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Hierarchies of Masculinity and Lad Culture on Campus: "Bad Guys", "Good Guys", and Complicit Men

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Abstract

Research on lad culture and gender-based violence (GBV) in student communities has examined hypermasculine gender performances, with little attention paid to hierarchies of masculinity. We explore lad culture by analysing qualitative, in-depth interviews with students. Our findings challenge simplistic constructions of "good guys" as allies/protectors in opposition to hypermasculinised, deviant "bad guys". We demonstrate how such binary constructions are premised upon gendered norms of men-as-protectors/women-as-weak and bolster problematic hierarchies of masculinity. We also highlight the crucial role of complicit masculinity in maintaining GBV-tolerant cultures. Our research suggests academic understandings of lad culture could benefit from a more comprehensive picture of the relationship between masculinity/ies and campus GBV. By theorising complex negotiations of hegemonic masculinity in this context, the paper also advances conceptual debates around the promise/limitations of changing, "softer" masculinities. Practice implications include rethinking how/whether prevention education can deploy "softer" masculinities whilst avoiding reinstating gender hierarchies that ultimately scaffold GBV.

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Introduction

In the UK, 1 in 7 women experienced serious sexual or physical violence while at university or college, and over two-thirds were sexually harassed (NUS 2010). An expanding literature connects gender-based violence (GBV) in student communities with manifestations of lad culture, which has been defined as excessive displays of macho behaviour linked to sexist and homophobic abuse (NUS 2010; Phipps and Young 2012). There is also some research on shifting and multiple performances of "laddishness" in campus settings in relation to drinking cultures, sport and gendered learning identities that provides some broad insights into students' understandings of and negotiations with "laddish" behaviour (Dempster 2009; Dempster 2011; Jackson et al. 2015; Stentiford 2019; Warin and Dempster 2007). However, less attention has been paid to hierarchies of masculinity and changing masculinities in examining campus lad culture in relation to GBV. A prominent exception is Phipps (2016, 11), who problematises conceptions of lad culture and suggests that a better understanding of "laddism" in the context of campus GBV "requires more nuanced study" of "different expressions of masculinity."[1] Insufficient engagement with multiple masculinities is problematic both in the light of critical masculinities scholarship that demonstrates that masculinity is not singular, and because it leads to an overly simplistic understanding of campus GBV as scaffolded exclusively by excessive (hyper) masculinity.

In this article, we advance theoretical debates on masculinity by analysing how the interplay between multiple, hierarchical, and shifting masculinities might usefully extend or change our understandings of how lad culture underpins violence-tolerant campus cultures. We do so through a qualitative exploration of students' constructions and experiences of different aspects of masculinity, which demonstrate that lad culture cannot be reduced to extreme, hypermasculine performances. Masculinity that supports a violence campus culture is more insidious than this, and we thus argue for a more nuanced understanding of lad culture. Our findings inform emerging debates on changing masculinities (Bridges and Pascoe 2014)—debates that interrogate "softer" masculinity performances for appearing to resist symbolic associations between "manliness" and sexual violence but ultimately replicating dominant gender norms (Messner 2016; Pascoe and Hollander 2016). Our analysis of the complex negotiations of masculinity at play in scaffolding (and sometimes partially disrupting) campus GBV also offers insights for prevention education programmes, for example, programmes could highlight the role of complicit masculinity and possibilities for challenging complicity and GBV-tolerant norms.

Theorising Masculinity and Campus Lad Culture

Our understanding of masculinity draws on critical feminist masculinities scholarship, which posits that masculinity is culturally, socially, and politically constructed, *not* biologically or otherwise determined by some fixed external asocial point (Buchbinder 2013; Connell 2005; Hooper 2001). Masculinities scholarship has generated the theoretical and empirical recognition that there are multiple masculinities, differing across time and cultures, and varying within different contexts, as well as in relation to intersectional identities/structures such as class, age, sexuality, race, and dis/ability (Connell 2005).

The most influential framework for understanding power hierarchies between masculinities is Connell's (2005, 77) concept of hegemonic masculinity: "at any one time, one form of masculinity rather than others is culturally exalted," becoming hegemonic through a continual process of becoming the taken-for-granted norm, and corresponding with institutional power. As idealised notions of masculinity embody characteristics symbolically associated with white, heterosexual, able-bodied men, some men (and occasionally some women) are more able to access culturally privileged masculinities than others.

The reinforcement of hegemonic masculinity occurs through its constructed opposition to femininity/ies, but also in relation to other masculinities labelled in Connell's schema as: subordinate, complicit and marginalised. Subordinated masculinity excludes non-heterosexual and other men perceived as effeminate from power, through "cultural stigmatisation of homosexuality or gay identity," with concrete effects including legal and street violence, and economic discrimination (Connell 2005, 78). Marginalised masculinities result from exclusion deriving from "the interplay of gender with other structures such as class and race" (80) and are often socially constructed as *hyper*masculine. Excessive hypermasculinity is projected onto less powerful groups of men to provide a contrast with, and thereby legitimate, purportedly more moderate acceptable forms of hegemonic masculinity (see below). Finally, complicit masculinity allows some men to benefit from hegemonic masculinity "without enacting a strong version of masculine dominance" (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 832). We discuss these concepts and their applicability to understanding and theorising lad culture in the analysis.

