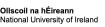**Cedar & Cypress Suite**
UCD University Club
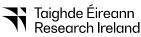
University College Dublin
29 May 2025

Reaction(ary) Media

Situating Influencers, Audiences, and Antagonisms

09:00-09:30
Tea/Coffee, Pastries, and Registration

09:30-09:45
Welcome

Anthony Kelly (School of Information and Communication Studies, University College Dublin)

Eugenia Siapera (UCD Centre for Digital Policy)

09:45-11:00
Keynote Address

Reactionary backlash from superheroes to social justice: Making sense of culture wars through fan studies
Mel Stanfill (Texts and Technology Program and Department of English, University of Central Florida)

Chair: Kylie Jarrett (School of Information and Communication Studies, University College Dublin)

11:00-11:15
Tea/Coffee Break

11:15-12:45
Papers 1: Gender, Identity, and Online Networks

Reactionary rationality: The use of science within far and reactionary right online ecosystems
Catherine Baker (Institute for Research on Genders and Sexualities, Dublin City University)

Performing entrepreneurship on social media: Self-marketing, political networks, and Brazilian female workers
Marina Frid (School of Geography, University College Dublin; Digital Economy and Extreme Politics Lab)

Ideological 'collabs': Mapping the masculinities and affectivities of the misogyny influencer ecosystem
Craig Haslop (Department of Communication and Media, University of Liverpool)

Victimhood, victim*could*, and the hypothetical injuries of reactionary politics
Kathryn Claire Higgins (Department of Media, Communications and Cultural Studies, Goldsmiths, University of London)

Chair: Páraic Kerrigan (School of Information and Communication Studies, University College Dublin)

12:45-13:45
Lunch

13:45-15:15
Papers 2: Audiences, Texts, and Political Affects

Decentralized sociality: A new lens on far-right behavioural dynamics and the alt-tech ecosystem
Jonathan Collins (Department of Security Studies, Charles University)

#WeGotYou?! Examining believability, cancel culture, and the reactionary turn in fandom through the Nick Carter case
Simone Driessen (Arts & Culture Department, Erasmus University Rotterdam)

Neoreaction blogs and worldbuilding: Narratives of utopia and apocalypse
Rhona Jamieson (School of English, Drama and Film, University College Dublin)

Interviewing incels: An audience-centred perspective of online radicalisation
Shane Murphy (Institute for Future Media, Democracy and Society, Dublin City University)

Chair: Sarah Anne Dunne (UCD Centre for Digital Policy)

15:15-15:30
Tea/Coffee Break

15:30-16:25
Policy Roundtable: Audience Engagement with Reactionary Media as a Policy Concern

Eileen Culloty (Institute for Future Media, Democracy and Society, Dublin City University; European Digital Media Observatory)

Thomas Hughes (Appeals Centre Europe)

Gillian Kennedy (European Movement Ireland)

Edel McGinley (Hope and Courage Collective)

Johnny Ryan (ICCL Enforce)

Tanya Warren (Coimisiún na Meán)

Chair: Eugenia Siapera (UCD Centre for Digital Policy)

16:25-16:30
Comfort Break

16:30-17:25
Panel Discussion: Future Directions for the Study of Reactionary Media

Alan Finlayson (School of Politics, Philosophy and Area Studies, University of East Anglia)

Debbie Ging (School of Communications, Dublin City University)

Gavan Titley (Department of Media Studies, Maynooth University)

Chair: Anthony Kelly (School of Information and Communication Studies, University College Dublin)

17:25-17:30
Wrap-up and Farewell

Reactionary backlash from superheroes to social justice: Making sense of culture wars through fan studies
Mel Stanfill (Texts and Technology Program and Department of English, University of Central Florida)

This presentation examines recent ugly moments in U.S. public culture through the lens of fandom, arguing that intense emotional attachments and community-driven behaviors underpin these events. From online harassment campaigns to the January 6, 2021 riot at the U.S. capitol, participants exhibit fannish behaviors— community members talk about interpretations together and many of them create and circulate their own texts, from art to memes, forging ties between them that enable taking collective action, at times even offline. Drawing on fan studies, the presentation highlights how these behaviors are not limited to traditional media fandoms but also emerge in political and social conflicts. Specifically, it connects backlash against the diversification of comic books with similar resistance to changes in history books, showing how both of them stem from a perceived victimization of white men. This ugly fandom reflects deeper societal structures and misunderstood grievances, reinforcing reactionary responses to cultural shifts. By recognizing the affective nature of these behaviors, we can better understand and address contemporary public conflicts.

