

**LGB Alliance response to  
DCMS Influencer Consultation  
Fri 7<sup>th</sup> May 2021**

DCMS Committee is inviting written submissions addressing the following areas:

1. *How would you define 'influencers' and 'influencer culture'? Is this a new phenomenon?*
2. *Has 'influencing' impacted popular culture? If so, how has society and/or culture changed because of this side of social media?*
3. *Is it right that influencers are predominantly associated with advertising and consumerism, and if not, what other roles do influencers play online?*
4. *How are tech companies encouraging or disrupting the activities of influencing?*
5. *How aware are users of the arrangements between influencers and advertisers? Should policymakers, tech companies and influencers and advertisers themselves do more to ensure these arrangements are transparent?*

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **LGB Alliance submission to the DCMS Committee inquiry on Influencer Culture**

<https://lgballiance.org.uk/>

This submission is made on behalf of LGB Alliance. We welcome the opportunity to respond to the Committee's inquiry into influencer culture and hope this submission is of interest. If you have any questions regarding our response, please contact [kate.harris@lgballiance.org.uk](mailto:kate.harris@lgballiance.org.uk)

LGB Alliance is a group that represents the interests of a rapidly growing number of lesbian, gay and bisexual people. We represent thousands of LGB people who have grave concerns about the loss of our rights, specifically in relation to moves to replace, in law and elsewhere, the category of 'sex' with 'gender identity', 'gender expression' or 'sex characteristics'.

We are long-time gay and lesbian activists who fought for the rights of people with a same-sex sexual orientation. These hard-won rights are now under serious threat.

#### **Why we are interested in this inquiry**

We have serious concerns about the role that influencers in the media, especially social media, are playing in promoting a culture based on certain beliefs. These beliefs, which are linked to queer theory, teach that everyone has a 'gender identity', separate from their biological sex, and that this 'gender identity' should take priority over biological sex in all areas of life, including health provisions, prisons, sport and – the area of primary concern to LGB Alliance – sexual orientation. These beliefs are being promoted to children and young people as if they were facts instead of beliefs. We believe this is causing grave harm.

#### **Is 'influencer culture' a new phenomenon?**

Certainly not. It has always been the case that certain groups in society congregate around certain newspapers, tv or radio channels etc. Indeed, it could be said that 'influencer culture' dates back to opinion writers such as Addison and Steele publishing their views (and promoting coffee houses) in

the *Spectator* in the early 18th century. However, the rise and growing dominance of social media have transformed this culture in three essential ways:

1. **Quantitatively.** The sheer number of media outlets means that people can choose from a vast repertoire of opinions. They can choose a single influencer, or group of influencers, with a particular point of view on YouTube, Tumblr, TikTok or Facebook, and ignore virtually all others.
2. **Accuracy.** Most influencers are not subject to fact checking. Conspiracy theories and unsubstantiated opinions spread like wildfire without any authoritative control mechanism to curb them.
3. **Youth.** Since young people who have grown up in the internet age tend to be more tech-savvy than older generations, they have taken control of social media. This has led to a troubling reversal, in which older generations are expected to defer to the young. Refusing to do so leads to abuse, threats, boycotts, and in some cases loss of work or livelihood.

**We will now list some of the changes in contemporary culture that are specifically relevant to LGB Alliance and that we believe can be attributed to a large extent to the spread of gender identity theory by hugely popular influencers: celebrities, once trusted human rights organisations that are now advocates for a specific world view, and young vloggers such as those on YouTube.**

- Many teens who are attracted to people of the same sex, especially those on the autism spectrum and/or with a range of other problems, are gravitating to influencers who persuade them that their distress is attributable to a single factor: gender. They develop gender dysphoria and are referred to youth gender identity services, where only their gender dysphoria is addressed and none of their other issues. Youth gender identity services have seen a huge increase in referrals, especially among girls, in the last 8-9 years. This is of special concern to LGB Alliance since research shows that most of these girls are lesbians.<sup>1</sup>
- No research has been conducted to explore the causes for this sudden and rapid growth in referrals. There is a complete absence of data. Theories are advanced, however, in film documentaries such as *Dysphoric* by Vaishnavi Sundar.
- Although gender identity theory is spread in multiple ways, including at schools, we hear constantly from detransitioners and others affected that influencers operating on social media platforms are playing a major role. A long catalogue of young YouTube influencers, some of whom have millions of followers, is described in the important book *Irreversible Damage* by Abigail Shrier.

