermore, the acknowledgement shown by both Lewis and Terry that banter could be viewed as problematic demonstrates that the men are making choices and therefore have agency within the space which has not previously been credited through the framing and conceptualization of laddism.

Using banter to convey notions of ageing

Within my research, the older men were acutely aware that 'acting their age' is complex and often conflicting (Phoenix and Sparkes, 2006). It was amongst the regulars in my research where banter continued to be utilized to demonstrate agency within the space. Whilst presence within the rugby space and associated practices were acknowledged to allow for particular laddish masculine behaviours to be permitted, many of the men commented that progression through the lifecourse meant that they felt conflicted about their actions. Carter, a 59 year old self employed male, who had lived in Sheffield his whole life and been part of the club from a young age, made interesting comments relating to how his laddish identity had changed with time:

> *As you get older you have to sort of realise you can't do it all. I don't play anymore but I still think of myself as one of the lads, enjoying having a laugh with everyone. We all have the same basic ideas, we just perhaps act a little differently, I am not quite as young as I used to be and can't always quite keep up with them physically, plus I should really know better, but I like to think I do alright with the chat. That's what we all have in common, we have good banter, the rest doesn't matter. (Carter, 59)*

Here Carter says that he '*still thinks of himself as one of the lads'* and also draws upon the idea of 'knowing better' previously discussed. The tension between undertaking laddish behaviours and 'knowing better' as men age, presented here by Carter, aligns with the work of Hockey and James (2003) on social identities and the lifecourse. Within this work they argue that 'we

know that being of a certain age brings with it social obligations and expectations' (2003, p. 3). Carter acknowledges that he has made some changes to his everyday life as he has aged, however significantly notes that banterous interactions remain prominent. In doing so, Carter once again highlights banter to be a feature of lad cultures, indicating that this does not alter with age/time, thus challenging writing which suggests that laddism is a phase of masculinity, or a stage of the lifecourse. This provides an interesting paradox which has not been explored in previous writing on lads (Thompson, 2002).

Theorising with mischievous masculinity allows exploration of the paradoxes presented through Carter's narrative. Using Phoenix and Sparkes' (2006) theorising of 'acting your age' alongside that of mischievous masculinities, we can begin to think more critically regarding how men understand and negotiate their lads' identity as they progress through their life course, and how this influences everyday sexist behaviours at their different stages. It is important to explore the contexts in which people 'act out their ages' and the 'resources' which people draw on to do so (Phoenix and Sparkes, 2006:108). Carter states that banterous interactions have remained constant throughout his time at the club and it is banter which acts as a 'resource' for him to continue to view himself, and fit in with, the other lads in the space. Significantly, in theorising lads through thinking in terms of mischievous masculinity, we can begin to understand how sexist ideologies continue to be re-constructed throughout the lifecourse and view laddish behaviours and lad cultures as not limited to men of a particular age.

Men utilising banter to challenge sexism

By theorising and understanding men through the lens of mischievous masculinities we can also explore the ways in which men are challenging sexism within the rugby club setting. Though there is not sufficient space within this paper to fully develop this idea, it is important to highlight this argument briefly here as it adds further layers to our (re)conceptualisation of lads and laddism.

As previously noted, often theorising on lads and lad cultures immediately invites condemnation, with the potential ways in which men are disrupting prominent conceptualisations of the lad failing to be discussed. My research showed that men challenge sexist behaviours within the rugby setting and the strategies implemented once again showed agency within this space.

Though sexist ideas still underpin the rugby culture at the club, some of the men had implemented strategies, drawing on laddish behaviours, to challenge and critique them. Significantly, the men implemented banter, usually utilized to convey sexist ideas, to be critical of sexist comments or to disarm sexist behaviours. Although there is not sufficient space to include examples here, the research clearly showed that displays of banter often support the characteristics and behaviours commonly associated with laddism. Resonating with the wider literature, there was much evidence to show how women can be oppressed through linguistic insults (see Phipps and Young, 2013, for example). However, the research extends this discussion by demonstrating how banter can also be implemented as a tool to challenge sexist ideas, with men utilising humour to reverse or question those insults that they thought

problematic. Arguably by utilising the modes of interaction that are recognised and valued in the rugby setting, the men were able to reconstruct notions of masculinity and 'do' laddism in new ways through the familiar tool of banter (Jackson et al., 2014; Wheaton, 2000; West and Zimmerman, 1987).

Conclusion

Lad cultures and laddish behaviour remains a prominent feature in the lives of men in my research and whilst this article has been critical of the conceptualisation of the lad, acknowledgement of the continued salience of laddism to rugby masculinities has been central to the argument. The article has proposed a new way to consider theorising of men in order to gain a more nuanced understanding of men in the rugby setting, with the potential to apply this to wider contexts and spaces in which lad cultures are prominent. Through introducing the idea of mischievous masculinities the article has demonstrated the limitations of previous conceptualizations of lads and has provided a framework to understand men's behaviours which offers greater flexibility by acknowledging the myriad ways in which men de/construct and re-negotiate laddish identities throughout the different stages of their lives. In thinking about lads in new ways and within the wider framework of mischievous masculinities, which account for life course perspectives, this article moves beyond theorising which has become inhibited by assumptions of lads as static monolithic characters and has shown that men's interactions within sites in which laddish behaviours dominate, is more diverse.

This article suggests that in order to productively challenge everyday sexism we first need to gain a greater understanding of the ways that men continue to perform laddish behaviours and secondly; consider the ways that men themselves respond to sexism within spaces in which lad cultures are dominant. Through engaging with laddism in this way, situating lads within a wider framework which makes the diversity of their behaviours more visible, it is proposed that this will provide a more stable foundation from which to both understand and challenge everyday sexism in society more widely. More specifically, this new conceptualisation of lads and lad culture has the potential to develop a productive dialogue whereby the more negative aspects of lad culture can be critiqued and in turn the links between laddism and everyday sexism can be more widely politicised. Furthermore, this article has posed questions regarding lads and laddism in a very specific geographical context and the potential to explore the limitations of these ideas geographically, in different locations, is an interesting point for future exploration.

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