Reactionary rationality: The use of science within far and reactionary right online ecosystems
Catherine Baker (Institute for Research on Genders and Sexualities, Dublin City University)

The reactionary and far-right's relationship with science is often characterised as one of outright denialism or rejection. Moreover, attacks on science and academia are key facets of the rhetorical and political organising of the far-right movement, both in the historical and contemporary context. However, simultaneously, reactionary and far-right groups invoke science as on their side, making claims to and assertions of 'basic biology', truth and human nature. Such rhetoric involves the strategic invoking of science in their calls for what they see as a 'proper' hierarchical ordering of society, presented as rational, evidence-based, or scientifically grounded. Notably, such practices exist in a broader mainstream cultural environment that reifies biological-essentialist narratives of gender and race. Understanding this complex relationship with concepts of truth, rationality, 'human nature' and academia — beyond reductive binaries of the rational liberal institution and illiberal irrational other — is essential for understanding and parsing the simultaneous attacks on and co-option of science and academic discourse for reactionary and far-right political goals.

Performing entrepreneurship on social media: Self-marketing, political networks, and Brazilian female workers

Marina Frid (School of Geography, University College Dublin; Digital Economy and Extreme Politics Lab)

Social media representations of influence and wealth through digital entrepreneurship have been among the compelling factors leading Brazilian workers, especially in lower-income groups, to use Instagram professionally on a massive scale. This talk examines the political implications of this process, drawing from the results of a multi-methods project on the nexus between labour precariousness and authoritarian politics. Through three ethnographic case studies—focusing on the sales, beauty, and domestic cleaning sectors—and a computational track of thousands of aspiring entrepreneurs on Instagram, the project found how lower-income workers' pursuit of building a presence and enterprising on social media embeds them in an algorithmic loop that promotes engagement with a network of coach influencers and standardized messages advancing far-right propaganda while obscuring unfair competition and fostering unrealistic expectations. The talk will focus specifically on the experiences of women seeking to reposition themselves from low-status or marginalized workers to entrepreneurs on Instagram.

Ideological 'collabs': Mapping the masculinities and affectivities of the misogyny influencer ecosystem

Craig Haslop (Department of Communication and Media, University of Liverpool)

There is now little doubt that many young people are navigating social media spaces where they regularly encounter discourses of far-right politics and misogyny. While for some time the focus has been concerns around the popularity of Andrew Tate, there has been less attention paid to the growing social media ecosystem of misogyny influencers who promote gendered disinformation and their increasing overlap with far-right agendas. In this paper, I map out some of the other 'misogyny influencers' who are gaining a following among young people and argue that as well as analysing their collaborated content (collabs), we need to think about their promotional, financial and interpersonal connections in this ecosystem. I begin to conceptualise how we can analyse their ideological entanglements, when the growth of the attention/affective based social media economy is increasingly facilitating the intersecting interests of misogyny influencers, the far right, and those with oppressive gender conservative and anti-LGBTQ+ agendas.

Vulnerability, victim*could*, and the hypothetical injuries of reactionary politics

Kathryn Claire Higgins (Department of Media, Communications and Cultural Studies, Goldsmiths, University of London)

In this talk, I consider how two reactionary movements—MAGA and Men's Rights Activism—leverage hypothetical futures of injury and oppression to justify agendas of violence and exclusion in the present. This is a mediated representational technique that I term victimcould. Working with feminist theories of vulnerability politics and building on extant critiques of strategic weaponizations of victimhood by the far-Right, I position victimcould as a clarifying analytical intervention that draws attention to how reactionary claims to victimization often tactically exploit both the prospective temporality of vulnerability as openness to injury (rather than injury itself) and the definitional openness of the unarrived, always-as-yet-undetermined future. My analysis of these two cases argues for how and why the concept of victimcould can help equip us for a) the resistance of regressive cultural agendas and b) the recalibrating of public vulnerability politics for progressive ends.