Connell's framework has been criticised for being "overly deterministic", with insufficient attention to fluid identities and inadequate emphasis on potential for resistance (see Conway 2012, 7). Whilst Connell sometimes over-emphasises stability above change in "the gender order" (Duncanson 2015), these are not inevitable aspects of hegemonic masculinity. Connell (2005, 77) conceived hegemonic masculinity as "a 'currently accepted' strategy," constantly contested and incorporating aspects of other masculinities over time in response to challenges (see also Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). The exact form of hegemonic masculinity is, by definition, always shifting and never fully defined, as our findings underline. Despite limitations, Connell's framework

has important benefits as it centres *power* in masculinity analyses, which is sometimes lost in alternative perspectives (de Boise 2015).

Lad culture has been defined as "a group or 'pack' mentality amongst students residing in activities such as sport, heavy alcohol consumption and 'banter'" that is "sexist, misogynistic or homophobic," entailing "objectification of women and rape supportive attitudes," and underpinning GBV in student communities (Phipps and Young 2012, 28). Parallel terms include "rape culture" in the US. Though lad culture has definitional limitations (see below) (Carline et al., 2018; Phipps, 2016), it is widely applied in public debates around GBV in student communities and was used by many of our interviewees. We find it analytically helpful to the extent that it has been applied in feminist scholarship on campus GBV to emphasise that the problem is not limited to individual perpetrators or to aberrant acts of sexual violence but is instead related to broader norms reflecting a range of interrelated problematic behaviours (Phipps and Young 2012).

Specific forms of masculinity understood to constitute lad culture are often vaguely defined. UK academics have analysed "laddism" in the form of white working-class men's rebellious behaviours in classrooms, understanding it as a response to an alienating school system (Willis 1977). Importantly, "laddism" is far from the preserve of the working class and can be performed by elite men. For example, misogynistic behaviour perpetrated by the exclusive and centuries-old Bullingdon Club, a dining club composed of wealthy all-men members of Oxford University in the UK, known for excessive alcohol consumption and violent behaviour—at gatherings where women were invited, they "have been made to whinny on all fours while men brandish hunting horns and whips" (Phipps 2016, 7). Members of the Bullingdon Club include former British Prime Minister David Cameron, and current Prime Minister, Boris Johnson. Actions which appear similar are condemned, ignored, or approved in society, depending on whether they are performed by elite or less powerful men as a result of class and/or racial prejudice (Phipps 2016). Feminist research explored the emergence of "new lads" in the 1990s as a response to cultural ideals of more caring, sharing "new men" (Beynon 2002; Gill 2003). "New laddism" involved both working class and privileged, middle-class, men reclaiming masculinity as a reaction to a purportedly "politically correct culture," and a backlash to feminism (Beynon 2002; Gill 2003; Gough and Peace 2000). Like earlier manifestations of "new laddism," student lad culture has been argued to relate to working-class masculinities in some HE contexts (Jackson et al. 2015). Importantly, however, there is evidence that laddism is partly a response to *felt* oppression and is enacted by relatively advantaged men who perceive their privilege as under threat (Phipps 2016; Phipps and Young 2012; see also Dempster 2009; Phipps and Young 2015). Some understandings of lad culture have failed to make this crucial distinction, which risks falsely attributing campus GBV exclusively to underprivileged, working-class men (Phipps 2016).

Laddish masculinities (like other masculinities) are not exclusively enacted by men, and the more extreme aspects appear to be performed by a minority of socially privileged young, heterosexual cis men (Phipps and Young 2012; Phipps and Young

2015). Further, prior assumptions about the lad as a static personality type are problematic—instead, men (and less commonly, women) who perform laddishness are "reflexive, self-aware agents" (Nichols 2018, 80), and may present themselves as lads in some contexts/moments and not others (Phipps and Young 2012). There is a need, then, for more complex analyses of different masculinity performances in relation to campus lad cultures. Beyond university contexts, recent studies confirm that lad culture should not be understood in a homogenising way as men's "laddish" behaviour can work to *both* challenge *and* bolster everyday sexism (see, for example, Nichols 2018). A small literature has examined students' negotiations with laddism and lad identities in UK campuses in relation to drinking cultures (Dempster 2011; Warin and Dempster 2007), sport (Dempster 2009) and gendered learning identities, including (disruptive) behaviour in classroom settings (Jackson et al. 2015; Stentiford 2019)—all providing insight into how students understand laddish behaviour. These studies do not directly analyse the relationship between lad culture and GBV, and the implications for theorising lad culture in this context remain under-examined. Analysing the complexities of laddism/lad culture in relation to campus GBV is important to developing a similarly more nuanced conceptual understanding of how multiple, hierarchical masculinities interact with lad culture to scaffold GBV. A fuller understanding of lad culture is, in turn, crucial to thinking about how the persistent problem of campus GBV might be better addressed.

We understand lad culture to be facilitated by a masculinised, neoliberal framework embedded within institutions and perpetuated by people in positions of power (see Phipps and Young 2015). Concerns have been raised, for example, about sexual misconduct perpetrated by staff against students and the ways in which institutions often fail to address misconduct (see, for example, Oman and Bull 2021). Lad culture enacted and experienced by students cannot be understood in isolation from the role of universities in tolerating and bolstering lad culture, or from societal issues surrounding masculinity and gender-based violence. These important contexts and challenges have been addressed elsewhere (see Anitha and Lewis 2018). Laddish behaviour by students is therefore only part of the problem of GBV in universities. Lad culture draws on cultural norms around masculinity, gender-based violence and the connections between them, and should be understood in that wider context, rather than as necessarily specific to campuses, or to particular groups of students. Our analysis here focuses on student understandings as part of this broader picture and suggests the importance of greater consideration of relationships between men and multiple, hierarchical masculinities in scaffolding a culture of GBV on campus.

