

Women and Equalities Committee

Oral evidence: Misogyny: the manosphere and online content, HC 867

Wednesday 21 May 2025

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Members present: Sarah Owen (Chair); Alex Brewer; David Burton-Sampson; Catherine Fookes; Christine Jardine; Rachel Taylor.

Science, Innovation and Technology Committee member present: Emily Darlington.

Questions 68 - 115

Witnesses

I: Dr Lisa Sugiura, Associate Professor in Cybercrime and Gender Criminology, University of Portsmouth; Dr Kaitlyn Regehr, Associate Professor in Digital Humanities, University College London; Jacob Davey, Director of Policy and Research for Counter-Hate, Institute for Strategic Dialogue; Janaya Walker, Head of Public Affairs, End Violence Against Women Coalition (EVAW).

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Dr Lisa Sugiura, Dr Kaitlyn Regehr, Jacob Davey and Janaya Walker.

Chair: Good afternoon, and welcome to the Women and Equalities Committee. Today we are holding an oral evidence session on misogyny, the manosphere and online content. I am really delighted that we have an expert panel before us. Welcome, and thank you for joining us. We will be hearing from Dr Lisa Sugiura, associate professor in cybercrime and gender criminology at the University of Portsmouth; Dr Kaitlyn Regehr, associate professor in digital humanities at the University College London; Jacob Davey, director of policy and research for counter-hate, Institute for Strategic Dialogue; and Janaya Walker, head of public affairs at End Violence Against Women Coalition. I am going to hand over to Christine.

Q68 **Christine Jardine:** Good afternoon. First, apologies if I mispronounce your names; I am having terrible trouble at the moment, so I can sympathise. Dr Sugiura, could you give us an overview of the different manosphere communities out there, the similarities and the differences?

Dr Sugiura: To provide some background context, the manosphere is a digital ecosystem that has largely grown over the last 10 to 15 years. It is the contemporary offshoot of pre-existing men's rights groups, particularly the Men's Rights Movement, which came to fruition in the 1970s. It is really the digital contemporary version now where content on issues that are not predominantly just men's issues has been co-opted and discussed in forums and blogs. It can involve fitness, relationships and very traditional gender roles, and there is this overriding sense that feminism has ruined their lives and, more than that, it has corrupted society and now men have to fight back for their very survival. That overarching ideology then draws together all the groups within the manosphere.

There are quite a few groups, but some of the main ones that coalesce within these spaces are first, the men's rights activists most aligned with the men's rights movement, which feels men are discriminated against in society. Secondly, MGTOW, which is short for Men Going Their Own Way, which is an online community and also an ideology made up of men who advocate disengaging from relationships with women and often from broader societal expectations altogether. They are often, but not always, divorced men who are angry at women such that they decide to avoid sexual and romantic relationships altogether. Thirdly, pickup artists, or PUAs for short, which is part of the seduction industry and teaches men manipulative techniques to pick up women, essentially. Finally, the last key group is incels, short for involuntary celibates, who believe that, due to genetic traits, so circumstances beyond their control, they are unable to attain romantic and sexual relationships with the women they desire and believe they are entitled to.

Q69 **Christine Jardine:** That is quite a worrying picture. How would you say



this manosphere has gained traction now with men and boys? Is it through issues, or what would you say?

Dr Sugiura: There are different aspects that have led to their growth, not least obviously the growth of the internet providing a space for like-minded individuals to come together with very little oversight, accountability or challenge to hateful discourse. But there are also offline things that we need to consider: the sociopolitical climate and a failure to tackle misogyny and violence against women and girls and to hold the perpetrators accountable, and even gender progression. I do not mean that gender progression is bad, but there is always a backlash when there is progression from the groups that feel that they are then somehow being discriminated against and that their rights are somehow being challenged.

Lastly, men and boys are experiencing genuine issues of feeling somehow left behind. These issues are not necessarily unique to men and boys: mental health issues, isolation, loneliness and financial and economic struggle. It is almost as if there has not been a space offline for them to have these discussions, and then these opportunities have arisen online. It is easy to “other” women, feminism, gender progression and equality as the problem for these feelings that they are experiencing.

Q70 **Christine Jardine:** How do you think it will evolve? Where do you see it going from here?

Dr Sugiura: If we just continue to let it grow as we have done, it is going to continue spreading these ideologies and indoctrinating young men and boys. We need to be cognisant of emerging and future technologies as well.

These groups are not just talking in hateful ways about women and marginalised persons; they are actively engaging in violence. I know a lot of attention has been afforded to offline physical mass attacks, but every day these groups are engaging in networked harassment, doxing—the release of personal identifiable information—image-based abuse and stalking.

The logical next step for these groups is that they are going to be engaging in more forms of emerging tech and gen AI, things like deep fake technology, engaging in harassment, abuse, virtual sexual assaults in the Metaverse and other forms of virtual worlds and extended reality technologies.

Q71 **Christine Jardine:** Jacob, how many men in the UK do you think are part of this, and how would we go about measuring that?

Jacob Davey: That is the million-dollar question. It is quite challenging to say for certain and give a comprehensive overview. There are different ways of measuring this. On the one hand, you can look at the audiences that some of the more high-profile influencers have. We know that some influencers who are adjacent to the manosphere—Andrew Tate would be



the most prominent example here—can regularly reach an audience of millions. You can also do counts of active members of forums. For example, you could look at an incel forum and count the numbers there, which are typically in the thousands. But I would approach this from their audiences and the impact they have. When we talk about the manosphere, we can talk about these disparate online communities that are, in their own way, promoting some form of ideological misogyny, or we can talk about their reach, and this is where there are some quite interesting statistics.

For example, Movember has just published some research that points towards the fact that 60% of boys and men are consuming material from what they call masculinity influencers, and there is significant overlap there with the manosphere more broadly. Polling commissioned by HOPE not hate found that 80% of 16 and 17-year-old boys had consumed content created by Andrew Tate, and a poll by Internet Matters found that 56% of young fathers under the age of 35 approved of Andrew Tate.

When thinking about the size and impact of these communities, the angle I would use is the number of young men and boys they are reaching, and the number of young men and boys they are actively selling a misogynistic world view to.

Q72 Christine Jardine: Doctor Regehr, how many people do you think are exposed to manosphere content even if they are not looking for it? Some may be, but it may just be that algorithms are pointing a lot of people in that direction.

Dr Regehr: The nature of this community has shifted substantially in the last decade. When I first started working on the involuntary celibate community—known as incel—with Inspector David Tan of the Metropolitan Police, we were looking at a relatively niche community of young people who were operating on fairly alternative platforms like 4chan and 8chan. These individuals were taking on the language of the oppressed and typically focusing on women as the source of their unhappiness.

In a survey carried out by members of the community in 2019, all 667 respondents were male and 64% were between the ages of 18 and 24. Among the respondents, 70% suggested they had been bullied in childhood, 94% said that they had missed out on developmental milestones, and with respect to mental health, 74% identified as having experienced anxiety and stress, and 76% indicated they had seriously considered suicide.

During lockdown we saw some of the main indicators for engagement within the incel community become more intensified through social isolation and high dosages of online consumption, but we also saw TikTok emerge as the dominant youth platform. During this period we saw content that was once relegated to rather alternative platforms like 4chan move on to mainstream youth platforms like TikTok and become



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saturated and normalised across a much wider population of young people. With this, we began to see widespread uses of incel rhetoric in schools. I have even had the heads of boys' schools call me to say, "I have an entire Year 10 group who have gone incel," which is a very different phenomenon from what we were dealing with at the Met pre-Covid. If incel 1.0 was about social isolation and feeling left out, incel 2.0 by contrast is about banding together and finding empowerment through the language of incel in a way that is saturating a much broader youth culture.

Q73 Christine Jardine: I actually noticed you were nodding there, Ms Walker, as if that reflects your own experience. To what degree do you think the talking points and what we are hearing are now trickling into mainstream?