The following paragraphs describe these developments in more detail. Our submission will focus on the emerging scandal of the medicalisation of confused children to illustrate the issues surrounding influencer culture.

### **Background**

- Gender dysphoria in children has long been a recognised condition. It has been treated at the Gender Identity Development Services (GIDS) within the Tavistock & Portman NHS Hospital Trust for over 30 years. Historically the number of children has been very small and the majority were male.
- There has been a huge increase in referrals in the last decade – from 77 in 2009/10 to 2,728 in 2019/20. The increase is even starker for girls – from 32 in 2009/10 to 1,981 in 2019/20; a

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/bjpsych-bulletin/article/sex-gender-and-gender-identity-a-reevaluation-of-the-evidence/76A3DC54F3BD91E8D631B93397698B1A>

more than 60-fold increase. In 2019/20 girls accounted for over 70% of referrals. No one can explain why this has happened. The subject has not been researched.

- The trend in care for these young people has been away from ‘watchful waiting’ towards adherence to the ‘affirmative model’. This model is presented by the influencers referred to above as the only humane approach. Any other approach is vilified and condemned throughout the ‘liberal’ media, especially in the US, as vile and ‘transphobic’.
- At this point we are obliged to say that leading organisations such as the US bodies WPATH and the Endocrine Society, often quoted as experts, are themselves biased ‘influencers’.<sup>2 3</sup> Their policies are rooted in ideological convictions. It is therefore all the more alarming that their views carry so much weight.
- The affirmative model is not a harm-free pathway
  - The affirmative model means that there is a lack of robust and meticulous psychological assessment.
  - Prior to puberty – in some cases from 9 or 10 years of age – children may be prescribed puberty blockers
  - From age 16, children and young people can be prescribed cross-sex hormones

The following article gives an overview of the state of current evidence relating to the use of puberty blockers and cross-sex hormones in children: [Current Evidence - Transgender Trend](#).

In summary, little is known about the long-term side effects or what effects hormone blockers have on the development of the teenage brain or children’s bones.

- Evidence shows that desistance rates are high if left untreated by medical means
- Puberty blockers and cross-sex hormones represent the start of a pathway of lifetime medicalisation, surgery, sterility and other health risks – clots, cancer, etc.
- We believe that the care of gender dysphoric children must be based on robust medical evidence. At the moment there is no evidence to support the use of the ‘affirmative model’ adopted by GIDS. Emerging evidence in fact suggests the opposite – that the approach used may be encouraging children towards irreversible medical interventions they may later regret.
- We welcome the recent letter from Hilary Cass to the NHS outlining her interim care plan for children and young people with gender dysphoria <https://cass.independent-review.uk/letter-to-nhs-england-may2021/>

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<sup>2</sup> The criteria for Board Member and Officer Positions of WPATH include the following: ‘Members affirm commitment to affirmative care and body autonomy’. ‘Affirmative care’ means accepting a (young) person’s self-diagnosis and proceeding on that basis. This represents a specific position, with which some professionals will disagree, especially in the case of minors. See

<https://www.wpath.org/media/cms/Documents/Elections/FINAL%20Criteria%20for%20Board%20Member%20and%20Officer%20Positions%20-%20WPATH%20BOD%202020%20Election.pdf? t=1593103571>.

<https://www.endocrine.org/news-and-advocacy/news-room/2021/endocrine-society-applauds-ama-resolution-supporting-access-to-gender-affirming-care>

<sup>3</sup> A recent statement from the Endocrine Society includes the following paragraph: ‘After transgender and gender diverse minors start puberty, prescribing hormone blockers to delay puberty is the recommended strategy if desired and if diagnostic and treatment criteria are met. Hormone blockers are commonly prescribed to delay puberty in children who experience early puberty. This treatment, which is reversible, gives adolescents more time to explore their options.’ Again, this represents a specific position, including contentious assertions. See <https://www.endocrine.org/news-and-advocacy/news-room/2021/endocrine-society-applauds-ama-resolution-supporting-access-to-gender-affirming-care>

