



‘Lad Culture’- A Historical Case Study of Masculinity

The aims of this Factsheet are:

- To explore the historical moment of ‘Lad Culture’,
- To discuss some of the media representations surrounding ‘Lad Culture’,
- To offer some theoretical approaches to analysing representations of masculinity,
- To discuss how lad culture expresses itself in contemporary culture.

Paula Yates: “I know exactly what you Loaded guys want, to be in bed with a great woman, eating crisps, and watching Match of The Day.”

What do the following pictures have in common?



They all happened in the 90s. *Men Behaving Badly* was a TV show, *Oasis* were a Britpop band and the latter was the England football team

http://i.dailymail.co.uk/i/pix/2013/08/22/article-0-0010FEB200000258-372_468x341.jpg
<http://1000words1000days.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/LadCulture.jpg>
http://ichef.bbci.co.uk/news/560/cpsprodpb/74EE/production/_83943992_england_1990.jpg

Why Men Matter – Men’s Studies, a background

‘Lad Culture’ occurred at the time when there was a keen interest into ‘Men’s Studies’ that had started in the 1980s but really started to take hold in the early 1990s in the US and Australia. This movement had come at a time when ‘the study of men and their lives was out in the open and on the move as never before’ (Segal) and reflected what was considered to be an absence of research into masculinities. In part, Men’s Studies emerged as a response to second-wave feminism (1960s onwards) which had seen huge amounts of academic writing, debate, and discussion into women and their place in society and which foregrounded the inequalities towards women in all walks of life; socially, economically and politically. Thus, there was an intentional and unprecedented interest into men’s lives as economic and other social adjustments began to impact on specific groups of men, just as it did for women. Anxieties around men’s roles in society coined a new term, ‘masculinity in crisis’ (Clare), whereby, it was suggested that men were in ‘danger of becoming redundant.’ However, these concerns didn’t seem to be reflected in the ‘real world’ where men still held much of the political power in society, as Segal states ‘men occupied all but 10 percent of cabinet seats, as well as key positions in all international agencies,’ despite this, what was beginning to be acknowledged was the way in which the role of men within society was complex and often ambiguous and that the concept of ‘a hegemonic masculinity’ with its aggressive machismo and patriarchal stance was not the only way to define men. The prolonged effects of wars on a global scale, the rise of

religious fundamentalism, changes in social structures of families and gay liberation movements were just some of the reasons cited to have had impact on men’s and boy’s lives, but yet hegemonic masculinity was assumed to be the norm; it embodied what Connell argued was, ‘the way of being a man’ it required all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men. Thus, what studies into masculinities, did was explode the ‘myth’ (Barthes) that there is one way to be a man and it looked how male identity was shaped and subject to change depending on the interplay of social, political, economic and historical factors.

‘Lad Culture’ – A Reflection of Context (1980s-1990s)



All images taken from 1980s miners’ strikes. Last image is of Margaret Thatcher.

<http://www.indymedia.org.uk/images/2004/03/287581.jpg>
http://media.npr.org/assets/img/2013/04/08/thatcher082way_custom-5cb98ce0b565af0e5e5de7d94cd6a1b78464c7b7-s6-c30.jpg

In order to understand ‘Lad Culture’ and the masculinities within it, we need a snapshot of what was happening before this sub-culture emerged. 1980s Britain (what would come to be known as the Thatcher years, with Margaret Thatcher being the first female Prime Minister) was characterised by big changes in economic, social, and political areas. Thatcher’s policies dismantled trade unions, privatised state run industries, emphasised free-trade and banking industries, and in her words ‘rolled back the carpet of socialism,’ i.e. the role of the state in people’s lives. Many of the jobs that were lost had been done by men and this impacted on working-class communities; poverty and joblessness coupled with the rise in jobs in the service industry; for example, hotels and call centres (all of which were seen as ‘feminised’ work) as well as the push for young people to go to university changed the way men saw themselves. The changes were supposed to make way for a so-called more equal society, one that would lessen the gap between the classes. However, during the 1990s this gap actually got wider, as Alwyn Turner argues in his book *A Classless Society: Britain in the 1990s*, Britain experienced a kind of ‘cultural classlessness,’ which seemed to reflect a feeling of optimism and a shift from the consciousness of community which had been centered around industries to the idea of individualism which in part linked to consumerism and spending power. In very basic terms it was a shift within class identities, one that had its roots in the past and working-class culture, and the

‘new’ society which foregrounded the rights of the individual that a sub-culture of masculinity emerged and formed what was coined by Hagan as ‘Lad Culture.’

Lad Culture – Sub-Culture Identity



https://s3.amazonaws.com/nodeimages/36638723/images/36638723_0_nocrop.jpg

Definition: Lad Culture

British: A group of men sharing recreational, working, or other interests. **Lad culture (also laddish culture and laddism)** is a British subculture initially associated with the Britpop movement. Arising in the early 1990s, the image of the “lad” – or “new lad” – was that of a generally middle class figure espousing attitudes typically attributed to the working classes.



