

OFCOM Media Literacy Consultation

Submission by Dr Craig Haslop, Senior Lecturer in Media and Researcher in Digital Youth Cultures, University of Liverpool.

Expertise:

-Principal investigator for two funded projects which designed research-based educational interventions for young people that focused on developing a positive online presence and promoting critical understanding of gender-based harassment and misogynistic content in online spaces. For more details see:

- The **Office for Students** funded project [Speakout | #Speakout: tackling online harassment in educational contexts | School of the Arts | University of Liverpool](#)
- The **ESRC** funded #Men4Change project: [Men4Change | University of Liverpool](#)

-Long term academic partner to [Beyond Equality](#), a charity which works with boys and men in schools, universities and workplaces to have brave discussions about what "being a man" means today

-Advisor to [White Ribbon UK](#), the leading charity in the UK which is engaging men and boys to prevent violence against women and girls.

Bio: Dr Haslop has over 15 years' experience of research on masculinities, digital youth cultures, and gendered experiences of online harms. He has published extensively on students experiences of online harassment, lad culture in online spaces, online misogyny, misogyny influencers and manfluencers, and educational interventions for young people which aim to tackle harmful norms of masculinity and gender and sexual based harassment, on and off digital spaces.

My submission is based on a range of recent research projects with young people (boys 13-14 and young people of different genders aged 18-25) focusing on their experiences of gender in digital spaces and the development of youth-led educational interventions around digital literacy, which can be read in more detail in the following international peer-reviewed publications:

Haslop, C. and Ringrose, J., (2025) Post-Tate, post-truth, post-digital: researching and mitigating the misogyny influencers. *Gender and Education*, pp.1-17. [Post-Tate, post-truth, post-digital: researching and mitigating the misogyny influencers](#)

Haslop, C., & O'Rourke, F. (2025). Misogynistic and Homophobic "Banter" in UK Digitised "Lad Cultures": Using Research and Homosocial Affect Theory in an Educational Resource to Tackle Harmful Masculine Norms. *Men and Masculinities*, 6(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X251333778>

Milne, B., Cambazoglu, I., Haslop, C., & Ringrose, J. (2024). Researching Young Masculinities During the Rise of 'Misogyny Influencers': Exploring Affective and Embodied Discomfort and Dilemmas of Feminist and Queer Researchers. *YOUNG*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/11033088241295844>

Haslop, C., Ringrose, J., Cambazoglu, I., & Milne, B. (2024). Mainstreaming the Manosphere's Misogyny Through Affective Homosocial Currencies: Exploring How Teen Boys Navigate the Andrew Tate Effect. *Social Media & Society*, 76(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051241228811>

O'Rourke, F., & Haslop, C. (2024). 'We're respectful boys ... we're not misogynistic!': analysing defensive, contradictory and changing performances of masculinity within young men's in-person and digitally mediated homosocial spaces. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2024.2335627>

O'Rourke, F. and Haslop, C. (2023) – **Men4Change**; Tackling and transforming harmful gendered norms and behaviours; – **A toolkit** for youth leaders and activists; [Men4Change | University of Liverpool](https://www.men4change.org/)

Context

Young people, 'manfluencers'/content creators, and gendered disinformation

Media and digital literacy require that young people can critically analyse content including through a gendered and political lens. Content creators and influencers convey a sense of (often imagined) accessibility, authenticity, and relatability for young people, and they have gained celebrity status such that their content becomes an important source of information (and mis/disinformation) and social glue for young people across a range of subjects including dating, sex, relationships, friendships, nutrition, and physical/mental health (Haslop et al, 2024 and Haslop and Ringrose, 2025). Unlike broadcast or mainstream media which are more closely regulated, online influencers/content creators are currently able to publish content if it does not breach platform guidelines. Therefore, gendered disinformation such as misogynistic stereotypes about women can be published with little recourse from platforms such as YouTube or TikTok (Haslop and Ringrose, 2025). A clear example is Fresh and Fit's freely available podcast on YouTube (with 1m+ followers) which, for example, has a regular 'womaniser Wednesday' series and content which preaches that nearly every woman is now 'transactional' in their dating, see [5 Important Things We Learned About Women Since Starting The Podcast](#)).

Fresh and Fit are only one example of a range of 'manfluencers' (Roberts and Wescott, 2024) who develop content which appeals to boys and young men through a focus on dating women, relationships, and men's self-improvement. Manfluencers often take (gendered) political positions through their content which promote specific ideologies

of gender. Many promote reductive notions of masculinity which suggest men should be dominant (in relationships); wealthy bread winners; focused on their physically strong bodies; and heterosexually virile (Haslop et al, 2024; Haslop and Ringrose, 2025; Movember, 2025). These manfluencers—who often reflect diluted ideologies from the manosphere, including anti-feminist rhetoric and a sense of victimhood that men are losing out to women (Haslop and Ringrose, 2025; Gerrand et al, 2025) —are now mainstream, with large followings on YouTube and TikTok. Recent research by men’s health charity Movember (2025) found that 2/3 of the 3000 men they spoke to in the US, UK and Australia, watched content from manfluencers, primarily because they found it entertaining, though they also found their advice motivational.

Our recent research with boys aged 13-14, suggests they are heavily reliant on advice from manfluencers about nutrition and their bodies. They highlight how they closely follow regimes suggested by manfluencers to get desired looks including making dietary choices.

There is also extensive research which suggests that young people do not believe that current relationships and sex advice at school is sufficient or effective (Ringrose et al, 2024), while research also shows that boys and young men are turning to influencers for advice about dating, sex and relationships (Haslop et al, 2024; Movember, 2025).