Decentralized sociality: A new lens on far-right behavioural dynamics and the alt-tech ecosystem

Jonathan Collins (Department of Security Studies, Charles University)

Decentralized sociality represents a novel conceptual framework for understanding far-right engagement within alt-tech platforms. Unlike traditional echo chamber or filter bubble theories, this conceptualization examines alt-tech's holistic communication dynamics, exploring how these spaces fill a psychosocial void for users who feel ostracized or marginalized. The paper argues that these platforms offer more than ideological reinforcement; they serve as comprehensive social environments, meeting all of their users' needs for connection, identity, and validation. Drawing from netnographic research conducted throughout my PhD, the study identifies core themes—such as grievance-based reattachment, identity fusion, and participatory knowledge—that perpetuate in-group belonging and intergroup antagonism amongst the far-right's alt-tech. Blending ideological content with everyday interactions, platforms like Gab Social normalize extreme views while maintaining high user engagement through entertainment and community-building mechanisms. Therefore, the findings highlight the critical role of social decentralization in fostering alternative group attachment, radicalization, and violent mobilization, underscoring the necessity of this novel framework to address and better understand the unique behavioural dynamics of these online ecosystems.

#WeGotYou?! Examining believability, cancel culture, and the reactionary turn in fandom through the Nick Carter case

Simone Driessen (Arts & Culture Department, Erasmus University Rotterdam)

In 2022, Backstreet Boys singer Nick Carter faced sexual assault allegations from three women. Carter, during his boyband career branded as the 'innocent, young, baby' of the band, did not receive a lot of public backlash due to the cases, despite their resonance with typical #MeToo-narratives warranting an artist's cancellation. Besides the cancellation of the "Backstreet

Boys Christmas Special" by ABC, Carter's reputation remained largely intact. Fans even petitioned for the special to be aired. Drawing on fan comments on a petition against this ABC cancellation, this article examines how fans reconcile the different media portrayals of Carter in relation to the narratives of the accusers. Using the framework of "believability" (Banet-Weiser & Higgins, 2023), the analysis reveals fans' loyalty to Carter: they consider him innocent, and call out the accusers. This case study contributes insights into why and how cancellation is avoided, unpacking the complex intersections of fandom, cancel culture and believability.

Neoreaction blogs and worldbuilding: Narratives of utopia and apocalypse
Rhona Jamieson (School of English, Drama and Film, University College Dublin)

This paper explores the role of fiction, and utopian writing, within contemporary NeoReaction. This far-right contingent of technological thought, popular in Silicon Valley, welcomes the apocalyptic self-destruction of capital. Through the figure of Nick Land and his 'Dark Enlightenment', it is possible to trace the development of NeoReaction from left accelerationism and cybernetic cultural theory. The style of writing common to the movement intentionally blurs the boundaries between science fiction, irony, and polemic. This paper argues that the movement's use of narrative is not only a stylistic method of persuasion, or the generator of a particularly affective response, but that these narratives perform philosophical work in the imagining of futurity. Commenting on the present and the future blur fundamentally within Land's prose, as he argues that we are neither aware of nor in control of a historical momentum that is already driving humanity towards the destination he foresees. The deterministic bent of his prose blends critique with anticipation, and thus finds in science fiction a useful tool for modelling potentialities.

Interviewing incels: An audience-centred perspective of online radicalisation
Shane Murphy (Institute for Future Media, Democracy and Society, Dublin City University)

To date, research on radicalisation within politically extreme online communities has largely relied on the analysis of publicly available digital content, such as forum posts, memes, videos, etc. Although understandable due to the ease of access, such approaches risk over-emphasising the role online content can play in an individual's pathway to radicalisation, while overlooking important contextual information about individual's offline lives, personal histories, and emotional experiences. This presentation advocates for direct engagement with members of extreme communities, as a means to more holistically understand radicalisation processes. Drawing from long-form interviews with 12 self-identified incels, this study identifies three interconnected factors which appear to have contributed to interviewees radicalisation: pervasive loneliness beyond romantic isolation, high rates of neurodivergence, and feeling "off-time" compared to peers regarding societal expectations during key life transitions. While previous research largely advocated a targeted, securitised approach to addressing incel communities, these findings demonstrate the potential for broader preventative interventions, which could potentially benefit many young people, not just those at risk of incel radicalisation.

BIOS

Catherine Baker is a Government of Ireland Postdoctoral Fellow in the Institute for Research on Genders and Sexualities at Dublin City University. Her current research, funded by Research Ireland, examines the role of science discourse in manosphere, far-right, and anti-trans disinformation online.