Source https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lad_culture
<https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/thumb/d/d4/OasisDefinitelyMaybealbumcover.jpg/220px-OasisDefinitelyMaybealbumcover.jpg>
<http://www.dejka.com/albums/blur/parklife/>

Dick Hebdige in his 1979 *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, argues that sub-cultures ‘form in communal and symbolic engagements with the larger system of late industrial culture; they are organized around, but not wholly determined by, age and class, and are expressed in the creation of styles.’ These styles are produced within specific historical and cultural times and reflect an identity that both resists and conforms to the ideas of the time. He further argues that subcultures cobble together (or hybridize) styles out of the images and material culture available to them in the effort to construct identities which will confer on them ‘relative autonomy’ within a social order fractured by class, generational differences, work, etc. Oasis, one of Lad-Culture’s defining bands of the time, seems to embody some of these cultural tensions. Above is the album cover for *Definitely Maybe*, released in 1994, that could be seen to reflect both the personal individualism of the time as well as references to masculine identities shaped by working-class history, for example there are two references to the football (a working class sport) in the image of George Best (Manchester United) and Rodney Marsh (Manchester City). The red wine glass is symbolic of a shift of class, and has connotations of something more aspirational, the room itself also reflects this, with its big windows, wooden floorboards, large plants, all of which signify a shift in class tastes. The imagery of Burt Bacharach is a reflection of Noel Gallagher’s (the lead guitarist) personal musical influences, the unashamedly ‘ownership’ of personal tastes was seen to be a masculinity that ‘knows itself’ and tapped into a feeling of male individualism. Clint Eastwood is on the television in the western, *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, a conventional ‘tough

guy’ film of the past signifying a masculinity that is more akin to the hegemonic norm. However, what also needs to be acknowledged is the way in which music labels capitalised on ‘selling identity,’ this was shown when record labels for both Oasis and Blur (another Britpop band) released singles at the same time. Blur were marketed as arty, southern and middle-class, whereas Oasis were Northern and working-class. Interestingly if you look at Blur’s album cover for *Parklife* you can see greyhound racing, a traditional working-class past-time, both bands marketing used indexical signs linked to different classes; a reflection of cultural tensions at the time but also as a way to appeal to their masculine demographics.



<http://www.bbc.co.uk/music/sevenages/events/indie/blur-vs-oasis/>

Lad Culture in Magazines - The Impact of Feminism

The lad-culture norm is given an overview by Robbie Knox writing for The Huffington Post (November, 2016), he recalls what the 90s lad culture meant to him: ‘Because 90s lad was very different from the lad of today. 90s lad arrived when many of the battles for sexual equality had been fought. The previous generation’s gender roles seemed ridiculous, and all my male friends took it as read that women could and would do the same things as us. At the same time, us boys were free to be ourselves. We could go to the pub, go to the football, get drunk, pull women in clubs with no expectations. Men were free from the constraints of political correctness, and equally no longer felt the pressure to be the detached silent breadwinners of previous generations.’ http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/robbie-knox/lad-culture_b_8582284.html



http://i.dailymail.co.uk/i/pix/2015/03/28/13/02BA4959000005DC-0-image-m-30_1427548706933.jpg

These attitudes were best observed in the rise in publication and sales of ‘Lads Mags’ during the 1990s which came at a time when the web’s impact on print publishing had yet to transform the magazine landscape. It also constructed and reinforced the Lad Culture and what Sabo and Jansen refer to as the ‘pageantry’ of masculinity, a form of masculinity that shows itself off. *Loaded* magazine was probably one of the best examples of this type of magazine. Now only online, it was launched in print in 1994. It was one of the first magazines to be called specifically a ‘lad mag’ and was representative of a masculinity which often espoused patriarchal, sexist and anti-intellectual approaches to ‘doing’ masculinity. The magazine’s title ‘Loaded’ has connotations of getting drunk, or drugged-up, as well as the violent implications of a ‘loaded’ gun with its aggressive sexual undertones, but this was normalised in its discourse.

Initially the magazine was not supposed to do well. It was derided for its 'baseness' and was labelled 'Folded' (the term for when a magazine closes down) by one writer from the NME, but it took the industry by surprise. Publishers did not believe that lads would take to reading magazines, as they believed that it was a feminised medium, but the magazine did exceptionally well (a reflection of how social changes were affecting men's attitudes to media forms) and it went on to sell half a million copies a month, and inspired laddish TV shows like TFO Friday and They Think It's All Over.

