Guidance for schools and colleges:
How to address the impact of misogynistic online influencers

Content warning: This guidance includes content which might be upsetting to some staff members.

Sexism is commonplace in schools, and affects both students and staff.[1] At present, misogynistic online influencers are having a significant impact in schools in the UK and around the world. Misogyny is "feelings of hating women, or the belief that men are much better than women".[2]

Misogynistic online influencers target and influence mostly young men and boys, although some young women and girls are also drawn to them. The Women and Equalities Committee's report on attitudes towards young girls in educational settings notes that "school teachers have voiced concerns about the toxic influence of social media and some of the purported 'influencers' who use it to broadcast misogyny to boys and young men."[3]

The rhetoric of these influencers usually centres around male domination of intimate relationships, work and fighting, but can also include homophobic, ableist and racist content. They often attract young people's attention with posts about dating, high performance cars, sports, glamorous holidays, and a luxury lifestyle, but behind those messages educators are increasingly seeing misogyny and violence against women being promoted as normal and acceptable.[4]

Online influencers use a range of social media platforms including X (formerly Twitter), YouTube, TikTok and Gettr. Influencers you could come across include:[5]

- Andrew Tate is a self-proclaimed misogynist with a high profile in the online realm. He promotes fitness and money-making advice along with personal development and advice on women and dating. Despite being banned from many social media platforms, his videos are still available across social media. He has been charged with rape, human trafficking and forming an organised crime group to sexually exploit women.[6]

- Jordan Peterson describes himself as an author, psychologist and online educator.[7] He is a commentator on a wide range of topics including women's rights and gender and has had his books published and sold in major book shops. Some of his beliefs include that "the masculine spirit is under assault," and that order is masculine, chaos is feminine. He has said that "a society run as a patriarchy makes sense" and "the notion of white privilege is a farce".[8]

- Robertas Ziogelis describes himself as "toxic" and uploads videos and jokes about his views on relationships, dating and 'rough sex'. He has spoken about wanting to put his hand around women's throats and dominating women.[9]

- Connor Prankerd posts advice videos saying things like "red flags are turn-ons for women" and "Women want to be with a superior, and leadership falls within that. Men lead, women follow."[10]

Be aware that the most extreme types of misogynistic online influencers are 'incels'[11] and exist alongside the more 'mainstream' voices. Incel content often contains encouragement of self-hatred, suicide and self-harm, and representations of extremely graphic and sexually abusive acts against women. At its most extreme, incel culture is known to have influenced several mass killings in the USA and at least one in the UK.[12]

Four steps to address misogynistic online influencers

1. Take a whole school approach

Misogynistic online influencers and their impact on schools are part of a much bigger problem of sexism in schools, and both are symptomatic of gender inequality in society. Therefore, creating long term change for equality requires a whole school or college approach. Ofsted now requires schools to "ensure that their school's culture addresses harmful sexual behaviour... and put in place a whole-school approach to address them".[13] Addressing misogyny from online influencers needs to be integrated into a whole school approach so that students receive a clear co-ordinated message that harmful attitudes and behaviours are not acceptable.

Responding to the impact of misogynistic online influencers through behaviour policies:

- A whole school approach should include looking at school policies, including Safeguarding, Behaviour, Staff Protection at Work and School Values, to ensure that they reflect the message that sexism and sexual harassment in schools is unacceptable.

- Sexist comments and behaviour should be managed and logged in the same way racist and homophobic incidents are recorded.

- All approaches to managing behaviour on this matter should be embedded in the school's values, in wider existing policies and in Citizenship and RSE teaching.

- Schools have taken different approaches to managing the impact of misogynistic online influencers. Some schools have tried to ban Andrew Tate and other online influencers from school life. These have included not being permitted to watch influencers' videos or view their social media anywhere in school, or to quote influencers or use their hand signals. This approach is backed up with a range of consequences including detentions and confiscating phones.