Jonathan Collins is a PhD Candidate in the Department of Security Studies at Charles University, where his research concentrates on the rise of the far right as both a social movement and threat for violent mobilisation. His other areas of interest include more broadly radicalisation, terrorism, conspiracies, and online extremism.

Eileen Culloty is an Assistant Professor and Deputy Director at the Institute for Future Media, Democracy and Society at Dublin City University, as well as Ireland Hub Coordinator at the European Digital Media Observatory. Her work focuses on disinformation, media literacy education, and the future of public media.

Simone Driessen is an Assistant Professor in Media & Popular Culture in the Arts & Culture Department at Erasmus University Rotterdam. Her research addresses popular culture and fandom, with a particular focus on music fandom and cancel culture, as well as regressive aspects of participatory culture.

Sarah Anne Dunne is a Research Assistant at the UCD Centre for Digital Policy. Her research interests include digital cultures and policies, feminism, gender and sexuality studies, and critical theories. She is currently involved in research related to the growth of far-right political sentiment and activism in Ireland that is emerging online.

Alan Finlayson is Professor of Political and Social Theory at the University of East Anglia. His core research interests are in political rhetoric and the persuasive expression of political ideas/ideologies. Most recently he has been investigating how digital platforms affect political rhetorical culture, with particular focus on reactionary digital politics.

Marina Frid is a Research Fellow in the School of Geography at University College Dublin and Associate Director of the Digital Economy and Extreme Politics Lab. Her current research on the ERC-funded WorkPoliticsBIP project investigates how beauty professionals engage with social media for work and business in Brazil, India, and the Philippines.

Debbie Ging is Professor of Digital Media and Gender in the School of Communications at Dublin City University. She is also Director of DCU's Institute for Research on Genders and Sexualities. Her research focuses on digital hate, online anti-feminist men's rights politics, and the radicalisation of boys and men into male supremacist ideologies.

Craig Haslop is Senior Lecturer in Media in the Department of Communication and Media at the University of Liverpool, UK. He has published extensively about contemporary masculinities on social media and television. His most recent research explores young people's experiences of lad culture and of the rise of 'misogyny influencers' such as Andrew Tate.

Kathryn Claire Higgins is a Lecturer in Global Digital Politics in the Department of Media, Communications and Cultural Studies at Goldsmiths, University of London. Her work is concerned with how communication negotiates justification for different practices of violence, exclusion and domination—especially, those we enact in the name of 'safety' or 'justice'.

Thomas Hughes is Chief Executive Officer at Appeals Centre Europe. He is the former Director of the Meta Oversight Board Administration. Operating under the EU Digital Services Act, Appeals Centre Europe provides independent out-of-court resolution for disputes about policy-violating content on Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube.

Rhona Jamieson is a Government of Ireland Postdoctoral Fellow in the School of English, Drama and Film at University College Dublin. Her current research, funded by Research Ireland, uses the methods of literary criticism and narrative studies to identify the role of narrative within NeoReactionary thought.

Kylie Jarrett is Professor of Information and Communication Studies in the School of Information and Communication Studies at University College Dublin. Her research focuses on digital labour and platform work, especially from a Marxist feminist perspective, as well as the intersection of gender and sexuality and digital media.

Anthony Kelly is a Government of Ireland Postdoctoral Fellow in the School of Information and Communication Studies at University College Dublin. His current research, funded by Research Ireland, investigates how new and emerging practices of political communication intersect, increasingly, with the political economy of platformised cultural production.

Gillian Kennedy is Policy and Research Manager at European Movement Ireland, where she is part of an ongoing project, supported by the Department of Foreign Affairs, monitoring misinformation/disinformation in relation to Irish–EU affairs. She was formerly an Assistant Professor at King's College London, specialising in protest networks, migration, and the Middle East.

Páraic Kerrigan is an Assistant Professor and Deputy Head of School in the School of Information and Communication Studies at University College Dublin. His research pertains to the dynamics of diversity in the media industry and its production cultures, specifically centred around Ireland's LGBT community.

Edel McGinley is Executive Director at Hope and Courage Collective, a national civil society organisation working with communities, workplaces, and institutions across Ireland to strengthen democracy and build collective resilience in the face of rising far-right hate and disinformation.