Janaya Walker: Just to give some introduction, I am here from the End Violence Against Women Coalition. We are a registered charity comprising of 160 primarily frontline specialist violence against women and girls services, but also other NGOs, researchers and academics. Part of the work we do is to convene a prevention forum, which brings together experts who are delivering frontline work within schools. I have really welcomed hearing my fellow panellists talk about this issue in the sense of a continuum of violence against women and girls and thinking about the fact that there are quite extreme manifestations of some of these ideas and ideologies, for example within incel communities.

To answer your question, we are really concerned about that seepage into the mainstream and the extent to which some regressive ideas have been repackaged, repurposed and normalised to a really broad audience. When we think about the efforts of the Government to halve violence against women and girls, the focus of this inquiry is really important in that it takes us towards what some of the drivers are, and what some of the social attitudes and behaviours are that underpin violence against women and girls. The normalisation of what may have been previously regarded as fringe or extreme views is a really concerning trajectory.

Chair: Following on from that point, Janaya, about how this is trickling down to the mainstream, I am going to read out some evidence that our Committee has received—name withheld obviously: "You've set up an equality Committee exclusively for women where you focus solely on solving women's problems and criminalise young men while you earn millions. It's disgusting how privileged and discriminatory you are. This has to stop"—I would like to clarify that we have just done some work on shared parental leave and heard a lot about fathers' rights to parental leave—"How is it possible that you're only interested in men's wellbeing when it's only for the benefit of women because more and more men hate you because they realise that many of you women are human garbage. How do we believe you're truly looking out for our wellbeing when your organisation only has the word 'women' in its name, not the word 'men', when you start releasing thousands of studies paid for with



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our money, in which you only care about women's problems while celebrating men's, when I've never seen you mention the word misandry in almost 20 years, in fact you've promoted it, dehumanising men and calling us rapists, toxic people and scum who do not deserve equal rights in our own native country, the only one we have. Your discriminatory and sexist Committee is nothing more than a fucking scam where you only hire and promote women while spreading hatred against us. This must change. There must be an all-male committee"—there have been plenty of those, I would like to add—"dedicated to solving men's problems. You can't be trusted, I know you hate us and are only after your own privilege and benefit. I hope you pay for all the harm you British prostitutes have done." I also prefer the word sex workers.

When I say that that content is not unusual for what I would receive, it is unusual that we would receive something like that as written evidence. We have yet to decide whether that written evidence will be agreed by the Committee; I personally think it should be because it is a very good example as to why we are holding this Committee session. It will also be flagged to Security. When we talk about it becoming part of the mainstream, my worry is not necessarily the reach, but how accepted this has become. Is there any way of challenging that at the moment, Janaya? If so, do you feel it has been successful?

Janaya Walker: Thank you. Hearing it in such plain terms really speaks to some of the sentiment that the panel has discussed in terms of the perception that women's rights are at the expense of men's flourishing within society and creating this kind of zero-sum game whereby, if there are more progressive policies for some, that means others lose out. It articulates so many of those points in an almost textbook form, but that does not take away from the gravity of it. It is really important to say it also speaks to what lots of women in public life experience when they put themselves forward to talk about these issues.

Your question around normalisation is a really crucial point. It is about the reach, the normalisation and the extent to which these ideas about women and girls are regarded as acceptable—because, of course, that permissibility is what can also shape the way people treat each other. That seems like an obvious point.

What are we seeing to challenge that behaviour? That is a really good question which points us to think about what it is that works. Sometimes when we get into these conversations, there is a desire for some amazing new radical thing we have never heard of. But we have been talking about this issue for a very long time, and oftentimes it is taking us back to some of the core principles around prevention.

What is happening in schools and education is a really important site to think about. We have had mandatory RSE, relationships and sex education, since 2020, and we know that that is making some progress. There is research to say that, year on year, young people are talking about the extent to which they feel equipped to have these



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conversations. However, it is nowhere near as far as we could go or as ambitious as we should be given the scale of the problem to really embed this not only within schools and education, but in our public comms and our behaviour campaigns across Government Departments.

Everyone will be aware of the report by the National Audit Office on the previous Government's record on tackling violence against women and girls. The evidence was clear that prevention has really been an afterthought and has not received the same political attention, investment or commitment as other issues. When we are talking about how we challenge this, we really need to go much further.

We obviously now have the safer streets mission and the Government's ambition, which is really welcome, to halve violence against women and girls within a decade, but we need to see that getting started. The Public Accounts Committee just published its report on Friday with some concerns that neither the Home Office nor the DfE were able to give a start date. So, when are we getting started? Because so many of these conversations have been borne out from adolescence and so on, we tend to return to, "Well, we have to look at the Department for Education," but when we go to the Department for Education, we and our members are saying, "So, where are we?". We are really keen to get into this and build on the brilliant work that has already been done but to do it on a much bigger scale and with much more investment than we have seen to date.

Chair: Thank you, Janaya, that leads us on really nicely to Catherine's questions.

Q74 Catherine Fookes: You have answered this to some degree, Janaya, but could you build on what you and Dr Lisa have already said about how the manosphere content leads on, if indeed it does, to violence against women, and how does it amplify, in your opinion?

Janaya Walker: The ethos and values of our organisation is to say, and the evidence tells us, that violence against women and girls is preventable—but it is not inevitable. If we are going to prevent violence against women and girls we need to think about the social attitudes and behaviours which underpin it. Some of the ideas around men's entitlement to women's bodies, that women owe men affection or attention, and that women are of lesser value if they engage in sexual activity all have a very long history in terms of traditional gender roles, but are also really about patriarchy and the domination of women.

On the question of how to address these issues, I think the panel are saying that we are contending with the fact that there is now the internet, which is a huge countervailing force against our efforts to try to move us towards a more just world for women and girls. As others have alluded to, we have had the MeToo movement and there has been some real outpouring from feminists, women and girls talking about their experiences, but alongside that I do not think we have had the opportunity to have really constructive dialogue about how we move



towards a society that is invested in, and that men and boys feel is invested in, creating a world that is better for them.

- Q75 **Catherine Fookes:** In terms of the link, how can we break the link between the manosphere and the content that boys and men are seeing? What makes them then go on to commit an act? Obviously not every young boy who sees that content will go on and do something, so what is it that is making them act? I do not know if anyone else wants to comment.

Janaya Walker: Just to add one more point, other than looking at the role of schools and education, one of the other areas we seek to highlight is the way in which the social media platforms themselves play a role in promoting this content. I am sure the Committee will have already considered the role of algorithms and recommender systems and the way the business model itself is set up to facilitate and redistribute these ideas to a much wider audience. If we are thinking about how to intervene, one thing is going to be the role that Government and Ofcom can play to introduce safety by design to really embed anti-gender-based violence within its policies.

- Q76 **Catherine Fookes:** Just to finish on that point, do you feel that needs to be included in the strategy for halving violence against women and girls?

Janaya Walker: Absolutely, yes. We really hope to see a central role for DSIT in the VAWG strategy.

Jacob Davey: If I could come in on this, there is a role to be played in connecting the dots between different strategies and approaches as well. Last year, the Home Secretary announced that extremist misogyny would be considered as an ideology in and of itself, under counter-extremism strategy. That appears to have stalled but, as the strategy comes to fruition, it is going to be essential to understand that role and that apparatus in terms of countering extremism, not as the be-all and end-all, but as one part of a solution for countering this.

If we think about young people who are most likely to go out and commit violence, they may well be caught in the prevent strategy mechanisms set up to help counter and de-radicalise people. As we think more broadly about countering violence against women and girls, it is going to be important to make sure that it is connected into counter-extremism efforts. There is some really interesting research out there: Bettina Rottweiler and Paul Gill from UCL have done some great work which points towards misogynistic attitudes acting as a predictor for an increased likelihood of people wanting to engage both with extremism and interpersonal violence.

When we think about misogynistic attitudes writ large, they are a common feature in extremist movements that we will be familiar with, for example with white supremacists, the extreme right wing and Islamist movements. If we are thinking about catching people who are right at the



sharp end and potentially going out to engage in targeted violence or mass casualty violence, then connecting the dots is important.