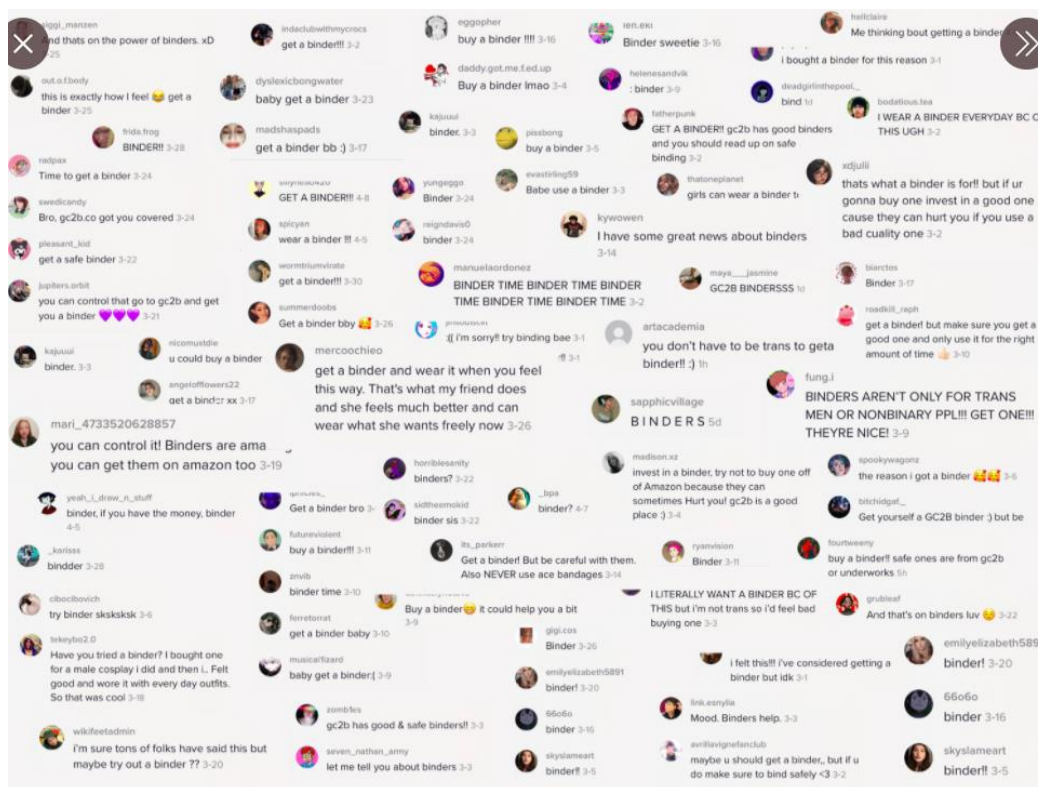
## The role of influencers

- Prominent campaign organisations and individual high-profile influencers use social media accounts with vast followings to promote the normalisation of gender identity treatment.
- They appear to be driving a cultural shift in which the extreme and harmful medicalisation of children (many of them likely to grow up lesbian and gay if not medicalised) has become accepted and immune to challenge – even immune to the need to provide scientific evidence.
- We often see influencers (including organisations and professional bodies) make statements or suggestions that are demonstrably false:
  - Puberty blockers are wrongly presented as a ‘pause button’
  - Puberty blockers are wrongly referred to as ‘fully reversible and harmless’
  - It is wrongly (and irresponsibly) claimed that teens with gender dysphoria are more likely to commit suicide if not treated with puberty blockers
  - The huge impact of drugs and surgery is trivialised; it is suggested that these are essential for a child with gender dysphoria to lead a fulfilled life
  - It is wrongly asserted that puberty blockers and surgery improve mental health