Brown, the founding editor wrote in the May 1994 launch issue: "Loaded is a new magazine dedicated to life, liberty and the pursuit of sex, drink, football and less serious matters. Loaded is a music, film, relationships, humour, travel, sport, hard news and popular culture. Loaded is clubbing, drinking, eating, playing and eating. Loaded is for the man who believes he can do anything, if only he wasn't hungover.' It was a masculinity defined by hedonism and individual experience as well as what appeared to be a kind of distinctly masculine empowerment. How far this was true is very debatable, but this was the feeling at the time. The magazine also created a kind of 'toxic masculinity' that tapped into fears about women whilst rejecting the 'new man' as a feminized form of masculinity 'a passive and insipid image.' At this time when the stereotypes for men attentive to feminism were two: Eunuch, or Beast, lads' magazines images offered 'a space of fun, consumption and sexual freedom for men' as well as 'a refuge from the constraints and demands of marriage and nuclear family.' However, some writers such as Jean Moir saw these magazines as little more than pornography 'serving up' a 'toxic masculinity' which 'promotes the dark male fantasy that ordinary girls are always ready for sex... and that the magazines themselves simply state this is an expression of 'emancipated sexual politics', a legacy of feminist equal rights. This idea found its expression in a stereotype called the 'Ladette.' source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lad_culture

The masculine 'performance' (Butler – see factsheet 125) was also taken on by women, fuelled by ideas of equality, representations of women adopting lad culture norms appeared, but unlike attitudes surrounding men's behaviour, women were often represented negatively for behaving in this way. A further complex debate surrounding the ladette is one which is still being discussed today by feminists; some post-feminists broadly saw laddetism as an expression of individual freedom and sexual liberation, but others such as Levy and Greer saw this stereotype as a form of patriarchal oppression whereby women are under 'the rhetoric of equality which is being used by political correctness as a way of masking the hammering women are taking.' Simply put, by acting 'like men', women (whether they knew it or not) were in fact shoring up patriarchy. Again, this is up for debate and is something that the next activity might help you discuss and understand.



http://i.dailymail.co.uk/i/pix/2010/10/27/article-1324355-0BAB5589000005DC-164_224x423.jpg

Acknowledgements: This Media Factsheet was researched and written by Di Naylor and published in April 2017 by Curriculum Press. Media Factsheets may be copied free of charge by teaching staff or students, provided that their school is a registered subscriber.
ISSN 1351-5136

Zoe Ball (above) was a famous ladette, she is still criticised today in the press if she drinks. In a recent story, she was reported as being drunk and behaving badly (see here for the story in full). <http://metro.co.uk/2015/12/18/married-strictly-spin-off-presenter-zoe-ball-caught-snogging-22-year-old-boyband-member-at-xmas-party-5572820/>

Activity

Consider this definition of ladette compared to the definition earlier of lad culture or laddism. What distinctions can you make? Concise Oxford Dictionary as: "Young women who behave in a boisterously assertive or crude manner and engage in heavy drinking sessions."

Also read and discuss some of these articles in relationship to attitudes surrounding Lad Culture and its effects on women and men.

The impact of Lad Culture on attitudes towards women has been a subject for much discussion. For further development of this argument, read the following and discuss your ideas and opinions:
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/oct/07/lad-culture-women-rape-sexual-harassment-abuse-laddish>
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/men/thinking-man/11228777/University-lad-culture-what-the-hell-is-positive-masculinity.html>
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-life/10657789/Sexist-lad-culture-can-British-universities-ever-get-rid-of-it.html>
<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2302235/Rise-raunch-culture-damaging-schoolgirls-warn-teachers.html>

Lad Culture Today



<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-31126002>

Jump forward to today and much has changed due to the web, lads' mags have either folded or moved online and it could be argued that there is a more pluralistic media landscape which means that one specific masculine sub-culture is no longer dominating. However, the emergence of sites such as <http://www.theladbible.com>, seem to be reflecting some of the dominant norms of the previous two decades, with its emphasis on humour, sex, the weird, and sport. It is manufacturing the same kind of attitudes associated to lad cultures before, with strong elements of audience participation, i.e. people sending in videos and stories. It generates ad revenue by monetizing what it considers to 'relatable content'. BuzzFeed reported it made more than £1m a year from advertising. Mimi Turner, Lad Bible's former marketing executive, told Radio 5 lives that the site is bigger than just 'Lad Culture' and rejects the ideas that it is 'sickeningly misogynistic.' Bates, summarising the Lad Bible's appeal, said: 'We have a huge appetite for relatable content - somebody doing something foolish or crazy or brave or inspiring that you might do too. That's a type of content that lends itself to social media, whereas it was never a lever that Loaded or Zoo could pull.' What has happened with sites like The Lad Bible is that it collates from all over the web therefore diluting some of the Lad Culture norms with other stories, this in turn makes it more acceptable to a wider demographic.

The new Media Studies specification will emphasise the way in which text reflect a time in history and will look at who these have been shaped by their context, this means you will need to look at texts from different time periods.