- Q77 **Catherine Fookes:** Dr Katelyn or Dr Lisa, do you want to make a comment about what kinds of behaviour or harm towards women the manosphere encourages?

Dr Sugiura: I would like to follow on from the previous discussion, but I will link in with the question that you just asked. There is evidence to show that perpetrators of extremist violence have a previous history of violence against women. Many of these perpetrators have engaged in domestic abuse, if not against partners then against predominantly female family members—often their mothers—so we can already see that continuum of violence.

But in terms of the harms, as everybody has already mentioned, it is the everyday online harms where they are engaging in forms of online violence against women and girls: the doxing, the abuse, the networked harassment. The manosphere engaged in quite notorious forms of harassment like Gamergate, the image-based abuse of celebrities following the iCloud hack and the soft audit campaign in America where they targeted sex workers and leaked their details to the IRS. Obviously, they target women in the public eye because they have a problem with women in powerful positions.

We need to be aware of the risks of future perpetrators as well, which is not often spoken about. In my research with incels I spent three years in the manosphere, and I interviewed self-identified current and former incels. Those that said that they were former incels and that they had so-called ascended still showed misogynistic tendencies. They can reject the incel label and might not necessarily engage in those spaces, but they will still talk about women in pretty dehumanising terms, which as we know is a predictor for gender-based violence. The reason these men were saying that they were ex-incels was often because they had found themselves a girlfriend, which is obviously what they wanted in the first place, but of course they still held those really negative attitudes. We are not discussing the risks to current and former partners of men in the manosphere, or those who claim to have left those ideologies behind.

- Q78 **Chair:** Dr Lisa, from your research, why do you think the manosphere influencers have built up such a large following? To follow on from one of our previous panels, people who work with young people every single day said that actually it is only losers who follow Andrew Tate in schools, and that it is more the middle-level influencers that young people are really sharing and taking note of. What is the draw to that mid level rather than the larger-reaching audiences of, say, some other influencers that we have already mentioned?

Dr Sugiura: Maybe some of the bigger names are more overt in their forms of misogyny or hatred towards women. Where you have the more middle-tier misogynistic influences, so to speak, maybe what they are



saying and doing is more palatable as well. They are providing a space for young men and boys who usually feel that they are disenfranchised and do not have role models to look up to. They are saying that all their problems are external to them, which is quite seductive.

The content is often presented in an educational and scientific way. There is a lot of discussion around critical digital media literacy, and certainly that is part of Ofcom's strategy for the Online Safety Act. Young people are being taught, "Think about what you see in an age of misinformation and disinformation online." Then they are presented with content in scientific ways; we have already spoken about how it is so readily available on the mainstream platforms like TikTok and YouTube. They draw on evolutionary psychology and biological essentialism and it seems credible, so they are likely to believe these things and feel that they are somehow legitimised.

Q79 Chair: You mentioned the Online Safety Act and Ofcom's role there. Do you think that they will have the resources and the teeth to deal with this issue? Because quite often, as you say, it operates in this grey area and in the pseudoscience. Do you think that Ofcom will actually be able to have the teeth to deal with some of this misinformation and disinformation around gender and women?

Dr Sugiura: The challenge is recognising misogyny.

Q80 Chair: Do you think that they will?

Dr Sugiura: Misogyny is not illegal and so having the weight behind them to recognise and tackle those more palatable, less overt forms of it is incredibly challenging, as I said.

Q81 Chair: Jacob talked about selling misogyny, and it is quite clear that there is monetisation of misogyny. How do manosphere influencers make their money? Quite a lot of them talk about crypto. Where is their money coming from? How do they make it? Who is best placed to answer that one, do you think?

Janaya Walker: I was going to talk about two strands of it; but one was to just reiterate the earlier point that the business model of the platforms themselves is really about the attention economy and trying to create a service that holds the user on for as long as possible, whether that is through amplifying divisive content—often harmful and abusive—or an infinite scroll, or trying to create a context where people are engaging and staying as long as possible because that connects to a service's ad revenue and user engagement.

On an individual level alongside that, we can think about the monetisation behind it in the sense that people can create entrepreneurial schemes where you pay £7 to get access to dating advice. Or you can have really engaging short-form content on TikTok, but if you want to hear more and you really want that simple, easy instruction to follow through on how you can gain success in six quick



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steps, get financial advice or secure the girl that you want, there is a move to a paid-for service.

Q82 Chair: They are making money out of men's and young boys' vulnerability and sadness—is that right?

Janaya Walker: Yes, and from violence against women and girls. It is important to recognise that there is a conflict in the sense that there is a business model that profits from violence against women and girls, and there is a Government mission to halve violence against women and girls and at times they are going to be at odds.

Just building on what Lisa said, the other point is thinking about the influences potentially with less reach. For some of the advice, it is not that you would click on a video which says, for example, how to rape a woman, or something headline-grabbing—although that is also the case—it is that it will be presented in a way that is folded into everyday aspirational material: fitness advice, dating advice, how to make money advice, and then through the course of that are seeds of really harmful attitudes towards women and girls.

Q83 Chair: Jacob, did you want to add anything on this? How do we stop that monetisation? If you are profiting from content that promotes violence against women and girls, that is illegal and harmful.

Jacob Davey: If I may just continue for one second on that algorithmic piece, because it is really important. We have heard about the attention economy, but it is not just a case that people will be trapped with a certain set of influencers, but actually that they will be served more and more egregious and more and more misogynistic content over time which is essentially an algorithmic rabbit hole that can facilitate radicalisation. We conducted a study—

Chair: Sorry, Jacob, we are going to come on to algorithms a bit later, if that is okay, I just want to stick with the monetisation on this section.

Jacob Davey: There are a few different monetisation buckets. As we have heard, there are products that I would put broadly as a grift bucket. The extent to which there is a route through criminal justice means to gather money will be challenging and will have to be examined on a case-by-case basis. There are also donations through platforms such as Patreon, and you can say, "If you like my work, send me £5 and you will keep getting more content." There is also the ad revenue side of things, which I do not think has been hit upon so much, which I would say is a part, but not the full component; there are other buckets.

There could be mechanisms to engage with social media platforms around ad revenue potentially using the Ofcom and the Ofcom Safety Act, but even if ad revenue is shut down, it is going to be challenging to go after the broader, grift-based economy that we see propping up a lot of these people.



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Dr Sugiura: Can I just add that there may be something for trading standards here, because they are branding themselves. They are selling merchandise: clothing and men's grooming products with their names on it. They are self-publishing books to further promote their ideas and add a veneer of respectability, which of course is just monetising misogyny. There may be something that can be drawn on there to prevent those products being out on the market.

Q84 **Chair:** Is any foreign money involved in this? If so, where does it come from?

Jacob Davey: I am not going to talk about state actors, but I would say that when we think about the manosphere writ large we are dealing with an international network; it is not just something which is isolated to the UK. There will be a lot of flows coming from audiences in Germany and Poland. We have conducted analysis globally that points towards the interconnected nature of these networks. There will potentially be money flowing across borders for the purchasing of products and for the donation model.

Q85 **Chair:** Is the donation model in traditional money formats, or is it in different ways?

Janaya Walker: In different ways as far as I am aware, but again it depends, because we are talking about such a spectrum of content, some of which is more deliberately on smaller sites that have less oversight or are now subject to less regulation. I guess there is more calculation on those sites in terms of, "How are we evading detection and making sure that we are not identified by authorities?" versus, as you said, your everyday interaction with mainstream sites and where that pulls you to.

Before we move on, I just wanted to go back to the question around the grey area, and some questions you asked about Ofcom and the Online Safety Act. The real challenge we see with the Online Safety Act in terms of regulation is that there is a tendency to address forms of violence against women and girls in a very isolated and individual way, to think about particular, priority illegal offences—a form of stalking, harassment or violence—and the requirements on different platforms to mitigate those harms.

What we are failing to see is Ofcom themselves looking at the Act in a systemic way, at the different ways in which the broader algorithmic systems—the design and business models or platforms themselves—are producing these problems, rather than this being about individual users only, and being geared towards a lot of the action happening after the harm is done. We see content moderation or getting posts down, but again we are pulling ourselves towards the sharp end of the crisis, and we want to be back to preventing this from happening in the first instance.