### **None of these assertions is supported by current medical evidence.**

- **Influencers: a few examples**
  - A celebrity with 1.1 million followers on Twitter recently claimed that puberty blockers had often been used for heavy periods and are not permanent.
  - Celebrities supporting and promoting the transgender organization Mermaids – *Munroe Bergdorf, Amanda Jette Knox, Olly Pike* [#DigiFest2020 - Mermaids \(mermaidsuk.org.uk\)](#)
  - Several young female-to-male YouTubers produce attractive videos that are extremely popular. For example, there is one with 22 million views and 165,000 subscribers, and another with 12 million views and 300,000 subscribers. They hold out the prospect of solving problems by ‘transitioning’ and joining a warm and welcoming community. Troubled teens grappling with a range of issues may fix on gender as the heart of their problem.
- Examples of gender ideology organisations promoting the use of influencers in their campaigns:
  - Mermaids – a transgender rights organisation campaigning for lowering the age where children may receive puberty suppressing and hormone treatment despite NICE guidelines and lack of evidence of medical benefit. This organisation encourages ‘influencers’ to champion their cause: [https://twitter.com/Mermaids\\_Gender/status/1284472994916642817?s=20](https://twitter.com/Mermaids_Gender/status/1284472994916642817?s=20)
  - GenderGP – an online overseas practice serving transgender people run by a suspended GP – promotes podcasts with influencers as part of their campaign strategy [Podcast | GenderGP Transgender Services](#)

Much activism takes place on other channels such as Tik Tok, Tumblr, Facebook and so on. Last April, a 17-year-old girl described being distressed about her female body and wishing she had a flat chest. These are the responses she received on Tik Tok:



- This is just one example of the normalisation of an ideology that is driving children towards making ill-informed decisions which will change their lives forever. The end result is a lifetime of medication, and will frequently include infertility, a lack of sexual feeling, and numerous medical risks.
- In our opinion, influencers have played a key role in normalisation of this extreme ideology, which is unsupported by any credible evidence. They have also promoted the dogma ‘any challenge is bigotry’. A great many children (disproportionately gender non-conforming children who have been shown statistically to be more likely to grow up lesbian/gay)<sup>4</sup> are being harmed as a result.
- Something is badly wrong with a media system in which influencers are able to disseminate harmful disinformation to impressionable and troubled youngsters and to create an atmosphere in which even professionals working in the field fear to challenge this narrative.

How do we know professionals fear to challenge it? Because they write and tell us.

[Tavistock trust whistleblower David Bell: ‘I believed I was doing the right thing’ | Transgender | The Guardian](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/apr/11/tavistock-trust-whistleblower-david-bell-i-believed-i-was-doing-the-right-thing)

- The whole subject of safeguarding of our children appears to have fallen by the wayside as an ‘old-fashioned’ or ‘conservative’ concern. We strongly reject this categorisation. Whenever we and others attempt to bring facts and evidence to the debate, celebrities and other influencers aggressively shoot them down.

<sup>4</sup> See <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/18981931/>; <https://www.genderhq.org/trans-children-gender-dysphoria-desistance-gay>

- We must urgently consider ways in which disinformation spread by influencers can be corrected in order to prevent another such scandal as the one currently emerging.
- LGB Alliance will be fundraising for a studio where we will seek to redress the damage done and to find new ways of encouraging children and young people to explore and embrace their diverse lives: using video, music and social media. No such resources exist at the moment. Any confused child looking online will be vulnerable to the powerful video messages of those who advocate changes based on gender identity.

## **RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS**

### *1 How would you define 'influencers' and 'influencer culture'? Is this a new phenomenon?*

We take quite a broad view of the definition of 'influencers'. The term is mainly associated with those who influence the consumption of products and services. It is also used in relation to media and popular culture. Our own submission focuses on the latter. However, we wish to say that beyond the UK, especially in the United States, drugs like puberty blockers and surgical operations such as mastectomies are regarded as consumer products and promoted in the same way. We will illustrate our point with a couple of examples. Indeed, the conflation of popular culture, health solutions, and consumer products is itself a troubling development that should be addressed elsewhere.

Example: A medical practitioner dancing around some vegetation with a musical background while advertising double mastectomies as 'Teetus deletus'

<https://images.app.goo.gl/BYCiQkZ1o7zw7jjCA>

Another ad for double mastectomy

<https://twitter.com/S0uthRiding/status/1227331481716056065?s=20>

The influencers we discuss in our submission have multiplied exponentially in recent years. Those discussed here follow and promote an ideology that takes society back to pre-Enlightenment days.

Science and evidence-based dialogue no longer carry weight. Freedom of speech is replaced by a series of mantras which must be learned by heart and repeated by believers. Biological facts established over millennia are dismissed as 'transphobic', frequently 'hateful' and sometimes 'not worthy of being heard in civilised society'. Such ideas are promoted by the small but powerful group of 'gender identity' or 'queer theory' influencers and repeated by celebrities.