To address this broader context, we engage with recent masculinities scholarship suggesting that there is considerable evidence of simultaneous change and continuity in contemporary masculinity/gender structures (Pascoe and Bridges 2016). A wide range of studies document new masculinity performances created through young, white, heterosexual cis gender men's incorporation of aspects of femininities and non-hegemonic masculinities (see overviews in Bridges and Pascoe 2014; Diefendorf and Bridges 2020). While these identities may be superficially liberatory and

completely distanced from hegemonic masculinity, more nuanced analyses highlight how such changes often reproduce gendered, raced, and sexual inequalities, while masking their tenacity (Bridges and Pascoe 2014). Similarly, as discussed further in the analysis, Pascoe and Hollander (2016) suggest that the masculinity politics of men who deploy feminist messages to denounce sexual violence against women in particular contexts are not straightforwardly progressive. The literature on lad culture has not yet explored the conceptual implications of shifting masculinities, and how this plays out with regards to sexual violence, GBV and masculinity.

Employing Connell's framework, we use the language of hegemonic, subordinate, marginalised and complicit masculinity as "heuristic devices" that "indicate plurality while also highlighting power relations both those between men and women and those between different groups of men" (Hooper 2001, 75). These labels are really placeholders for mechanisms through which hegemonic masculinity is maintained (e.g., feminisation, or hypermasculinisation of othered men), saying little about the content of specific masculinities which may fall into these categories in particular times and places. While hypermasculinity is often projected onto groups of underprivileged men (Hondagneau-Sotelo and Messner 1994), including in the context of student lad cultures, as noted above, there are suggestions that extreme masculinities on campus are more about *perceived* oppression (Phipps 2016). Where we refer to hypermasculinity, we do not see it as a type of masculinity with a stable meaning, instead we use the term to signal the process whereby some masculinity performances by some men in some contexts are constructed as excessive, providing a counterpoint through which to legitimate the "just right" cultural ideal of hegemonic masculinity (see Hooper 2001, 72). In the interviews, hypermasculinity was associated with open displays of laddishness and with perpetration of obvious sexual misconduct and overt sexism, while hegemonic masculinity was related to young heterosexual cis men exercising sexual restraint and acting as strong protectors of women against "other," hypermasculine men. In the interview analysis, we flesh out these complex hierarchies, illustrating how they operate in conjunction to both scaffold and, at times, destabilise both lad culture and gender-based violence.

Context, Methodology, and Data

This article draws on 26 semi-structured interviews with university undergraduate students (seven men and 19 women) aged 18–25, conducted as part of a study designed to provide qualitative insights into students' perspectives on GBV and the gender constructions underpinning them. We conducted the research in a small city university in England, UK (population: 10,000 undergraduates), which is not named to protect identities. We obtained ethical approval from the University Research Ethics Committee. Interviews lasted one to 2 hours and were audio-recorded and transcribed.

As previous UK research on lad culture has often been based entirely on interviews with women, we also recruited and made special efforts to recruit men through signposting in adverts (see below). However, most research participants were women

(19 out of 26). This may have been due to perceptions of GBV as a "woman's issue" (NUS 2010). All interviewees self-identified as cis gender, and all except two identified as heterosexual. Two women indicated they were "equally attracted to women and men" and "mostly attracted to women". Eighteen participants identified as "White British", two as "Asian/Asian British", three as "Black/African/Caribbean/Black British", two as "Mixed/Multiple Ethnic groups," and one as "Other".

Given that our study is based on a nonprobability convenience sample from a single UK university campus, instead of aiming for generalisability, our concern was with "information-rich" cases (Patton 2015) and gaining a "subjective understanding of how and why people perceive, reflect, role-take, interpret and interact" (Adler and Adler 2012, 8) as appropriate to qualitative research. We aimed to include diverse participants who may differently experience GBV on campus as a result of their gender, sexuality or ethnicity. The final sample partly reflects this diversity—for example, it is relatively varied in terms of ethnicity and sexuality. In addition, interviewing men students (albeit a small number of them) enabled us some insight into men's understandings of, and responses to, GBV, which is key to recognising the complexities of gendered identities and scripts facilitating GBV-tolerant cultures.

Interviews were conducted by five (women) researchers, the four authors of this paper, and a research assistant. None of the students were taught by the researchers, but there is inevitably a hierarchy between the researchers as faculty and students that could increase interviewees' desire to present a good account of themselves. Given what is known as social desirability bias, interviewees may have been less inclined to identify as/with lads in this setting than in another (e.g., a student bar, talking to men researchers). We understand participants to be "meaning makers" rather than passive vessels for answers (Warren, 2001, 83), and the interviews as suggestive of what is deemed socially acceptable to say about GBV (and in this case about lads/lad culture), which is itself an important focus for analysis. To allow diverse views to be expressed, we used vignettes/scenarios to prompt discussion, rather than asking about students' *own* behaviour (see below). It is possible that the men interviewees may felt indirectly accused by scenarios involving imaginary lads and that this may have influenced their responses. However, in practice, they expressed a range of perspectives on the behaviour of men in the scenarios, suggesting that the vignettes were sufficiently open to allow for their own interpretations.

There may also have been some element of self-selection in who participated. Interviewees were recruited through campus-wide advertisements explicitly aimed at women *and* men. Adverts stated we were seeking student views on relationships, gender, harassment, and abuse. Although adverts did not reference lad culture or use accusatory language, lads may have been dissuaded from coming forward. Those with prior interest in the issues were more likely to have been attracted to the research, and at times some interviewees referenced feminist ideas. However, they were typical students with diverse views and not overtly involved in activism. There did not appear to be any activism on this issue on this campus at the time of the study. Many had witnessed/experienced GBV, but this is unsurprising given prevalence rates.