Q86 **Alex Brewer:** This is fascinating. Can I start by asking you, Jacob, to



what extent current moderation policies on social media platforms are effective in preventing this content from spreading?

Jacob Davey: We need to talk about the spectrum of content, as we have just heard. In some cases, we have seen particular high-profile influencers being de-platformed—Andrew Tate being the obvious example, although there is a question around whether de-platforming did much to limit his audience or notoriety. The fact that this content is still readily accessible, not just on fringe forums and platforms, but on major and mainstream social media platforms, points towards the fact that there is more to be done.

Again, we bring ourselves back to this discussion of grey area content. We are coming from a model where platforms were essentially trusted to go out and moderate themselves. Ten years ago, we would typically have expected them to have a higher threshold than what is explicitly illegal: they wanted to make sure that their spaces were safe and enjoyable for audiences. We have seen a backsliding from that. In many ways this has become a geopolitical football, where we are seeing greater pressure, particularly from the current administration in the United States, to roll back on that moderation in protection of their particular conception of freedom of speech.

This is really the crux, because it is very easy to undo moderation efforts and then suddenly turn your platform into a toxic mess almost overnight, as we have seen in the case of X, formerly Twitter. This is why it is really important to ground these discussions around platform moderation efforts in the broader discussion around regulation in the UK as well. I am not sure if we are going to have further discussion around that, so I can hold off on my thoughts around Ofcom.

Dr Regehr: To build on that, it is important to note that not only is there little incentive for social media companies to take down harmful content, but there is actually financial incentive for them to keep it up. I am sure we all know this but, just to be clear, the financial model of social media platforms is based on advertising revenue; the public do not pay for these services and arguably the public are not the consumers here. The public are the product, or rather their time and attention is the product that is being sold to advertisers. In my research we call this process the attention economy, or what Nick Srnicek refers to as the algorithmic economy.

My team at UCL, including Dr Katharine Smales and Dr Caitlin Shaughnessy, has looked at the way in which hate, harm and disinformation is prioritised through that attention, or algorithmic economy because disinformation is often more attention-grabbing than truth. Harm, or things that hook into our insecurities or initiate an emotive response, are more attention-grabbing, which is what advertisers are paying for. What I would really like to impress on the Committee today is that this algorithmic economy is an unethical financial structure



that prioritises profit over people's wellbeing, and it is through this structure that harm, including online misogyny, flourishes.

Our 2024 Safer Scrolling report in partnership with the Association of School and College Leaders looked at how recommender systems on TikTok actively amplify and direct harmful content to young people. This research employed an algorithmic study using archetype modelling. We did long-form interviews with young people, created TikTok profiles based on those young people, and then analysed and mapped 1,000 videos which were recommended to our archetypes. After only five days on TikTok, our research showed a fourfold increase in the level of misogynistic content being presented to our hypothetical young people.

This same methodology has been applied by other researchers to other issues. Amnesty International did a project on self-harm, and Ribeiro et al. did a project on alt-right using this methodology, both of which pointed to the same phenomenon: harm is being algorithmically offered and actually flourishes through this economy.

Alex Brewer: That is devastating, but very interesting.

Dr Sugiura: Could I add to that?

Alex Brewer: Very quickly, and then I will need to move on.

Dr Sugiura: It is important to know how these misogynistic influences are circumventing the control measures that are in place. On TikTok, for example, research was undertaken with my colleague, Anda Solea, at the University of Portsmouth, essentially investigating incel content. This was apparently after TikTok had banned all incel and misogynistic content in 2022. They had stopped any account that had "incel" in the profile but not "incels" plural, which was unhelpful from the start.

In terms of how accounts are able to get around those measures, it is just about using creative language. They will omit letters for symbols and refer to terms that are not recognised by platforms; the particular language that these groups use often goes unnoticed and is not moderated. They blur images to avoid shadow banning, copy posts from the more clandestine sites like 4chan and Reddit and even have links on there that are not being taken down by TikTok that direct users to the more extreme sorts of content. Although the platforms are saying, "We do not allow this content", in practice we can see how they are still allowing it, and in fact they are enabling users to engage with more offensive types of materials.

Q87 **Alex Brewer:** Thank you, that is very helpful. Given the sharing and cross-platform nature of how this works, would you say that it is not just difficult to ban content from influencers, but it is impossible to do?

Dr Sugiura: It is not impossible; it is about staying on top of it. It is difficult because it is such a dynamic space and is about understanding these approaches. I mentioned the language, and anybody that has a



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little of knowledge about, say, the terminology that these groups use would recognise straight away accounts, profiles and posts that are relevant to incels, for example. It is about having that information and acting upon it.

Q88 **Alex Brewer:** Essentially, it is intention followed by resource?

Dr Sugiura: Yes.

Q89 **Alex Brewer:** Fabulous, thank you. Janaya, if I could come to you. Is demonetisation effective or does misogynistic content need to be removed altogether?

Janaya Walker: When it comes to the question of whether content needs to be removed altogether, from one perspective the real emphasis for us and lots of our members is its importance in relation to non-consensual intimate images. I know that has been raised by the Women and Equalities Committee, which we really welcome; particularly for survivors who have had their images shared that is a real challenge in terms of the re-traumatisation that comes through their inability to have the content removed and the uncertainty about how far the reach has been spread.

I know that there is evidence from the Revenge Porn Helpline that it is able to remove 90%, but there is 10% that it really struggles with, so there are some important steps there that the Government should be taking. I note that they have rejected lots of recommendations of the Committee, which we hope there will be some movement on. Content take-down primarily in relation to non-consensual intimate imagery is really important.

Outside that, while content takedown is important, we are always trying to return the conversation about the need to move towards preventing the proliferation of that content in the first instance. We really want to be returning to safety by design and the ways in which we can embed a preventive approach to platforms and products, designed so that these things do not flourish. In many ways, once we talk about content take-down we are too late, and we are not achieving the goals that we set out to do. I guess there is a bit of both there, depending on what the focus is, but for the victims and survivors, the recommendations that the Committee has made around non-consensual intimate imagery are incredibly important.

Q90 **Alex Brewer:** Lisa, just coming back to you very quickly, if a content creator is demonetised, can that content creator and the platform continue to earn money directly or indirectly from that content?

Dr Sugiura: As we have seen with Andrew Tate, he personally had his profiles removed but others kept using his materials and splicing them—cutting them up and things—which still made money for those platforms. So, in evidence, yes.



- Q91 **Alex Brewer:** Coming back to you very briefly, Jacob, you mentioned about de-platforming and we have just touched on that. Does it work or does it actually pose a risk? Do they move to platforms with less moderation, or to mainstream television? Does it work or is it counterproductive?

Jacob Davey: It depends on your objective in the de-platforming. In the short term, de-platforming a high-profile influencer on one of the major live streaming services—YouTube or TikTok—can have an immediate impact on their ability to reach into particularly vulnerable communities, although, as we have seen with Andrew Tate, it can also add to their notoriety.

We are dealing with a vast universe of platforms now, some of which are specifically set up to have very limited moderation efforts. Time and time again we see, not just in the case of misogynistic influencers, but within other extremist movements, that they will always find a way to reach an audience. The audience might be smaller or fragmented but taking someone down cannot be the whole solution.

This comes back to the points around content. I do not think that we can solely moderate out these broader systemic issues. I will return to a refrain I have heard across the panel today: we need to be shifting towards a regulatory system which focuses on safety by design, ensuring that these platforms are actually set up with the safety of their users at the forefront and that their business models of themselves are not facilitating radicalisation. To give you a one-sentence answer: yes, it can have some impact, but it cannot be the whole solution by any means.

Chair: We will go quickly to Catherine, and then to Emily.

- Q92 **Catherine Fookes:** I just have a quick thought. We are saying that there is no incentive for social media companies to take the content down. Are you basically saying the only way to get rid of this content is to make misogynistic content illegal, rather like we have with child sexual abuse imagery, where there is a system for it to come down? Do we need to make misogynistic content illegal?