### *2. Has 'influencing' impacted popular culture? If so, how has society and/or culture changed because of this side of social media?*

'Influencing' has a major impact on popular culture, especially with young people. Influencers gloss over the unresearched, ideological and potentially very harmful outcomes of gender identity theory.

First, campaigners teach that everyone has a 'gender identity' – a feeling – which is more important than biological sex. Those of us who insist we do not have a gender identity and find the idea sexist and regressive are dismissed or mocked.

Organisations once set up to campaign for people with same-sex sexual orientation now focus on 'gender identity' instead. Stonewall, for example, no longer refers to same-sex sexual orientation; it says same-*gender* attraction instead. Let's spell out what that means. It means that two males, both

with a penis, who identify as women, can refer to themselves as a 'lesbian' couple. It is hard to put into words how offensive that is for lesbians, who see our rights and even our own definitions for ourselves swept away. Young lesbians are pressured to say they would consider male-bodied people as potential sexual partners. Otherwise they are called 'transphobic'. Worst of all, this attitude is marketed as 'progressive'. We maintain it is the exact opposite of progressive.

In 2015 Stonewall recommended to the Women & Equalities Select Committee that there should be:

- A review of the Equality Act 2010 to include 'gender identity' rather than 'gender reassignment' as a protected characteristic and to remove exemptions, such as access to single-sex spaces

<https://www.stonewall.org.uk/women-and-equalities-select-committee-inquiry-transgender-equality>

What this means is that in Stonewall's ideal world, there would no longer be any places for lesbians or gay men (or indeed women) to be together without the opposite sex.

Another example is the careless promotion of the largely unknown effects of puberty blockers, cross sex hormones and surgery – which are all presented online as if they are nothing to worry about. Indeed – double mastectomies for girls wishing to 'live as boys' is euphemistically called 'top surgery'. At the most recent count, over 34,000 girls are fundraising on GoFundMe to finance the removal of their breasts.

*3. Is it right that influencers are predominantly associated with advertising and consumerism, and if not, what other roles do influencers fulfil online?*

As we have shown, there is a trend in popular culture, especially in the United States, to see those demanding specific solutions to their health problems as consumers rather than patients requiring unbiased expert assessment, diagnosis and treatment. There is a harmful conflation between commercial products, health solutions, and cultural kudos. Influencers are driving and/or exacerbating this trend. The influencers we are concerned about use harmful incorrect data (debunked suicide stats, reversibility of PBs, pause button, misrepresentation of the law regarding single-sex spaces (EqA 2010) to promote this ideology. Most frequently they refuse to engage in debate and block those who ask questions. Much of their output uses emotional blackmail techniques which serve to shut down any critical engagement. ('Don't discuss this or I will feel unsafe? Is this a "safe space"?')

*4. How are tech companies encouraging or disrupting the activities of influencing?*

Tech companies facilitate the activities of the influence culture that we are discussing. For instance, Amazon refused to allow Abigail Shrier to promote her book on their site. Twitter, Facebook, Medium and YouTube frequently restrict or shut down accounts that promote women's or LGB rights and challenge gender identity ideology. In addition, social media companies make no attempt to correct or prevent the influencers' dissemination of 'fake news' in support of gender identity ideology. They behave as if the ideas put forward by gender critical people are abhorrent. In other words, those who promote the rights of women and people with same-sex sexual orientation are now regarded by social media companies as bigots – and censored.

What this means is that Twitter, Facebook, Medium, YouTube and Amazon are themselves among the most powerful 'influencers' in promoting the gender identity ideology that is causing so much harm. They bear a heavy burden of responsibility – which will eventually become clear.

*5. How aware are users of the arrangements between influencers and advertisers? Should policymakers, tech companies and influencers and advertisers themselves do more to ensure these arrangements are transparent?*

A few months ago, BoyzMagazine was bankrupted by influencers who were angry that BM had suggested that its readers watch an LGB Alliance webinar. The angry mob brought pressure to bear on advertisers, and one by one they all caved. Every publication is fearful of losing its advertising revenue. Although most users are probably unaware of these underlying mechanisms, the power of aggressive influencers to protest and to shut off advertising revenue has become increasingly clear. This poses a serious threat to freedom of expression. Transparency itself cannot solve this problem.