Shane Murphy is a Postdoctoral Researcher in the Institute for Future Media, Democracy and Society at Dublin City University. His work focuses on masculinity, online radicalisation, and far-right extremism, often employing qualitative methods, and where possible, engaging directly with those who hold radical beliefs.

Johnny Ryan is Director of Enforce at the Irish Council for Civil Liberties and a Senior Fellow at the Open Markets Institute. His work focuses on surveillance, data rights, competition/anti-trust, and privacy. He previously held senior roles in the online advertising, media, and technology industries.

Eugenia Siapera is Professor of Digital Technology, Policy, and Society in the School of Information and Communication Studies at University College Dublin and Co-Director of the UCD Centre for Digital Policy. Her research interests are in the areas of digital and social media, political communication, and journalism.

Mel Stanfill is Associate Professor in the Texts and Technology Program and the Department of English at the University of Central Florida. Their work explores the intersections of technology, identity, law, and economics in shaping cultural access and interpretation, with a recent book examining the intertwining of politics and fan communities.

Gavan Titley is a Professor in the Department of Media Studies at Maynooth University. His longstanding research interests and commitments are in the politics of race, racism and multiculturalism in Europe, and the generative role of media and communications in this politics.

Tanya Warren is Director of Policy at Coimisiún na Meán, Ireland's independent media regulator. She brings over 15 years of experience in policy, communications, and strategy, and previously served as Special Adviser to the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport, and Media.

Symposium Venue

Location   The symposium takes place at UCD University Club. See campus map on p7 (building 81, grid C6/7)

Registration Registration begins at 09:00 on the morning of Thursday 29 May. Teas, coffees, and pastries will be available.

Catering   Lunch will include a gourmet sandwich, side salad, dessert, and drinks. Tea/coffee breaks are also provided.

Wi-Fi   For those with access, you can connect to Eduroam. Everyone else should use the UCD Wireless network.

Map   See page 7 for grid references. You can also find a campus map with a list of building references here.

Getting to UCD

By bus   The main bus routes serving UCD from Dublin city centre are E1, E2, and 39a. E1/E2 buses both stop at the bus stop on the N11 (grid A9). This is 8-10 mins on foot from UCD University Club. 39a buses have a terminus on campus (grid C10/11). This is 10-12 mins on foot from UCD University Club.

By taxi   via N11 — Donnybrook/Stillorgan: Arriving to UCD via the N11, enter via the N11/Stillorgan Gate. You can alight in the N2 car park (grid B7), close to O'Reilly Hall. UCD University Club will only be a 1-min stroll away.

              via R825 — Clonskeagh: Arriving to UCD via the R825, enter via the Clonskeagh Gate. There is a set-down area outside the UCD Sports Centre (grid E5/6). This is 6-8 mins on foot from UCD University Club.

By car   via N11 — Donnybrook/Stillorgan: Arriving to UCD via the N11, enter via the N11/Stillorgan Gate. You can use either the N2 car park (grid B7) or the N1 car park (grid B9/10). The N2 car park is a short stroll (c. 3-5 mins) from UCD University Club, whereas the N1 car park is an 8-10 mins walk away.

              via R825 — Clonskeagh: Arriving to UCD via the R825, enter via the Clonskeagh Gate. You can use either the W4 or W5 car parks (both grid E6/7). Either of these car parks are a 6-8 mins walk from UCD University Club. A further option is the W3 car park (grid E4), which is a 12 mins walk.

              As of Friday 16 May, parking on campus at UCD is free, even in Pay & Display car parks, except for premium rate spaces. Premium spaces, such as those in the N2 car park, are clearly marked in yellow.

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LEGEND

- ▮ Student Residences
- ▮ Sports and Recreation
- ▮ Education, Research and Innovation
- ▭ Pedestrian Route
- ▮ Woodland Walk
- ▮ Vehicle Route

Goatstown Road

Newstead Entrance

Rosemount Entrance

Clonskeagh Entrance

Ridgeview Entrance

Belfield Office Park

Greenfield Entrance (Pedestrian and Cyclist)

R138 Entrance

Dublin Bus

Aircoach Bus Stop

Merville House Entrance (Pedestrian & Cyclist)

Roebuck Wicket Gate (Pedestrian and Cyclist)

Roebuck Road

Roebuck Castle Gate (Pedestrian and Cyclist)

Owenstown Park Entrance

Fosters Avenue

Fosters Avenue Entrance

< City Centre

Wicklow >