Janaya Walker: I would not necessarily say that the answer would be to make it illegal, because that goes back to the way the Online Safety Act works primarily through the lens of individual criminal offences. That is the baseline for action from the social media platforms. If something constitutes a criminal offence, and particularly if it is deemed priority illegal content, then you take action.

What we are trying to draw attention to is that so much of what underpins violence against women and girls is within the grey areas. That is where we are looking at things like the recommender systems and, as the professors have talked about, the way that the algorithm promotes those. How do we get to regulating the social media platforms in a way that addresses how the business models themselves are harmful and



proliferate these things, rather than relying solely on the criminal law, which, again, comes in far too late?

Q93 Chair: I sat on that Bill Committee that undid all the work that was done on legal but harmful content, on the Online Safety Bill Committee, for my sins. I am just wondering whether there is space for this, because it is this grey area, and it is a question of how you act. We know that online platforms will not act if it is legal. The conversations that we have all heard—on non-consensual intimate image abuse, for example—indicate that they will not act unless it is illegal. Would it be of benefit to include misogynistic material as illegal, or not? If not, just let us know. Dr Kaitlyn?

Dr Regehr: Of course, the problem that you will face with that is the free speech argument, as you know, in that predictive technologies, which are what you would be using, would be too restrictive on the rights of the poster. Particularly with misogyny, we have this grey area on where we draw the lines around that content. The argument should not be around free speech. The argument at stake is about not publication, but dissemination. It is not about whether an individual has the right to post this content, but whether social media companies should be actively promoting the content, particularly to young people.

What we should be doing with this is having a rating system on content. If social media companies are found culpable of actively promoting content on the For You pages—let's say on TikTok—of young people, they should be culpable for this. We can also do this with other things. There is this idea that we are living in a digital town square where everyone has the right to free speech. We do not live in a digital town square; we do not see all content that is posted. We see a very narrow picture which is selected for us personally. What we need to attack is the way we have allowed social media companies to choose what that is for us and for our children. That is the culpability.

Q94 Emily Darlington: I wanted to go on and talk a little more about algorithms. We have talked a bit about what algorithms are and what they are currently doing. Safety by design is part of the Online Safety Act, yet how do you monitor safety by design if there is a lack of transparency in the algorithms of the social media companies? What is the solution to that?

Janaya Walker: I would say for violence against women and girls specifically, the way the legislation is drafted—correct me if I am wrong—is that there is a role for transparency reporting. That should allow us to shed some light on the practices of the businesses themselves. There is a huge gap for us when it comes to violence against women and girls specifically. We have statutory guidance for violence against women and girls that is currently in draft and in consultation provided by the regulator, but it is voluntary.



This is a real contradiction because so much of the basis for the introduction of the Online Safety Act was a real cross-party consensus understanding that the era of self-regulation was over—it was not effective and was doing untold harm to society—but when it comes to the issue of violence against women and girls, we have guidance that is voluntary.

As End Violence Against Women Coalition, we were working with a coalition of the NSPCC, Professor Clare McGlynn and others in calling for a violence against women and girls code of practice that would be binding. Under the law, social media platforms would have to comply with its content or explain how they were going to alternatively meet those same standards. There is a real, quite obvious solution there in terms of how, under a new Government with the mission to halve violence against women and girls, we make that statutory guidance more robust in the form of a code of practice.

Q95 Emily Darlington: Dr Regehr, I saw you react to that question. Did you want to contribute?

Dr Regehr: Yes. It is a great question. A proactive or safety-by-design approach, of course, would do more to hold tech companies accountable and account for their algorithmic systems as a business model. Let us just pull that apart and think about what that means. We accept that tech companies know what trainers we will want next season and we accept that they will know we are pregnant before anyone else does, but do we accept that they will know that our children are self-harming or suicidal, without any duty of care? Do we accept this? Probably not, and yet there is no duty of care. There is no consistent line of communication between tech and Government to protect kids. We accept the Online Safety Act as a clean-up job afterwards, but there is no consistent mechanism for platforms to report or flag young people consuming harm who are at risk. That is a failure.

Q96 Emily Darlington: I just want to move it on a little, not just to the algorithms themselves, but to the use of AI both in content moderation and in informing the algorithms. We are aware that they are currently very good at identifying women's health advice and taking it down, having used certain terms. Jacob, what role do you think they have in promoting or moderating misogyny? Do you think they should be doing more, or is this an area that the companies have not actively thought about in programming the AI?

Jacob Davey: At the moment, there is a bit of a gold rush to try to outsource everything to AI here. There are a lot of challenges inherent to the training of recommender systems. We know from a number of cases looking at other related phenomena, for example racism, that bias can be introduced into those systems. Accordingly, relying solely on AI is always going to cause a number of significant challenges.



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We conducted some research recently in the German context looking at this, where we analysed TikTok content. We were specifically interested in seeing how discussion of sexual violence against women was moderated, in particular whether there was content promoting rape and sexual assault. Actually, we found that there was fairly limited content because the AI seemed to be doing a fairly good job at removing it.

What we also found, however, was that the AI was over-moderating against survivor stories, to the extent that the value of social media being to provide people with a platform to talk about these difficult issues was being over-moderated. That is a roundabout way of saying that there is an inherent risk of relying too much on AI for these solutions, and they can actually help create environments that in some ways feel less safe.

Q97 Emily Darlington: Fantastic. The social media platforms are still hosting content promoting misogyny. As you said, there is always a difficult legal line around what is freedom of speech versus what is illegal in terms of incitement or promotion of activity. Dr Lisa, why are they still getting away with it, and what should be the Government's role in that?

Dr Sugiura: They are going to continue getting away with it if we do not disrupt their business model, as we have just continually said. There has to be that disincentive for them to continue engaging in the way they are. I know under the Online Safety Act they could be sued, effectively, for a year's profits, but for the massive platforms that is not necessarily going to be much of a concern, if it even gets to that point. I am loath to say banning, but there has to be more to be able to disrupt that.

Q98 Emily Darlington: Do you think algorithms are doing enough to disrupt some activity that we see, some harassment within the manosphere: the pile-ons, the doxing, and others? I tweeted on behalf of the victims of Andrew Tate in the UK calling for their extradition back into the UK to answer to the allegations that had been made by women I have met. He responded personally and then a huge pile-on happened, including—from what I could tell—many, many bots being used.

Do you think algorithms are doing enough to challenge that kind of behaviour where they see the activity suddenly landing on individuals? I am using my example because I do not want to bring up other ones, but I can tell you from some stories of the victims of the Tate brothers that this is activity that drove them off social media platforms. Jacob, do you maybe want to talk about the tech? Could they do that or not? Could they stop it?

Jacob Davey: Yes. In theory, platforms have a wealth of tools available to them. You can delimit content, you can ensure that it reaches fewer audiences and you can label content that is being flagged as potentially harmful, but it comes back to the point we constantly iterate, which is that it is not in the interest of these platforms' business models. In many ways, they are now functioning as outrage machines. They are set up to garner as much attention and eyes on screens as possible. We know that



highly emotive content is the most effective mechanism for keeping someone's eyes glued to the screen and keeping them engaging with it.

To answer your question, yes, there are a lot of mechanisms that can happen, but we are not seeing that now. This is consistently evidenced through, as you say, the digital pile-ons, the co-ordinated harassment campaigns and the co-ordinated trolling, which have become a persistent feature of manosphere activity online over the past decade.

Janaya Walker: I would like to make a slightly different point. I just wanted to pick up on what you referred to in your question around free speech. A really important aspect of this discussion is that when we talk about how to address online violence against women and girls, there is a tendency for those who are opposed to it to talk about that as an infringement on free speech. We are very clear that violence against women and girls is an infringement on women's human rights. If we are thinking about the articles in terms of right to expression, right to life and right to privacy, all these things are held up in the extent to which we take enough action to end violence against women and girls.