We designed seven vignettes to gain insight into how students construct and respond to GBV through discussion of hypothetical scenarios. Scenarios were based on research insights and/or media reports about GBV in UK universities and told stories that might speak to aspects of GBV across the continuum, from everyday sexism to sexual violence. We piloted the vignettes with students who did not participate in the formal interviews to ensure that they were clear and realistic. When used in qualitative research, vignettes 'enable participants to define the situation in their own terms' and "provide a less personal and therefore less threatening way of exploring sensitive topics" (Barter and Renold 1999). We asked students to read each vignette and to explain to us what they thought was happening in each. Many spontaneously raised their own experiences, suggesting the vignettes helped to facilitate such conversations. Analysing interviewees' constructions of fictional scenarios, as well as examining their encounters/experiences, enabled us to explore their perceptions of the complexities of and links between masculinity, GBV and lad culture. A wealth of data and analytical themes were generated, some have been explored elsewhere (Anitha et al. 2020; Jordan et al. 2018). We analysed discussions of lads and lad culture (both terms interviewees used unprompted) in depth because of their prominence, and due to the lack of attention to hierarchies of masculinity in the existing research on lad culture. As most discussion of lads and lad culture arose in relation to three of the vignettes, this article focuses on responses to these.

We used NVivo 11 to identify patterns and enable thematic analysis of the interviews. Two of the researchers identified significant concepts within each transcript through preliminary coding (e.g., accounts of lad culture/masculinity), discussing and reflecting on common and divergent themes among the research team to co-construct coding. We agreed final key themes through an iterative process of comparing analysis between the two coders and between and within transcripts. While there are always multiple available readings of data, we made efforts to be as sensitive as possible to the overall context of each interview in selecting and analysing extracts for inclusion in the paper. We aimed to go beyond the semantic content of the data to examine the underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualisations of lads, masculinity, and GBV, and to consider the broader sociocultural contexts and structural conditions shaping the data (Braun and Clarke 2006).

Findings

The themes that emerged from the data analysis are presented alongside a discussion of students' experiences and perceptions. Themes include: accounts of lads and laddism—including notions of hypermasculine "bad guys" and identification of masculine entitlement—as underpinning the normalisation of GBV on campus; discussions of the role of masculine bonding and complicit masculinity/men in scaffolding GBV; and, accounts of men as allies and "good guys" associated with hegemonic cultural ideals of protector masculinity.

"Bad Guys," Hypermasculinity, and Masculine Entitlement

Students' accounts explicitly identified behaviours depicted in the vignettes as part of a lad culture ubiquitous in university settings, associating it with their many encounters with GBV, from everyday sexism to sexual/domestic violence. While a small minority of interviewees occasionally dismissed these behaviours as banter (see also Anitha et al. 2020), the vast majority characterised laddish behaviour as excessive masculinity performances by sexually aggressive, predatory men: "lads being lads … lads want to be the guy that sleeps with most women and can drink the most and do the stupidest stuff. It's all just hypermasculine. It's so ridiculous" (Isabelle,[2] woman); "there's a lot of pressure to be a lad … you've got to be the alpha, which means you got to sleep with all the girls and more than your mates" (Joshua, man). Through pejorative references to "alpha males," students frequently positioned laddism as a too extreme display of manliness in terms that resonate with broader projections of hypermasculinity onto "others" (Hondagneau-Sotelo and Messner 1994). Particular types of men were commonly implicated by our interviewees: "not all the guys will do it, but the quiet, nice, shy boys don't do things like that. It's the loud, shouty [ones]" (Alice, woman); "it is like sort of the lads' lads" (Lucy, woman). Several interviewees identified a problematic "pack mentality": "it's a large group—of boys that get together" (Alice); "[they're] boisterous and like kind of throwing pints around … those out with their friends in the club. And they are the ones that will pat your bum when you walk past" (Lucy); "people that play rugby and play sports and have these big groups of men where they get into this sort of cave-man, wolf pack mentality of all trying to be the alpha male" (Ethan, man).

"Pack mentality" was often attributed to sports teams, with many interviewees identifying rugby lads/boys as culprits: "the male rugby team have already got a bad rep at Uni. I know quite a few of them and they're really nice one to one but, when they get together, they feel like they need to prove their masculinity… it's that sense of like brotherhood… so they can talk about it, bond over it, like it is to almost assert their own dominance" (Samir, man). Naila (woman) confirmed this, describing her experiences working behind a bar: "rugby lads, ugh, they're the worst kind … a rugby lad just *picked me up*, and I am like "*I'm working, come on, put me down*" … he started making really crass comments, saying "the things I would do to you if you hadn't got a boyfriend" … it was just horrible." Students commonly reiterated documented connections between lad culture, men's sports teams, macho drinking cultures, displays of heterosexuality and sexual assault/harassment (Phipps and Young 2012; Martin 2016).

Even while sometimes condemning laddism, men students navigate their own identities in reference to lad identities given their prominence in the social landscape Carline et al., 2018; Dempster, 2011). Here, the men often reinforced othering narratives by distancing themselves from lads. For example, Marcus (man) denounced the objectification of women in a leaflet referred to in one vignette (1, see endnote): "I'm not a rugby lad […] So I don't really associate myself with any of the thoughts in this leaflet". Lad behaviour is, again, situated as undesirable, exaggerated "macho"

behaviour—with which these men do not want to be associated—mirroring broader social processes of hypermasculinisation.