Recommendations

With this body of recent research in mind, I make the following recommendations about what digital media literacy campaigns and interventions should include, and how young people should be engaged:

- 1) Platforms should promote influencers who encourage critical digital literacy and equitable ideologies around gender and sexuality.** Research has highlighted that toxic manfluencer content is often fed to boys and men by the algorithm (Haslop et al, 2024; Ging et al, 2024). This content rarely encourages its viewers to think critically, and instead uses fear, humour and aspiration to engage viewers. OFCOM should incentivise platforms to also promote influencers who can offer alternatives to this material, including engaging content on critical digital literacy and on realities of gender inequality, ways of being a man that encourage gender equity.
- 2) Platforms should engage boys and men directly.** The reality is that masculinities are being communicated in specific ways in digital spaces and that boys and men react to that material in their behaviours (Haslop et al, 2024; Roberts and Wescott, 2024). Some of the material is unhealthy for men themselves as well as having an impact on others. Men’s homosocial dynamics play out in specific ways in online spaces which can have negative impacts on them and others (Haslop and O’Rourke, 2025), which digital literacy training

needs to address (see Haslop's [#Men4Change toolkit](#) as an example). We need to have direct educational conversations with boys and men about gender in digital spaces.

- 3) Platforms urgently need to help young people demystify manfluencers.** Manfluencers often glamorise their lives and foreground wealth as part and parcel of 'successful masculinity'. Young people need to understand how content creation and influencing works, such that it is the limited few who can accumulate wealth through that career and that it requires resource, time and work. It is rarely a fast track to wealth, and many manfluencers generate wealth by peddling disinformation to play the algorithm and get attention (Haslop and Ringrose, 2025).
- 4) Platforms should promote an understanding of gendered algorithmic cultures.** Our research suggests that young people have a much better understanding of the business and technological dynamics of digital spaces than we imagine. However, an understanding of the technology and business environment does not mean that young people understand how the cultural dynamics of gender play out in social media spaces where controversy is rewarded (i.e. content which challenges proven facts about gender inequalities for women), which over time cements beliefs about gender based on disinformation.
- 5) Digital media literacy needs to speak to young people in their language/through influencers.** Young people want to communicate through digital spaces and connect to each other through influencer and content culture. Critical digital literacy should be taught within contexts that are relevant to young people such as gaming/prank/lifestyle content; influencers, and content creators, should be included in these endeavours.
- 6) Platforms should include youth voice in algorithmic change.** Our research suggests that boys have felt bombarded by misogynistic content during the rise of Andrew Tate (see Haslop et al, 2024) and more recent research has highlighted that teen boys and young men (16 and 18) can be targeted with misogynistic manosphere content simply because seek out 'men's interest' content (not necessarily misogynistic) (Ging et al, 2024). If platforms want to meet the needs of their audiences, they should listen to young peoples' needs and wants regarding algorithms and the development of digital literacy.
- 7) Platforms should promote effective reporting services as part of digital literacy.** Digital media literacy includes how to make the platforms and its users accountable. Young people have told us that they find reporting services confusing, slow and unreliable. Whether this be when they see inappropriate content or have experienced harassment from others on social media. Social media companies should work to make sure their reporting systems are effective to rapidly remove inappropriate content and that there are proactive and clear

promotional campaigns targeting young people to help them understand what they can report and how they can do it.

Observations about OFCOM's media literacy activities

It is commendable that OFCOM are focusing on media literacy programmes and have evaluated various training programmes. The syllabi look extensive. However, from the materials I have viewed, I make the following observations which are designed to address some of the issues I have outlined.

Reading OFCOM's reports on media literacy activities ('What works in delivering media activities' and 'What works in delivering train the trainer media literacy interventions', I note the following:

In 'what works in delivering media activities' OFCOM notes: 'Projects addressed a variety of media literacy topics (usually in combination), most commonly around: online safety (including identifying scams and avoiding online harms); using technology to get online or using online services; persuasive design (including algorithms and echo chambers); and mis and disinformation'.

The above suggests that training with young people did not address influencers or content creator culture, the gendered nature of those cultures, and that algorithmic cultures and mis/disinformation can be gendered. Given the rapid rise of toxic manfluencer material and evidence which suggests many boys and young men are consuming this content (while gender and sexual based harassment and violence towards women is still a well-documented problem), I would recommend OFCOM adapts their approaches to training and regulation to account for this issue based on the recommendations outlined above.

Thank you for reading.

Other References

Gerrand, V., Ging, D., Roose, J. M., & Flood, M. (2025). Mapping the Neo-Manosphere(s): New Directions for Research. *Men.and.Masculinities*, 8(5), 443-464. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X251350277> (Original work published 2025)

Ging, D., Baker, C. and Brandt Andreasen, M. (2024). *Recommending Toxicity: The role of algorithmic recommender functions on YouTube Shorts and TikTok in promoting male supremacist influencers*. Summary Report. Project Report. DCU Anti-Bullying Centre, Dublin City University.

Movember (2025), *Young Men's Health in a Digital World Report*, [Young Men's Health in a Digital World - Movember](#)

Ringrose, J., Ging, D., Mishna, F., Milne, B., Horeck, T. and Mendes, K., (2025) Postdigital bystanding: Youth experiences of sexual violence workshops in schools in England, Ireland, and Canada. *Behavioral.Sciences*, 7(1), p.81.

Roberts, S. and Wescott, S., 2024. To quell the problem, we must name the problem: The role of social media 'manfluencers' in boys' sexist behaviours in school settings. *Educational.and.Developmental.Psychologist*, 07(2), pp.125-128.