

**"I have a sense that it's probably quite bad...  
but because I don't see it, I don't know"**

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Credit: Wikipedia

Lad culture in English universities is often perceived by university staff as involving 'extreme' behaviour and as being carried out by only a handful of 'bad apples' rather than as a widespread culture that fosters gender-based harassment and violence.

But new research, led by Lancaster University, says this perception stems from various factors, including many [staff](#) having limited understandings of lad [culture](#) which reflect the way it is portrayed in the media.

There was a notion that it was evident only in social spaces, especially venues that sold alcohol.

There was a common perception that lad culture was not visible to staff because they did not frequent spaces in which laddish practices occurred.

Interviews also suggested that because staff did not see it they did not know how prevalent it is.

Only 'serious' instances are reported to staff. Most incidents go unreported because students perceive the behaviour as 'the norm' and too common to report.

The paper, entitled "I have a sense that it's probably quite bad....but because I don't see it, I don't know": Staff perspectives on 'lad culture' in higher education" is the first of its kind to focus on staff perspectives rather than on student views.

It was undertaken by Carolyn Jackson, a Professor of Gender and Education in the Department of Educational Research at Lancaster University and Vanita Sundaram, a Professor of Education at the University of York.

Face-to-face and telephone interviews were carried out with over 70 staff across six universities in England (north and south, campus and non-campus and new and old universities).

Interviewees included pro-vice chancellors, deans, student union

officers, lecturers, college officers, and welfare and security staff.

The study examined how staff understood lad culture, whether they thought it was a problem, where it was visible, to whom and why.

Other findings included:

- Some staff saw lad cultural as largely unproblematic and highlighted positive aspects including 'male bonding' and 'having a laugh'
- Most staff associated laddism mainly with men but a proportion suggested that women could be 'just as bad as men'.
- Staff across institutions identified lad culture as overtly sexist behaviour and included demeaning attitudes and behaviour towards women.

"A plethora of examples were provided by the interviewees including physical, verbal, visual and sexualised actions to shame, demean, humiliate, objectify and intimidate women students in relation to their gender, sexuality and ethnicity," says the article.

"While laddism was perceived as covering a range of practices, sexism and misogyny were often narrated as underlying these."The study says there is a complex picture relating to the visibility of lad culture, [sexual harassment](#) and violence. In some cases lad culture is increasingly visible thanks largely to attention by the National Union of Students, Universities UK (the voice of universities in the UK) and the press.

"However, our research suggests that at an institutional level perceptions about visibility and prevalence of lad culture are strongly influenced by how it is conceptualised and, relatedly, to whom it is visible," say the authors.

"Despite staff acknowledging that sexism and sexual harassment and violence are central to lad culture, dominant discourses associating lad culture with alcohol-fuelled public displays of rowdiness means that many of the less extreme 'everyday' instances of sexual harassment and violence across a wide range of university contexts are rendered invisible."

**More information:** Carolyn Jackson et al, 'I have a sense that it's probably quite bad ... but because I don't see it, I don't know': staff perspectives on 'lad culture' in higher education, *Gender and Education* (2018). [DOI: 10.1080/09540253.2018.1501006](https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2018.1501006)

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