It is important we do not see it as a zero-sum game, as though, if we take action to prevent online violence against women and girls, that is anti-free speech, and vice versa. These things are really interconnected. There are so many parallels that are made between the online and the offline world. The inaction and our failure to address this at scale mean that women are already changing their behaviour and censoring themselves online in response to the real risk of violence, threats of violence or previous experiences of violence. It is really important to enter that into this discussion. Those two things are connected, rather than in opposition to one another.

Jacob Davey: When talking about freedom of speech, it is really important to underline the point that social media platforms are not free speech environments. They are curated speech environments. They are not a level playing field where anyone can go out and have an equal voice. The voices are being carefully tailored to nudge people towards content that keeps eyes on screens.

Dr Sugiura: It is those who are already privileged who are prioritised as well. We need to emphasise that.

Q99 **David Burton-Sampson:** Jacob, I just want to explore the area of online gaming. It is something that perhaps people would not generally think about in relation to this area, but can you give us an overview of how online gaming and gaming-adjacent social media platforms contribute to the spread of the manosphere?

Jacob Davey: Yes, certainly. More broadly, when we talk about these movements—the manosphere or other extremist movements—it is important to understand that they are multi-platform phenomena. They spread across a vast universe and ecosystem of social media platforms.



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Gaming itself forms an essential part both in the evolution of the manosphere and as an environment that continues to incubate toxic and misogynistic worldviews.

Over a decade ago, there was the Gamergate phenomenon. It was essentially a large-scale harassment campaign leveraged by gamers operating across a range of fringe platforms that have already been noted—4chan and Reddit, for example. They sought to go out and harass and attack high-profile women involved in games media and games production, whom they saw as essentially responsible for what they called the feminisation of gaming spaces or the injection of woke ideology into their gaming spaces.

This had a significant impact on the people who were on the receiving end of this harassment. It also formed a bit of a test case for some patterns of behaviour we see playing out in extremist movements now. The so-called alt-right in the US was incubated by Gamergate communities. It is there that they learned and honed their skills in silencing voices online through targeted harassment. Similarly, it formed a very visible, very tangible manifestation of manosphere ideology.

If we look at the history, gaming platforms have really helped shape the movement writ large. But there is a broader issue with gaming platforms, to do with the normalisation of social norms that are toxic. There is a wealth of research that points towards this. Research out of the University of California suggests that 85% of participants in their analysis encounter hate speech online, with misogyny being the most prevalent form of hate speech. Similar research has been conducted by Amarnath Amarasingam, which again pointed towards around 80% of gamers experiencing hate speech, with misogyny being virulent. The ADL in the US has done repeated surveys that point towards around half of women gamers experiencing harassment on a regular basis.

On the one hand, you have these cultures that have helped drive the manosphere and helped these communities test their tactics for online harassment. On the other hand, you just have a broader set of social norms that allow this misogyny to be maintained and to grow in a relatively unchecked fashion. I see nodding from across the panel, so I am not sure if other panellists want to jump in there.

Q100 David Burton-Sampson: On the point you just made about it being unchecked, is it fair to say that the level of controls around this sort of behaviour on gaming platforms is probably less than the limited level of controls we see on other platforms?

Jacob Davey: It is fair to say that gaming platforms and gaming companies have been largely absent from conversations around online safety, perhaps because when we started these conversations, the most visible form of activity was on your Twitters, Facebooks and YouTubes. Gaming platforms probably just kept their head down and hoped that



they were not going to have attention drawn to them. You see a similar lack of engagement on an ongoing basis around online safety.

This again comes back to the nature of the content in question, though. We know that gaming platforms invest very heavily to counter grooming of children by sexual predators, because young people are such a large market for them, but we have seen less evidence of them investing in similar moderation around hate speech. The challenge here is you are not dealing with one very large company like TikTok or Facebook, but a number of different distribution platforms. Again, the focus becomes somewhat dissipated.

Dr Sugiura: When it comes to video games, there is a consensus that the representations within that sphere are problematic. It is well-renowned for being sexist, misogynistic and discriminatory, hence female gamers often disguise the fact that they are women. For excellent work around gender and gaming, I would recommend Dr Frazer Heritage from Manchester Metropolitan University. He and I recently wrote a paper for *The Conversation* focusing more specifically on incels and gaming and the pipeline through there.

We need to be cautious, because engagement with video games—like any other media—does not always mean that someone is automatically going to be radicalised into misogynistic ideologies. Certainly, though, in the research that I did with incels, they mentioned that spending those long periods in these isolated spaces where these ideas are percolating, where the really negative comments about women and female relatives are just commonplace, led them to identify with being an incel when they were then exposed to the particular incel content; it ticked a checkbox for them. The problematic representations that are so easily available and accessible within video games can create that baseline from which those more extreme manosphere ideologies can resonate. It could become an entry point.

Q101 **David Burton-Sampson:** If I can come to you now, Janaya: looking at pornography, what impact does access to violent and extreme pornography have on attitudes towards women and girls?

Janaya Walker: It is a really important question; it would be quite remiss to talk about the manosphere and the online world without addressing the role of pornography. Obviously, we know that pornography is not only one thing, but we know that violent forms of it are incredibly prevalent. Historically, there have been lots of debates about the extent to which you can prove cause and effect between engaging with pornography and violent acts. We have evolved since then, and lots of the academics in this area, such as Fiona Vera-Gray and Professor Clare McGlynn, tend to talk about the extent to which violent pornography creates some social scripts for young people and society more broadly. They see pornography as one part of the cultural wallpaper of society.



The research done, I think, by Clare McGlynn and Fiona Vera-Gray found that, looking at landing pages of the three largest porn websites in the UK, one in eight titles described sexually violent acts. This is really important to factor in because there is a real contradiction there, particularly when we are talking about content moderation and what is on and what is off, or what is happening in schools and whether sexual violence is taken seriously, for example. If we are addressing the harm only after it has occurred, but young people are regularly engaging with material that depicts women being dominated by men and routinely deliberately humiliated by men and seen as not only objectified, but subjugated, that is going to have an impact on people's worldviews across age groups.

This is something we would really welcome the Women and Equalities Committee exploring further because it is such a huge field. There is also a connection here with the proliferation of non-consensual intimate image abuse and the extent to which that features on pornography websites. In our view, the Online Safety Act was not set up to regulate pornography; that was not one of its principal roots. A lot of the discussion was around children's access to pornography, which is really important, but there is a case to be made, even outside categories of extreme pornography, around what the roles of search engines are, for example. As academics have spoken about to previous Committees, the fact that you can access these extreme forms of pornography and violent pornography via your mainstream search engine is a problem. That is going to have to be considered much more intently than it has been to date.

Dr Regehr: I just wanted to note how consumption of pornography also feeds into other offline behaviours and other types of digital behaviours for young people. My work with Jessica Ringrose, which looked at 500 young people, found that the rates of digital flashing—that is the unsolicited sending of sexual images, particularly to girls—were incredibly high: 75% of the girls in our focus groups had experienced it by the age of 15. That research informed the new cyberflashing legislation, so it is now illegal for an adult to send a picture of their genitals to a child. But these laws, of course, are focused on the individual perpetrator, rather than on the platform that allowed the harm to circulate.

As my colleague Amir Malik, who now advises the UN on AI strategy, rightly pointed out to me, criminalising the individuals is one thing; criminalising the platform that allowed the image to circulate is another. That is to say, there is still no threat to these businesses' bottom lines, or threat of legal repercussions for the tech companies that facilitate the image being sent to a minor. That is just one example, but it highlights how we need a much more holistic approach. Rather than putting out individual fires, we should be going to the source, the fuel that ignites them. To do that we need a three-pronged approach of regulation, moderation and education.

Q102 **Chair:** On that point, on which social media platforms would you suggest



this is most prolific?

Dr Regehr: Image-based abuse?

Chair: Yes.

Dr Regehr: That particular study with Jessica Ringrose was mostly on Snapchat. It is an incredibly culpable platform in that way. There are also a lot of problems with Instagram, which is also a space where we see porn push happening for young men. Young men are not necessarily actively seeking pornography, but they are being pushed it through private messengers on Instagram.

Chair: Okay, so Instagram and Snapchat.