- However, this approach has the disadvantage of shutting down the conversation with students and not addressing their interaction with misogynistic online influencers outside of school. It also creates a sense of Tate and others as being exciting and taboo, and plays into the hands of online influencers who describe themselves as people outside the law, or the underdog.[14]

- Key to any behaviour management approach taken by a school should be staff being trained and feeling confident to address the issue with agreed responses, as part of a wider, consistent whole school approach to tackling sexism.

- Teachers should work closely with the school's safeguarding lead to log any support for misogynistic online influencers that is a concern. These logs should be used to look for patterns of behaviour.

- Be aware that the most extreme types of misogynistic online influencers, incels, exist alongside the more 'mainstream' voices. Incel online culture includes the promotion of violent and sexually harmful acts against women and girls and some parts of it promote self-harm and suicide to young men. Exposure to such content is a significant concern from a safeguarding perspective. Some schools address engagement in incel culture by linking it to the PREVENT scheme.

2. Create a safe learning space

These online influencers often use sexist language. Some have also been reported to promote heterosexuality as the only acceptable sexual orientation, believe physical strength and the ability to fight are key to masculinity and make derogatory references to people on lower incomes.

It's important to acknowledge that being exposed to such content can impact upon students and staff, in particular women, girls and people from other marginalised groups.

Creating a safe space to educate and discuss difficult topics with young people needs to be carefully balanced with the needs of those who don't feel safe when such language and ideas are used.

Andrew Tate and other influencers have also spoken out against formal education, dismissing it as of no use, and several do not respect female leaders. Therefore, schools should balance the need to support female teachers to feel safe, without inadvertently undermining their authority infront of students.

You should raise the topic of misogynistic online influencers in a variety of lesson types and assemblies rather than letting it all fall to the responsibility of PSHE educators. This could take the form of discussions on wellbeing during registration, looking at healthy relationships in English or Drama, encouraging respect for women in PE, discussing critical thinking in Media Studies or Citizenship, or an online fact-finding task in Computer Science - this all helps to add to the conversation.

Before you raise this issue in a lesson, create a 'safe space agreement' with your students. This will help to give students the space and confidence to say what they think, be aware that this may mean that they use language that you may not be comfortable with. Be clear with students that any harmful language used in the 'safe space' must not be used in other areas of the school.

Things to consider when deciding whether to mention Andrew Tate by name:

- Some advise schools not to mention Andrew Tate by name as it risks promoting him or making young people that wouldn't have come across him otherwise aware of him - and that for all social media influencers, more searches and clicks mean more success.

- Other practitioners feel that his fame is already so extensive, with millions of X followers and billions of video views on Tiktok,[15] that young people are already well aware of him, and mentioning him in school doesn't change that. They have concluded that not mentioning Tate by name adds to his mystery and image of being an outlaw.

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3. Train and equip educators

A lot of education professionals avoid talking about Tate and other online influencers because they don't feel that they are well enough informed. In reality, it is impossible to know everything about these influencers as the online landscape is constantly changing and there are so many online influencers.

Educators do not need to know everything about a subject to encourage critical thinking, explore values and healthy relationships amongst their students. Young people may tell you what they are seeing and hearing about online influencers, and that's a great place to start a conversation.

Accessing [training from UK Feminista](#) will help your school take action to address sexism and sexual harassment in a consistent and effective way. Avoid a model where only one person in a school is trained, or where the responsibility falls to a less experienced colleague. Tackling sexism and sexual harassment could form part of your teacher training day, teacher CPD hours or a whole staff twilight session. Training is also an opportunity to discuss the importance of tackling these issues at school with colleagues who may otherwise be sceptical.

Tips for difficult questions:

- As much as possible, try not to avoid difficult questions but instead, use them as teachable moments, for example "what makes you like that perspective?", "how might that perspective be harmful to others?" and "how would you respond if you were advising a younger student?" etc. Keep a record of difficult or challenging questions and use team meetings, line management meetings and staff training to discuss potential responses.

