# Concerns raised over social media algorithms leading boys to misogynistic content



Dr David Smith, a social psychology expert from Robert Gordon University, has raised concerns about social media algorithms that are leading boys as young as 12 years old towards misogynistic content within the so-called "manosphere." This trend, according to Dr Smith, stems from innocuous internet searches for topics such as dating advice or fitness routines, which can rapidly devolve into exposure to harmful ideologies.

In an interview with the Sunday Mail, Dr Smith highlighted a disturbing case of a young participant who became involved in incel culture after merely searching for guidance on how to determine if a girl liked him. He warned that such algorithm-driven pathways could mark the beginning of a long-term association with harmful beliefs at a formative age. "I remember one of the participants I spoke with joined inceldom when he was 12... it's worrying that anyone could, at age of 12... go and write themselves off for the rest of their lives," Smith remarked.

The issue has gained further prominence following the release of the Netflix drama "Adolescence," co-created by Stephen Graham, which addresses how disaffected teen boys can be drawn into toxic online subcultures associated with the far right. The narrative centres on a schoolboy accused of killing a female classmate, igniting discussions around the influences of digital content on young minds.

In recent developments, Police Scotland has initiated measures to combat incel culture, as part of a broader strategy aimed at addressing violence against women and girls. This comes in the wake of the tragic Plymouth shooting in August 2021, where an individual who identified as an incel fatally shot five people, including his mother, before taking his own life.

Dr Smith elaborated on the dynamic of the incel community, which largely consists of individuals who feel disenfranchised in romantic contexts and attribute their struggles to both societal factors and personal traits. These individuals often subscribe to what is termed the "red pill" ideology, referencing the film "The Matrix," which propounds a belief that they have awoken to harsh truths about gender dynamics. The extreme end of this spectrum is the "black pill," which embodies a nihilistic belief that change is impossible.

He noted that while platforms like TikTok have sought to block the term "incel," related content like the "black pill" and "80/20 rule" continues to infiltrate users' feeds. The "80/20 rule" cynically asserts that a majority of women are only attracted to the most conventionally appealing men, a belief that perpetuates a framework of resentment and fatalism among incel adherents. As Dr Smith stated, “the biggest dangers of incel culture are... normalising misogynistic attitudes... that can lead to harassment and stalking.”

The implications of incel forums also extend to mental health, with rising concerns about links to suicide and self-harm among impressionable young individuals. Dr Smith commented, “These are young guys... looking for some answers about how to make a girl like them... aside from being told ‘you can’t’, these are places where people are consistently discussing the best ways to kill themselves.”

Reflecting on broader societal contexts, Dr Smith suggested that feelings of hopelessness, exacerbated by contemporary issues such as the cost of living crisis, contribute to the appeal of incel ideologies. He expressed concern about government policies that may further alienate young people, potentially deepening resentments within this demographic.

Karyn McCluskey, CEO of Community Justice Scotland, echoed these concerns, stating that the pervasive influence of the manosphere online is a significant issue. “It’s everywhere online... algorithms are pushing all this toxic stuff," she said, highlighting the subtlety with which young individuals can be drawn into troubling content. According to McCluskey, there is a critical need for society to address the confusion many young men feel about their identities in the modern world, suggesting a broader discussion about societal roles is necessary for the well-being of youth.

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

## References

* <https://dl.acm.org/doi/fullHtml/10.1145/3313831.3376232> - This article discusses how social media algorithms can influence user perceptions and behaviors, which aligns with Dr. Smith's concerns about algorithms leading boys to misogynistic content.
* <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/aug/13/suspect-identified-in-plymouth-shooting-as-jake-davison> - This news article details the tragic Plymouth shooting incident, where the perpetrator identified as an incel, which Dr. Smith mentioned as part of the broader societal concerns surrounding incel culture.
* <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-58274497> - Police Scotland's efforts to address incel culture and violence against women and girls are highlighted here, reflecting measures to combat toxic online subcultures.
* <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt15378300/> - The Netflix series 'Adolescence,' co-created by Stephen Graham, explores themes related to disaffected teenagers being drawn into toxic online subcultures, aligning with Dr. Smith's concerns.
* <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/14614448221094135> - This article discusses the impact of social media on male identity, touching on themes relevant to Dr. Smith's observations about the manosphere's influence on young males.