Rachel Taylor: Thank you for bearing with us through what seems like a long process, particularly when we can hear people having fun outside. It is always more difficult.

Chair: It is more fun in here.

Q103 **Rachel Taylor:** I wanted to move on to looking at education. To Kaitlyn first, if I may: what education do you think should be included in the national curriculum to help prevent the influence of the manosphere on young men and boys?

Dr Regehr: Let me first talk a little about moderation because I know that is a big debate at the moment. A lot of attention has been focused on the regulation of devices—that is, smartphones. We do all need to be moderating or banning some forms of usage—we all do—but equally, this is not necessarily a device-specific issue. It spans phones, tablets and internet-connected screens.

Further, from a platform perspective, other countries that have banned social media, such as Australia, have not included YouTube, which shares much of the same content as other social media platforms, in this ban. In this country, Ofcom figures from 2024 suggest that 80% of kids from the age of three to 17 utilise YouTube. If we are going to look at moderation, we need to be looking much more holistically across devices and platforms and much more broadly in the way we draw these boundaries about what counts as social media engagement.

As for education, my team and I advocate for investment in critical algorithmic literacy to be implemented across the curriculum, ensuring that interventions are up to date with technological advancements, and allowing students to be co-creators of their safe practice. We have a set of resources that will be distributed nationally with the Association of School and College Leaders next week.

It is also essential to include boys in these discussions. It is really hard to tell boys all the things they cannot be without giving them options about what they can. A peer-to-peer learning approach has been exemplified by



Education Scotland's Mentors in Violence Prevention—an excellent model that has been rolled out in half the schools in Scotland. My colleague Nicola Shaughnessy and I have worked with this group to develop its materials about online misogyny. It is amazing. Older boys mentor younger boys about digital misogyny, champion youth voice and promote positive role modelling. This is an educative rather than a punitive response to boys' behaviour, and they love it. They have hoodies that say, "I'm a mentor." It has completely changed the ecosystems of this school. I talked to one school leader of a comp in Liverpool who had used those resources from Scotland, and he said it is the best thing he has ever done in his school.

Q104 **Rachel Taylor:** Interesting. Could I ask you, Janaya, how we can reach men who are no longer in education, particularly young men?

Janaya Walker: Yes, that is an important question. This is something to add to the conversation that we have been having today, which is that there is a necessary focus on young people's attitudes. There is emerging research on the questions around the extent to which young people's views are becoming more aggressive and more troubling. Even in EVAW's own polling between 2018 and 2025, we are finding that there has almost been a flip-over. In some research we did before around sexual attitudes, it was the older age groups that tended to espouse more rape myths and stereotypes. In the research that was carried out by the Crown Prosecution Service and Equally Ours, they found that it was the younger cohort—those aged 18 to 24—who held some of the most troubling views around rape myths and stereotypes.

While saying all that, it is really important to bring into the picture that this is not only a problem for young people; this is across society. It cannot be that only young people are agents of social change, particularly if within the media, within institutions—including the police and the military and all these things—there are all these revelations about the extent to which this is a problem across older age cohorts.

In terms of what we can do there, we are big advocates for more investment in public health campaigns, including behaviour change campaigns. This was something that was initiated to some extent under the last Government with things like the Home Office's Enough campaign, or the Mayor of London's Have a Word campaign. We know that there were some evaluations done with some really valuable findings, but this is something that we would like to see on a multi-year, sustained basis in which there is real long-term investment. As everyone here will know, this change in social attitudes and behaviours is not something that happens often in six months or a year, particularly when we are up against such countervailing forces of the online world and the manosphere. I am really giving a nod to the public behaviour campaigns there.

Again, going back to the conversation we have just had around pornography and access to pornography, Baroness Bertin carried out a



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pornography review, which has a set of 32 recommendations that this Government are able to take forward, if so willing. That is another really important route.

When we are thinking about the halving violence against women and girls strategy, we really want to see that shift so that it is something that is held by every government department. Not long after the election, EVAW published something called an accountability mechanism, which was really looking at how we can ensure that every Government Department is responsible and is held accountable for the measures that it is taking. What is the MHCLG doing? What is happening in the DWP? How might that be contributing to a conducive context for VAWG? It is trying to look at it at a systems level, but also across all age cohorts.

Q105 **Rachel Taylor:** Jacob, do you have anything to add in terms of how you think we can be reaching men and educating them?

Jacob Davey: Maybe one more thing to add to this is actually thinking about part of this as broader strategies around protecting men and boys' health as well. Movember recently put out some research that pointed towards the fact that men who engaged with masculine influencer content online actually had poorer mental health outcomes. This is really important for us to consider: actually engaging in this material, engaging with the very specific branding of masculinity that is promoted by these influencers has a degrading and negative impact on wellbeing.

There are broader strategies, and there is currently a consultation ongoing around men and boys' health. When we are looking at the strategies in place around safeguarding men's mental health, we should be considering the negative impact that this particular brand of toxic masculinity is having and finding ways that those strategies are conversant around it.

Rachel Taylor: You have already touched on your peer-to-peer mentoring programme, so I will move on in the interest of moving things forward.

Dr Regehr: I cannot recommend it enough.

Q106 **Rachel Taylor:** This question is to Lisa. At what point do you think you would consider that someone has been radicalised by manosphere content, and how can they be de-radicalised?

Dr Sugiura: Okay, that is a really difficult question. As I said, it is not just a simple process of watching content and automatically believing in it. There are obviously other individual and external factors that might make people more susceptible to that. Then they start engaging with it and posting their own maybe hateful things, how they view women and how they speak to the women in their lives. There are obviously maybe red flags, but it is difficult because it is probably an individual process. I would hate to just say that there is a one-size-fits-all approach to this because it is really difficult.



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Q107 **Rachel Taylor:** It is to help us, so that we can ask what red flags are there along that route, and how we can turn somebody back.

Dr Sugiura: Clearly, expressing some of this hateful content is an obvious red flag. Some arguments that come up in my research are, "It's cathartic," or, "Oh, this is just fantasy. I don't necessarily believe it." But of course, it is still normalising and validating that. The message it sends to would-be perpetrators is that this is okay for you to do. It is really difficult. If somebody is contributing to it, they are part of it, even if they themselves might challenge that. Sorry that I can't be more specific there.

Q108 **Rachel Taylor:** It is fine. It is a difficult question. Do you think there is anything that people can do to de-radicalise people when they have reached that stage?

Dr Sugiura: Yes. We are talking about misogyny here. We are talking about negative attitudes towards gender equality, which is a driver of violence against women and girls. We could look to domestic abuse intervention schemes as well. I realise that that might seem off-putting, and people will say those things are for perpetrators, but it is about deprogramming. It is about giving them that alternative narrative that, "Oh, actually women are human beings too, and they're worthy of your respect." We can look at those, and I know there have been many of these programmes that have been successful. I do not know whether we call them by the same label and risk that defensiveness, which is obviously so pertinent in these spaces, but we can certainly look to some best practice that has been demonstrated.

Q109 **Chair:** In an education setting, some issues that we have talked about on NCII, and we have seen that with some serious incidents that have taken place by young men and boys, are that it would not have been flagged as a serious enough incident—nor would any of the behaviour beforehand—in the same way it would have been if it was other radicalised content. Is there an argument that Prevent, or a different form of Prevent, needs to start looking at this? Jacob, at the beginning of this you talked about how there was a correlation between the misogynistic content of the manosphere and radical far-right or even extremist content. Is there a need for that?

Jacob Davey: Absolutely. My understanding is that it is recognised up to a certain degree. This goes back to the point I made around extremist misogyny itself being recognised as an extremist ideology. This is not relevant to all of the manosphere, but certainly to some of the most egregious components of it, particularly those where we see the highest risk for violence. I would absolutely say that there is space within the Prevent infrastructure and within the channel programme to identify warning signs and to ensure that that knowledge is transferred effectively to frontline practitioners who have a duty of care under Prevent, and to invest more broadly in intervention providers and intervention practitioners who can do that valuable de-radicalisation work.