- If a student makes comments suggesting that "the women are lying about Tate's alleged crimes", you could try saying "the Romanian police wouldn't press charges if they didn't have what they felt was good enough evidence. There are a lot of women who have accused him of crimes during several different incidents, how likely is it that they are all lying? In the UK, 5 in 6 women who are raped don't report – and the same is true for 4 in 5 men. Of the rapes that are reported (for example 67,169 rapes were recorded by police in 2022)[16] only about 3 per cent are false accusations".[17]

- Students may say that Tate is "good on mental health as he says men should cry". You could try saying "he also says men have to always be strong, can never be disabled, unfit or broke and are only successful men if they are super rich and date models. Are those expectations really good for men's mental health?"

- Students might mention that they respect Tate because they have heard that he undertakes charity work. You could ask the student "does giving to charity excuse a person's harmful behaviours in other areas? What possible motivations might a person have to donate to charity other than wanting to support the cause e.g. to generate a positive public image?"

- You might come across students saying that "he's a skilled business man who didn't get education qualifications, so I don't need education either". You could say something like "he has made money from building up his social media following, but if you want to be successful in business, it is essential to know how a business works and to be able to understand your accounts. That is why education is important. If you're interested in business then why don't you write a proposal for a project and we can help you work on it."

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4. Engage parents and carers

- Communicating with parents and carers is essential to a whole school approach.

- Encourage parents and carers to avoid punishment as a first reaction to young people watching or following these online influencers. The way online algorithms work, young people may have been seeking out innocuous content such as videos about cars or body building, and algorithms may have taken them to misogynistic or other discriminatory content. Moreover, the way online influencers are presented to young people often gives them a feeling of legitimacy.

- Young people may be curious and want to have a conversation. Encourage parents and carers to talk regularly with their children and open up the conversation. They can ask their children what they like about these online influencers and what they take from what they say. This gives parents the opportunity to find out if their children have come across any concerning content about women or masculinity.

- Encourage parents and carers to consider where they can bring up other aspects of the issue. For example, healthy relationships, alternative models of success or role models demonstrating positive masculinity.

- Talk to parents and carers about what the school is doing on this issue, for example: staff training, improving school policy, introducing an assembly programme and ensuring the presence of positive male role models and alternative images of success etc.

- If parents are sympathetic to misogynistic online influencers you can use the following techniques:

  - Explain why the online influencers are in contradiction to school values (such as anti-discrimination, empathy, a safe place to learn) and teaching (like RSE and citizenship).

  - Remember, the concern is not owned by individual teachers but is related to the school's values, supported by policies.

  - Concerns about Tate and others are well evidenced. Tate is accused of a number of serious criminal offences.[18] He has been banned from TikTok, Facebook and YouTube, and was previously removed from the Big Brother TV show.[19]

  - Be clear about the importance of school being a safe place to learn and work for all, and how some of the language and beliefs do not support that.

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5 Please note that the information provided here is the best available to our knowledge in August 2023. Several influencers have changed their online handles and many videos and quotes have been deleted, so we expect the available content to change continually over time. In addition, there are always new influencers appearing online.

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11 The term incel was created by those who consider themselves to be involuntarily celibate. Some of these men turn to hatred towards women and feminism.

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13 Ofsted, School inspection handbook for September 2023. Accessed at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-inspection-handbook-eif/school-inspection-handbook-for-september-2023#introduction.
Similarly Estyn recommends that schools "adopt a whole-school preventative and proactive approach" (Estyn, "We don't tell our teachers" Experiences of peer-on-peer sexual harassment among secondary school pupils in Wales, December 2021. Accessed at: https://www.estyn.gov.wales/system/files/2021-12/Experiences%20of%20peer-on-peer%20sexual%20harassment%20among%20secondary%20school%20pupils%20in%20Wales_0.pdf)
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14 This can be seen in Tate's numerous references to the 'Matrix'. On the 31 July 2023 he stated on X (previously Twitter): "A record number of European laws have been broken in the prosecutors attempt to jail me. I guess they thought if they broke a bunch of laws and threw me in jail on garbage, something real would appear. It didn't. Because nobody has anything bad to say about me. Uh oh." [sic]

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