Evidence suggests the prominence of laddism in sports teams, and that these contexts are "more probable sites of sexual assault" in campus settings (Martin 2016, 31). Students' critiques of lad culture therefore demonstrate some resistance to dominant gendered cultures. However, the presentation of laddish behaviour as enacted by a few hypermasculine "bad men" is problematic. This is because the construction of deviant men and implicit contrast with "good guys" facilitates a simplistic understanding of GBV and positions less obviously violent actions as unambiguously innocent. Further, representations of hypermasculinity serve to bolster the dominance of the currently accepted hegemonic masculinity, the "just right" cultural ideal.

Another prominent theme in interviewees' representations of laddism was the centrality of masculine entitlement to lad culture. Vignette 2 depicted a woman "in a short shirt" telling another student to "get lost" when he slaps her bottom. His friend calls her a "frigid bitch", saying she should be "grateful for the attention." Participants linked the behaviour in the scenario with heterosexual cis men's embarrassment at having their masculine pride (premised on heterosexual prowess) dented: "they do it to please each other […] save their masculine ego" (Samir). Ryan (man) both recognised and put forward reasons for their hostile reactions:

> It's sort of like a masculine thing. They've been like pushed away … they can't accept it, so they have to turn to abuse … it's seen as again like a challenge to your masculinity. And males stereotypically seem to be dominant. And if that's took away from you, then it's embarrassing.

Interviewees understood entitlement as socially sanctioned, not just a feature of individual men's egos. Janice (woman), for example, identified the gendered imperative not to upset or humiliate men by challenging their sense of masculinity:

> When boys do things that are like socially like disrespectful or rude to women in some ways like, "oh, he is the lad. It is just banter" … if women were saying that about men, it'd be different. I think it'd be, they're like "oh, you've hurt his ego. He's a man, you shouldn't do that to men". But it's okay for men to demean women.

In the context of campus lad culture, these perceived humiliations were related to heterosexual men's expectations of entitlement to women's bodies. Joshua noted that "men are quite aggressive, like a sense of ownership and allowance" in their objectification and treatment of women. Women interviewees shared many stories of real-life aggression directed at themselves or friends on rebuffing men's (usually unsolicited) sexual overtures:

> lads come up to me and ask for my number. And if I say, no, they just–because it's not what they're expecting … then they become nasty to you … the response you get back is like, oh, fuck off then, something like that. And it's like, *thanks*. (Letitia, woman)

Women's refusals *in and of themselves* trigger some men's hostility and anger. In the most extreme example, Ethan described an attack on his friend who was "being groped by a man":

> She was very polite. She said, could you please not, I'm not interested, I've got a boyfriend. He swore at her and then punched her in the mouth on the dancefloor. *What is that?* That is complete—that is male entitlement gone *mental*, like, absolutely mental. Now there must be a reason why he thinks that that's acceptable … his big group of guy friends thought it was *funny*. They didn't have a go at him or stop him or anything.

Ethan underlines the contrast between his friend's mild rejection ("very polite") and her assaulter's violent reaction, reading this as "male entitlement gone *mental*." Notably, the perpetrator is rewarded by his friends' laughter and approval, illustrating his successful reclamation of manhood. Taken together, these narratives reiterate arguments that some men's hostile responses to apparent emasculation can be understood as "thwarted privilege" (Chandler 2019, 1354). Students' accounts suggest that masculinity makes heterosexual men feel entitled to sexually access women, this entitlement, combined with the premise that threats to masculinity are intolerable, underpins aggressive attempts to reassert dominance. They also point to the role of other men in authorising and policing "laddism," a theme we develop further below.

Complicit Men and Subordinated Masculinity: Masculine Bonding and Gendered Barriers to Intervention

A majority of interviewees highlighted the importance of men's bonding and complicit masculinity in understanding university lad cultures, where men students acquire or lose "lad points" (Elizabeth, woman) according to a set of informal but always-present rules imposed by predominantly men social groups: "it's like this lad culture, if their friends see them trying to get with these girls, and they kind of go up in their ranks really, like in the popularity rankings … it's just kind of like a basis to build friendship on". Friendship, belonging and popularity here are contingent on successful lad behaviour.

Men's bonding is commonly premised on the exclusion of non-masculine "others," especially women and queer men, and plays a central part in reinforcing masculine identities based on misogyny and homophobia (hooks 1992; Messner 2000). Masculinity scholars have argued that men's bonding and sexual violence are frequently mutually constitutive (see Flood 2002–2003, 29–30; Messner 2000, 9). Interview responses to vignette (3) demonstrated this connection. In this scenario, "James" witnesses a group of men competing to have sex with the "most hammered hottie" at

their house party. James is undecided over whether to intervene when he sees a very inebriated "Shannon" who has had her drink "spiked," being taken upstairs by one of the men. Students suggested that lad points are lost through failure to actively participate in group activities/competitions encouraging predatory behaviour towards women and, also, crucially, *through stopping others from perpetrating.* Interviewees saw James' dilemma as understandable given peer pressure to conform, with some explicitly interpreting the pressure as gendered: "[he's] with all his lads, like mates, he's having a competition … he's not going to interfere in that" (Ryan). James' interference would disrupt masculine bonding. Similarly, Zoe (woman) commented that her men friends engage in "lad banter": "they egg each other on … it's not a nice term, but it's seen as pussying out if they don't continue on with things like this." The gendered language of "pussying out" suggests that dissent is cowardly, feminine, and not what a "real man" does.

Here, *complicit* masculinity is both recognised and contested by students. Connell (2005, 80) uses this notion of parasitical masculinity to conceptualise the position of the many men who benefit from hegemonic masculinity while respecting women, avoiding violence and sharing housework, and who can "easily convince themselves that feminists must be bra-burning extremists." Complicit masculinity rests on men's complacency about gender relations and active avoidance of acknowledging and/or resisting problematic masculinities which might threaten the foundations of masculine privilege. While only a small group of men enact hegemonic masculinity, the majority "benefit from the patriarchal dividend, the advantage men in general gain from the overall subordination of women" (Connell 2005, 79).

