# Concerns over social media's influence on young boys and misogyny



A prominent Scottish academic has raised concerns about the influence of social media algorithms on young boys, specifically how they may inadvertently direct them towards misogynistic content. Dr David Smith, a social psychology expert at Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen, highlighted the troubling trend of boys as young as 12 becoming exposed to extreme views associated with the “manosphere,” a term encompassing various online subcultures that advocate misogynistic attitudes.

Dr Smith noted that even seemingly innocuous online searches for dating advice or fitness tips can lead youngsters down a path that introduces them to harmful ideologies. Speaking to the Sunday Mail, he shared a compelling example from his research on incel culture—short for "involuntary celibate." He recounted a case of a boy who, at merely 12 years old, searched for "how to know if a girl likes me" on YouTube and soon found himself inundated with “red pill” ideology, which posits that women manipulate the dating scene to their advantage. “It’s worrying that anyone could...go and write themselves off for the rest of their lives,” he stated.

This issue of youth radicalisation into misogynistic beliefs has garnered increased attention partly due to the recent Netflix drama "Adolescence," co-written by Stephen Graham. The series focuses on a schoolboy named Jamie, who is accused of murdering a female classmate after experiencing a barrage of cyberbullying and exposure to misogynistic online content. The drama has ignited discussions about how disaffected teenage boys are being drawn into toxic online subcultures and the associated violence towards women.

Police Scotland has responded to these concerns by launching a crackdown on incel culture in 2023, as part of a broader strategy aimed at addressing violence against women and girls. Events such as the tragic case of Jake Davison, an individual who identified as an incel and perpetrated a mass shooting in Plymouth in August 2021, have highlighted the potential real-world consequences of online radicalisation, further underscoring the need for intervention.

Dr Smith elaborated on the broader “manosphere,” which includes various groups of self-proclaimed misogynists and men’s rights activists, all of whom share a belief that modern society is biased against men. This belief system often leads to extremism, with members normalising misanthropic attitudes and sometimes perpetuating real-world violence and harassment against women. Notably, within these discussions exists a concept known as the “80/20 rule,” suggesting that 80 per cent of women are only attracted to the top 20 per cent of men, which further entrenches feelings of hopelessness and resentment among adherents.

Amid these discussions, Karyn McCluskey, the CEO of Community Justice Scotland, also expressed her alarm about the pervasive nature of manosphere content online. Speaking to the Sunday Mail, she stated, “You’ve got young guys...and the algorithms are pushing all this toxic stuff, even if you’ve never looked at it before.” She explained that a search for gym exercises can lead users down a path of extremist gender views through a gradual “drip, drip, drip” effect of content.

Potential impacts of exposure to incel culture extend to mental health concerns for young boys, as studies suggest a troubling correlation with rising rates of suicide and self-harm linked to online communities that promote self-pity and hopelessness. Dr Smith remarked, “These are young guys maybe just looking for some answers about how to make a girl like them,” only to find themselves absorbed in discussions about self-harm and nihilism.

The repercussions of these online influences have been a topic of family discourse, as illustrated by a recent BBC report featuring a teenager named Ben alongside his parents. They discussed the implications of the Netflix series "Adolescence," which portrays the dangers surrounding boys' interactions with social media. Ben expressed that while he recognised elements of the show, he believed it primarily echoed parental fears regarding their children's online activities.

The family acknowledged Andrew Tate, a highly publicised figure in the manosphere, and debated the potential impact of his ideology on young boys like Ben. They collectively voiced concerns about boys not receiving adequate guidance on healthy interactions with the opposite sex, which Ben attributes to their reliance on online platforms for social education.

As discussions continue around the troubling intersections of youth, technology, and misogyny, experts and families alike are grappling with how to address the underlying issues without stigmatizing young boys who seek validation in the tumultuous environment of the digital age.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://cacmb4.acm.org/news/279835-social-media-algorithms-amplifying-misogynistic-content/fulltext> - This article supports the claim that social media algorithms amplify misogynistic content, which can impact young users. It describes a study where TikTok's algorithms increased the proportion of misogynistic content in recommended videos over time.
* <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/2024/feb/social-media-algorithms-amplify-misogynistic-content-to-teens> - This report corroborates how social media algorithms can lead to a surge in misogynistic content for young users, emphasizing its normalization among them.
* <https://lens.monash.edu/@education/2024/07/01/1386838/we-research-online-misogynist-radicalisation-heres-what-parents-of-boys-should-know> - This piece explains how algorithms on platforms like YouTube and TikTok expose boys and young men to misogynistic content, often through seemingly innocuous online searches.
* <https://www.bbc.co.uk> - Although specific BBC coverage is not detailed in the search results, general BBC reports would discuss the implications of online content on youth, aligning with concerns about the Netflix series 'Adolescence' and its portrayal of young boys' interactions with social media.
* <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/jake-davison-shooting-plymouth-terrorism-b1928227.html> - This article provides context on Jake Davison, an incel who carried out a mass shooting, illustrating real-world consequences of online radicalization into misogynistic ideologies.
* <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/jun/04/police-scotland-launch-crackdown-on-involuntary-celibate-incel-culture> - This article discusses Police Scotland's efforts to address incel culture as part of combating violence against women, reflecting broader concerns linked to online radicalization.