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That is just the very sharp edge of the tip though. It needs to be part of a much broader strategy that includes the preventative measures we have heard so much about, such as public health approaches to countering violence against women and girls. This is where I see a need for a more joined-up strategy, one that recognises the role of counter-terror architecture, the role of broader strategies to counter violence against women and girls, and the role of education. That connectivity is much needed.

Chair: I am going to go to Catherine and then Alex. I am conscious of the fact that there may be votes soon, so I just wanted to make sure that we get through these last two sections before the votes.

Q110 **Catherine Fookes:** Janaya, in several of the answers we have touched on the Online Safety Act. Just to be clear, do you think that the Online Safety Act adequately addresses misogynistic content online?

Janaya Walker: The short answer is no—absolutely not. We raised these concerns during the passage of the Online Safety Act about the way in which the Bill was drafted. In its initial drafts, violence against women and girls was not even mentioned by name. As this discussion has raised, there are concerns about the ways in which it has been geared towards a really individualised approach, which does not consider violence against women and girls in the round and does not go far enough to address the business model that promotes this content.

I would like to just reiterate the earlier point about the fact that we have VAWG guidance that is statutory guidance and is voluntary, despite the fact that there is widespread recognition that we cannot rely on simply the good will or self-regulation of some platforms, particularly because we know how much of a source of profit violence against women and girls is.

I am conscious that it is a huge topic, but I would like to add to what Jacob said. This is something that the coalition has been considering, and I would say that we are much more cautious about the transference of counter-terrorism practices and Prevent to this area, particularly when we are thinking about it as an issue that often shows up in schools and with young people. Our evidence is saying we should look at this as a human rights issue, a safeguarding issue and a welfare issue.

From what we know about the Prevent programme, there are huge challenges with it and a lot of question marks remain. Even if there are warning signs that are identified, the question remains what support, provision or intervention is then provided for young people. It is not necessarily the case that applying the Prevent programme to a case in which a young person is displaying harmful sexual behaviour or is talking about young girls and women in class in a problematic way, leads us to a solution where we address it.



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Again, we are in agreement that the question there is about the resource, investment and evidence around what works to stop that behaviour escalating, rather than about the extent to which we put in other practices and surveillance within schools.

- Q111 **Chair:** That was why I said Prevent-type programme because we can all agree that there are massive failures and flaws within the Prevent system. But at the moment, when police have spoken about really horrific crimes, the behaviour was flagged but was not enough, because it was misogynistic rather than a proscribed organisation. It did not go any further because it did not meet the threshold of Prevent.

Janaya Walker: I wonder to what extent it is around not just, thresholds but resources? Even had it met a threshold for Prevent, what package of interventions would be available for a young person?

Chair: I completely agree, but the evidence they gave us was that it did not meet a threshold.

- Q112 **Emily Darlington:** It makes me think a lot about what we are doing with some programmes around anti-gang, anti-knife violence and stopping reoffending. We have this big brother situation in prisons; we have programmes that have seemed successful. From what you know about those programmes, do you think an approach like that, which focuses on men and boys having a healthier attitude, could be extended into dealing with some of these attitudes?

Janaya Walker: I do not know if I know enough about those programmes to comment, but from what you have described, there is a parallel in terms of thinking about what is most effective for the young men and boys and their lives. What context are they situated in? Who are their role models? What sort of behaviour are they engaging with? Who would be most influential in terms of changing their behaviour? We should look at their motivations for getting involved and think about gang activity, criminal exploitation and the incentive of money. There is lots of learning across different forms of abuse and exploitation, but often the challenge returns to resources in terms of how much investment there has been in early intervention and in work towards behaviour change.

- Q113 **Catherine Fookes:** Kaitlyn, I agreed with your comments on regulation, moderation and education. I thought that was really powerful, but I have just been sitting here thinking, "How are we going to get any social media company to moderate?". Would you say it would be a good idea for us to recommend that we need to try to persuade one social media company to be the first one to take this seriously, do the work and start moderating content and that will then lead others to do so—and, if not, we are just never going to do it?

Jacob Davey: Can I just jump in very briefly? Ofcom has draft guidance at the moment that is open for consultation, which we have heard about. There are challenges there in that it is currently voluntary, but we have to see the extent to which that has an impact in and of itself. My



suspicions are that the impact will not be huge. So, at that point the question needs to be whether the guidance that has been issued becomes the first iteration of a future statutory code of practice around violence against women and girls. That would be an appropriate sequencing.

I can share our consultation response with the Committee because I know we are pressed for time. I would again bring this back to the conversation and the refrain we have had from across the panel: that this really needs to come down to strengthening the recognition of systemic platform design and algorithmic harms. We need to lean into some measures under the OSA to put that pressure on platforms. I would also say that there is more that Ofcom can be doing with the tools it has to be holding these platforms to account.

Q114 Alex Brewer: My first question is to Janaya: do the Government need to introduce an offence classifying misogyny or extreme misogynistic speech as a hate crime?

Janaya Walker: That is a really interesting question. I think it is something that has been debated over the years. EVAW is a coalition, so within our 160 members there are different views on this. EVAW's tendency is not to steer towards that as a first approach. The reason is that, when we talk about violence against women and girls, we situate this within a broader context of inequality: gender inequality and structural inequality, with violence against women and girls as a cause and a consequence of gender inequality. There can be a risk sometimes, in talking about only misogyny and hate crime, of individualising what is also a structural issue. Given what everyone has said today and given the Government's ambition of halving violence against women and girls, we are less sure about whether that takes us where we want to go in terms of prevention.

There is a question to be asked about having it as an aggregated factor and what that might mean about reporting, but that potentially steers us towards the criminal justice system and some solutions that we have been exploring, with much more frequency than the prevention we want to see front and centre.

Jacob Davey: I would like to come in very briefly on that. I completely agree with what you say in terms of prioritisation of approaches, and actually the broader question here is preventing this mainstreaming of misogyny. But there is potentially a gap in current hate crime legislation as it stands, in terms of looking at the way these movements have evolved. In certain cohorts of the manosphere there is now a clear ideology that advocates for violence and crime against women, which is at its core misogynistic rather than anything else.

To me, that motivation of hostility, which looks similar to the aggravating factors that we have around race, or disability, or transgender identity around hate crime, means there is scope for a discussion around whether that is a gap. I completely agree that the criminal justice approach



cannot be the only solution that is proffered to this issue, but just a solution to a small number of cases perhaps.

Q115 **Alex Brewer:** That leads me very nicely to the final question. Briefly, what other policies or legislation do you think need to be enacted by the Government in order to address the harm of the manosphere? If you could pick one thing, what would it be?

Janaya Walker: I will go first. We are working with some great partners at the moment—the Make it Mandatory Campaign, the Sex Education Forum and Brook—looking at where some gaps are in relationships and sex education. I spoke earlier about the fact that there has been some great work and lots of work in Parliament to ensure mandatory RSHE across England and Wales, but there is a real gap in that it is not extended to 16 to 18-year-olds, particularly those in further education. There is lots of evidence that this cohort of young people is really open and willing to engage in these conversations. That is quite a simple thing that we could put forward. We have the Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill before us, so I have to recommend that.

Jacob Davey: Beyond my point I have just made around hate crime, I would go back to my point about strategies around men and boys’ health, particularly mental health, and making sure that they are conversant and communicative with the impact this toxic masculinity can have on the outcomes for men and boys.

Dr Regehr: I will go back to my refrain of moderation, education and regulation. We need a three-pronged approach to these issues. From a regulation standpoint, I will draw from colleagues at the Molly Rose Foundation, who suggest that a new or revised Act should reassert an overarching duty of care that places the primary onus on tech firms to identify and respond to all harms.

Dr Sugiura: Because the influence of the manosphere revolves around dominating women and coercive control, and there is obviously the reach towards young people, domestic abuse should be recognised for people under 16.

Chair: Thank you very much. Thank you to the Committee and to Emily Darlington for guesting for our Committee. If there is anything that you think you have not been able to explore as much as you would want to, or you think that when you leave here, we did not touch on an issue that we should have, please write to us and we will include that as evidence. That brings this session to a close.