In this context, the students demonstrate a more complex understanding of responsibility for GBV than either perpetrating (bad) or abstaining (good). Mere non-participation is inadequate—silence and passivity are portrayed as crucial to the continuance of GBV. Whilst recognising the constraining context, many interviewees were simultaneously clear that if James and friends did not intervene, they would be culpable, as Elizabeth put it, "accessories" to the perpetrator. Lucy's comments illustrate this perspective:

> Even though the guys who didn't take them upstairs, they're still actively taking part […] still making the choice and they were still aiding the guy … even though they weren't actually having sex with her, they were still encouraging and topping her drink up. So, they were just as much ruining Shannon's control of the situation as he was. It's just that he went a step too far and took her upstairs.

Emma recounted an experience of feeling uncomfortable with her boyfriend's failure to challenge his friend who showed everyone naked selfies sent by a girl they both knew, and in part, at her own inaction: "it made me feel like she needed to know, that she had the right to know. But then I said I was going to tell her and then he said, no, you can't, because I'll get in trouble because he'll know it was me. I haven't told her […] I still feel like I should tell her."

These accounts suggest agency in complicity as well as in more overt participation, with the complicit majority judged not merely innocent bystanders, but as *responsible* for perpetuating lad culture. Complicit masculinities are not just "slacker versions of hegemonic masculinity", but "something more definite and carefully crafted" (Connell 2005, 79).

Ryan stated he was in the minority in attempting to resist lad culture, reflecting that he had "never seen" other men challenging misogynistic comments about women on social media:

> It's not good. I don't like it. But it's hard to [challenge it]. If you speak out against that, then they'll just be like, oh, you're so boring, get a sense of humour … I've even been called gay for expressing that it's wrong to call people sluts and stuff like that … That makes me feel like, well, wow, I've tried to speak out against something that's completely wrong and now I'm being abused for it … I've not stopped. But it does make you think, is it worth getting into the aggro with people.

Ryan is labelled a "gender traitor" by other men students, feminised, and subjected to homophobic abuse, all documented responses to feminist men activists (Berkowitz 2004; hooks 1992). Given the broader "gendering of feminism" as incompatible with culturally rewarded, hegemonic masculinity, men's interest in feminism is "framed as emasculating" (Bridges 2010, 22). Using "gay" pejoratively serves to associate Ryan with subordinate masculinity. In patriarchal logic, "gayness … is the repository of whatever is symbolically expelled from hegemonic masculinity," including femininity, so that feminised gay men and/or men perceived to be effeminate or emasculated, are positioned "at the bottom of a gender hierarchy among men" (Connell 2005, 78). Ryan's experiences of being constructed by his peers through subordinate masculinity show why complicity may be the default choice for many men students as a result fear of feminisation, rejection, aggression and threatened or actual violence from other men. Ryan also suggested that feeling unable to act despite his willingness to speak out was "horrible" for him. His experiences show how resistance to the dominant culture is constrained and may come to feel pointless.

Students' accounts highlight men's bonding premised on heterosexual entitlement to women, and how complicity with "laddish" behaviour shores up GBV-tolerant cultures by normalising rather than challenging such practices. They also illustrate gendered barriers to interpersonal intervention whereby men who attempt to resist are constrained by their peer's constructions of them as insufficiently masculine.

"Good Guys," Men as Allies/Protectors: Perpetuating Hegemonic Masculinity

Interviewees highlighted the figure of the "good guy", distinguished through his efforts to protect women, as a counterpoint to both the hypermasculine perpetrator and the complicit man. Many men students explicitly contrasted their own "good guy" behaviour with that of problematic "alpha males":

> I'm a single man. I do enjoy meeting girls on a night out. I would never go up to someone I never met before and start touching them inappropriately … I'll never do that; never ever do that. And it makes me very angry when I see that … *it makes me ashamed to be part of the male gender to be honest*. It's just horrifying (Ethan, our emphasis).

Students situated "good guys" as the hegemonic form of masculinity in this context—the most culturally exalted/desirable gender performance for men (Connell 2005). Ethan was not the only man we interviewed who drew on implicitly feminist concerns about consent. He suggested that sexually violent men lack "basic empathy," seeing women as "just vaginas":

> The whole idea of she's asking for it … they think oh, it's not the man's fault he just saw her in a short skirt and couldn't control himself, well he *should* be able to control himself. I wouldn't do that. I'm quite a normal guy, I think. I might be a bit cleverer than some, I've made it to university, but I don't think I'm more emotionally evolved than anyone else … You shouldn't ever think that it's acceptable to do this to anyone.

The critique of victim-blaming and of biologically essentialist ideas of men's "uncontrollable" heterosexuality as an explanation for sexual violence against women here partially challenges dominant gender norms. However, Ethan's description of himself as a "normal guy" reiterates that sexual violence is perpetrated by "others," that is, less-than-normal and less-than-ideal men. At the same time, mentioning his superior intellect and corresponding capacity to restrain his sexual urges (in contrast with lesser men) resonates with hegemonic masculinity by emphasising rationality, control/mastery of the self, and domination of other men (Bach 2017; Hooper 2001; Pascoe and Hollander 2016).

