

How should Government better protect boys from exposure to this kind of material?

Enforcing social media companies to moderate their content, in ensuring its safety and appropriateness should feature as an important part of the Government's regulatory framework. However, the harm caused by much of the misogynistic & toxic content, referred to in your question above, can primarily be seen to be a product of powerful, unregulated, & opaque algorithms that constantly amplify polarising and controversial content towards young men. This, combined with addictive design features that pull young men into spending hours endlessly scrolling this content, results in harm through this toxic content being amplified to young men for hours every day.

Hence, protection for young men in this instance would be best achieved by :

- **GREATER TRANSPARENCY** surrounding the algorithmic products, user experience data and current moderation processes. There is a need for social media companies to be more transparent around their algorithms (with researchers and/or independent regulators). This could look like regular transparency reports on content served to the algorithms of Australian users and/or confidential real-time API algorithmic access for public health researchers.
- **GREATER CONTROL OVER IN APP EXPERIENCES.** requiring social media companies to provide easily accessible features for young men to better control and customise their social media feed. Research has clearly shown that when users have more control over their online environments they have better mental health and wellbeing.
- **SAFETY BY DESIGN PRINCIPLES.** Mandating safety by design features such as limiting infinite scrolling - this prioritises user safety over maximising user engagement.
- **ALGORITHMIC LITERACY.** Upskilling young men's understanding of both algorithmic designs, social media content curation, masculinity and the harms of misogyny and sexual/physical violence is also important to empower their discernment (and eventual push back) against this kind of content.
- Create (non-financial) rewards/incentives for platforms that act for social good e.g. recognise platforms that can show they are positively benefitting young men's mental health/helping to build social cohesion.
- Require platforms to have strong Trust and Safety Teams in their governance structures with proof of meaningful decision-making authority.

What should social media companies do to encourage online empathy?

Social media companies (at the very least) should be responsible for understanding the ways in which the product they are profiting off incites indifference, insensitivity, and polarisation. Secondary to this, it is important they begin working towards mitigating these polarisations. One example of this is TikTok's automation of comments filtering – whereby comments that a user is more likely to agree/align with are automated to rise to the top in the video comments section. Complementary to this, a digital literacy and harm-minimisation industry funding model could look to implement digital literacy and wellbeing programs that help young men become healthy, empowered online citizens. These programs would help young people and their families with the skills needed to navigate online spaces, while bolstering their critical thinking, emotional regulation, and online empathy. Research has shown that education can significantly reduce the risks of social media, social media companies should be obligated to reduce these risks, given they profit off of them.

Given empathy requires users to see others' perspectives (and to know when the information being given is only one perspective), social media companies should invest in design solutions that prevent/tackle the echo chamber effect. This could be 'by design' e.g. ensuring recommendations systems and algorithms diversify content as well through user features e.g. allowing users to recognise funnels and enable/encouraging them to choose alternatives.

Continuing to tackle mis and disinformation is also important here.

Proactively partner with civil society and research experts to track and understand the health and well-being effects of their content on audiences.

Eating disorders and body image issues, while disproportionately affecting women and girls, have an impact on men and boys.

What should companies do to combat harmful body image content, and specifically for toxic and harmful body image content driving this issue amongst boys and young men?

Certain content on social media can be certainly be dramatically misleading, exacerbating young men's views of themselves. Companies should collaborate with Australian health organisations to establish evidence-based notes and content that is promoted and verified in-app to contract this harmful body image content. Exposure to accurate health information, that young men know is verified and backed by evidence, can significantly improve their health literacy, and therefore their health outcomes. Furthermore, partnering with diverse influencers (who represent diverse male body types) to promote content which depicts a range of healthy and realistic

physiques could have great benefit. While there has been a growing movement towards body positivity for young women, a similar shift is needed for young men to challenge narrow ideals of masculinity and physical appearance. Promoting body diversity online can help reshape the narrative around male body image and foster a more inclusive and positive self-perception for young men.

I'm interested in your thoughts on digital mental health interventions – particularly for men and boys.

- **Tell me what this would look like practically – do you think it's automated check-ins? Real time chats with professionals? Mandated mental health risk assessments for those displaying signs of distress?**

Digital mental health interventions have vast potential, with all the options you've listed there worth exploring further. However, the success of these interventions' hinges on the fact we effectively engage young men, meeting them in meaningful places and spaces online. If these interventions are not gender sensitised, or co-designed, co-developed and co-disseminated with young men, they run the risk of being out of touch from their needs and wants. Speaking practically, we know that anonymous, informal, and easily accessible support appeals to young men. Simplifying pathways to evidence-based support, that meets them where they're at (e.g., online or in-app) is key. Automated check-ins, messaging, and referrals based on usage data (such as time on app) may also help young men reach out to services by making this information readily available and accessible.