Pascoe and Hollander (2016, 68) argue that there is a "changing relationship" between hegemonic masculinity and sexual violence as men both "engage in and speak out" against it. They note instances of young, white, heterosexual men shaming other men for acts of rape/sexual assault. While this shaming appears to challenge the connections between masculinity and sexual violence, positioning themselves as the "'good guys' who don't rape" and "rapists" as "*failed men*" is a strategic signalling process that allows those doing the shaming to maintain their symbolic dominance over other men (Pascoe and Hollander 2016, 68). Ethan replicates this notion that "a *real* man" is not overwhelmed by his sexual impulses. Hegemonic masculinity, in this way, is not fixed but fluid and dynamic, as Hooper argues (2001, 62), it adapts "through constant challenges and struggles, to resemble whatever traits happen to be most strategically useful for the getting and keeping of power." What Pascoe and Hollander refer to as "mobilizing rape," then, is a continuation, rather than a disruption, of hegemonic masculinity.

As well as reinforcing aspects of hegemonic masculinity, there are other troubling implications of the persistent demarcation between "good guys" and "other," deviant men. Though Ethan distanced himself from alpha males/perpetrators, he nonetheless

saw sexist jokes as "funny" in private settings: "if it's just me and my housemate sitting in the living room and we're not saying it to anyone and we're both aware of how ridiculous what it is we're saying. So, it's a non-issue." This suggests limits to self-reflection since perceiving himself as a "nice guy" means Ethan sees himself as able to confidently distinguish between contexts where sexist comments have serious implications and those where they become "ridiculous" or harmless. Further, in discussing sex and consent, Ethan commented:

> *I'd never be that guy.* If it's happened, *we've both been really drunk … that's different*, I think […] well, I mean like ethically. *If you're stone cold sober* and she's absolutely bad *and she's clearly vulnerable* and you're taking advantage of a vulnerable person, *that's definitely wrong*. (our emphasis).

The depiction of the obviously "bad" sober man, the fully agentic predator cynically taking advantage of drunk women, resonates with flawed social notions of "the rapist." It also implicitly scaffolds the assumption that less overtly intentional acts due to reduced agency—for example, "we've both been really drunk"—are necessarily unobjectionable. This demonstrates that while condemnations of sexual violence may indicate decreased social acceptance, the "definitional murkiness" of rape (and sexual assault) enables "the mobilisation of rape as a symbol with no clear referent, such that men can engage in sexual assault and simultaneously distance themselves from it discursively" (Pascoe and Hollander 2016, 70). In other words, disapproval of sexual violence may not mean less willingness to perpetrate and othering narratives may instead facilitate GBV, "allowing men to preserve their identity as non-rapists" (Pascoe and Hollander 2016, 70). The potential need for Ethan to problematise his own sexual encounters (whether meaningful consent is possible where both partners are inebriated), is sidestepped as a result of the binary opposition of bad/good men, rapists and non-rapists.

Many women interviewees highlighted the existence of "good" men who were "allies": "I've got a lot of friends who are boys and they're not violent, they don't harass women when they go out … it's not like they are all biologically destined to do that" (Rebecca, woman); "when you go out with them, they often look out for you" (Lily, woman); Lucy recounted experiencing harassment and the intervention of "good" men:

> Guys'll notice what these other people are doing, and they'll like come over and like pretend like, "oh, I've been looking for you, where have you been." And then the other lads will like back off because it's kind of like, okay, so they've got, I don't know, like their own males … it's kind of like they're not free girls anymore because they've got males looking after them. So, they step back.

Lucy was one of many respondents who stressed that it is specifically men who can safeguard women, as would-be perpetrators see them as a threat and as having ownership over the women they accompany. The "good guy" is made possible here

through ideas of "protector" masculinity, premised on assumptions that women are weak and need protection (Young 2003), whilst simultaneously reinforcing the norm that women are men's (sexual) possessions (Seymour 2017).

Bystander approaches can evoke protector masculinity by emphasising that *most* men are not violent, and encouraging men to be part of the solution, "to step up to prevent other men's acts of violence" (Messner 2016, 62; see also, amongst others, Messner et al. 2015; Katz et al. 2011). These approaches draw upon and redirect conventionally masculine characteristics, such as strength and bravery (Messner et al. 2015) into protection by suggesting that "true men" are not violent towards women and should act as their champions (Flood 2015; Masters 2010; Murphy 2009; Seymour 2017). Well-intentioned attempts to harness protector masculinity are problematic as they affirm femininity as subordinate and lacking in agency and reproduce problematic masculinity norms (Messner 2016; Seymour 2017; Young 2003).

Ethan, too, recognised issues with protector masculinity, critiquing the need for such intervention:

> That shouldn't be a reason for them not to touch them just because they have boyfriends … [but] with these idiots that seems to be the only thing they understand … You hope that they would just respect them anyway.

But he also commented: "luckily, I've got quite an intimidating accent when I get angry. I'm not a very intimidating guy, I don't like fighting, but … I can put a front on, and it usually works. And the girl always thanks me the next day."

Ethan repeatedly distanced himself from hypermasculinity ("I'm really against violence'; 'I'm not a very intimidating guy"). However, the talk of using what he perceives to be his "intimidating accent" when he is angry, and his saying that an incident *might* become a fight, demonstrates how easily protector masculinity slides into violence. Ideas of men as strong protectors of women are intimately connected with violent masculinity through cultural understandings of masculinity as "dominance, toughness or male honor" (Flood, 2002–03, 25). The performance of the "good guy" is premised on displays of dominance and violence, which are ironically similar to the hypermasculinity Ethan attributes to "other" men. Below, we discuss theoretical and practice implications of the multiple, hierarchal representations of masculinity implicit in interviewees' perspectives.

Conclusion

The construction of hypermasculine lads in the interviews echo research on the connections between these performances, a "pack mentality," and GBV (Phipps and Young 2012, 28; NUS 2010). Moreover, the interviews suggest clear links between masculinity and young cisgender heterosexual men's culturally sanctioned feelings of entitlement to sexual access to women in lad culture. Alongside the extreme masculinity performances most commonly associated with laddism and lad culture, such as

perpetration of sexual assault against women, however, our findings reveal the crucial role of complicit masculinity and masculine bonding in the maintenance of GBV-tolerant cultures. In contrast with both the hypermasculine perpetrator and the complicit man, our analysis unpacks the gendered construction of the "good guy" as a protector of women. These insights extend a literature on lad culture that has only begun to explore how students understand, resist, and facilitate diverse masculinities in this context. We argue that lad culture cannot be reduced to performances of hypermasculinity, and that "softer" performances of masculinity also play a part in lad culture. A fuller understanding of lad culture and how it intersects with multiple, hierarchical masculinities is vital to attempts to address the ongoing problem of campus GBV. More broadly, we have demonstrated how simplistic, binary constructions of "good guys" as allies/protectors in opposition to hypermasculinised, deviant "bad guys" are premised upon gendered norms of men-as-protectors/women-as-weak and bolster problematic hierarchies of masculinity. Our arguments illustrate the promise and limitations of changing masculinities, including the "complicated ways" in which masculinity and sexual violence continue to be connected (Pascoe and Hollander 2016, 68) (see below).

Students' constructions and experiences illustrate complex negotiations of masculinity that scaffold and, at times, potentially disrupt lad culture. Many students' identification of extreme masculinity as problematic and condemnation of complicit masculinity demonstrates an existing contestation of lad culture/GBV. This highlights the potential for resistance by students at the interpersonal level and shows that the mechanisms supporting campus lad culture are far from monolithic (Carline et al., 2018; Dempster, 2009, 2011; Jackson et al., 2015; Stentiford, 2019). A practice implication of this finding is that by emphasising how complicity and masculine bonding scaffold GBV, prevention education programmes can encourage collective responsibility and conceptions of students as active bystanders who can challenge GBV-tolerant norms. A full discussion of what form this might take is beyond the scope of this article, however, this might involve, for example, asking students to reflect on instances such as the ones presented in our vignettes (see analysis) and/or similar experiences from their own lives, and working together to consider how to (safely) challenge complicity (see Hutchinson 2018 for a practitioner perspective on implementing prevention education).

Students' accounts of alternative "good guy" protector masculinities destabilise notions of men as naturally violent/hypersexual, suggesting potential for men's enrolment in resistance. However, the findings amplify concerns about campaigns/education programmes that emphasise men as non-perpetrators, encouraging perceptions that a small group of deviant "other" men are the problem (Messner 2016; Seymour 2017). This allows the majority a pass out of examining their own potentially problematic practices that can scaffold violence, and that may be normalised and perpetrated by the many. Moreover, in efforts to appeal to men and reframe anti-violence work as "manly," ideas of hegemonic masculinity as heroic, masculine and strong, may be deployed rather than transformed (Messner 2016, 62; see also Messner et al. 2015; Murphy 2009)—for example, recasting strength as restraint and as the refusal to hurt women.

Further, the relationship between hegemonic masculinity as "a constantly negotiated construct" (Hooper 2001, 62) and GBV is neither fixed nor straightforward. Analysis of students' constructions of "good guys" illustrates how broader, shifting, and inconsistent gender expectations alter the context within which young, white, heterosexual, cis men do gender, such that ostensibly distancing themselves from hypermasculine men may become merely a different enactment of power (Pascoe and Hollander 2016). This process reinforces hierarchical relations among men, as well as reasserting dominance over women (Bridges and Pascoe 2014). Protector masculinity relies on notions of chivalry where "good" men protect "their" weak/passive women from "bad" men (Seymour 2017). While exercising restraint and not engaging in GBV "makes you a man," however, this capacity for control is implicitly premised on violence always being within reach. Sexual violence remains a key reference point in the construction of hegemonic masculinity. What appears to be resistance may therefore essentialise connections between masculinity and GBV (Pascoe and Hollander 2016). Students' representations suggest that the persistence of hegemonic masculinity, while always subject to challenge, is nonetheless remarkably resilient and adaptable to maintain legitimacy (Connell 2005). Future research might usefully explore alternative gender identities which subvert hegemonic masculinity.

In addition, for the most part, interviewees in this study tended to see men as a homogenous group, often assuming, for example, that all men are heterosexual and perform heterosexuality in a particular way. There was little explicit awareness of potential racialised and class dynamics amongst our participants. Men, women, and non-binary people are likely to experience lad culture differently along lines of gender/class/race/sexuality, and further research is necessary to understand these intersectional factors, as well as to consider how to engage with intersectionality in challenging lad culture. We agree with recommendations that interventions should focus on peer conversations about masculinity and harness "disruptive" moments (Carline et al., 2018). Peer-led, critical discussions of laddism are important to undermining gendered narratives which bolster GBV, and our interview analysis indicates that student understandings of lad culture are far from homogenous/static, suggesting that there is potential for such disruption. If lad culture is to be effectively challenged through prevention education programmes, and/or by students and staff engaged in activism on GBV, however, more radical deconstruction of gender than that implied by "good guy" masculinity is necessary, along with more critical awareness of both hierarchical and shifting masculinities.

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Notes

1. See also Diaz-Fernandez and Evans (2020) for a relevant discussion of space, affect and dynamism in experiences of lad culture.
2. Pseudonyms are used to protect participants' anonymity.

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