

Craig Dillon interview: Youtube vlogger on seeking protection for those accused of sex attacks online after being accused himself

Craig Dillon was crushed when he was called a rapist on YouTube - now, with charges dropped, he is a man on a mission

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Craig Dillon built an audience of 50,000 for his videos of pranks, music and interviews (*Teri Pengilley*)

Six months ago, Craig Dillon was one of YouTube's rising stars, a fresh-faced vlogger whose pranks and lifestyle clips attracted more than a million views.

Then a former sexual partner used YouTube to post a video publicly accusing Dillon of raping him and the rising star's world fell apart.

Three other young men also came forward, posting videos making similar claims about the University of Westminster student. Last November, Dillon, 21, was arrested on charges of sex abuse and rape pending an investigation by the Metropolitan Police Sapphire Serious Sexual Assault Unit.

This month, Dillon was told no further action will be taken against him and that all the charges have been dropped due to a lack of evidence.

Now Dillon, the subject of virulent online abuse after his arrest, is seeking to rebuild his life. In his first interview since his exoneration, he calls for anonymity for those arrested on serious sex assault claims and more protection for those wrongly accused of rape.

“When my ordeal was finally over, it felt like they've chewed you up and spat you out,” Dillon, who started posting videos of supermarket pranks when he was 16, tells *The Independent*.

He said: “People still perceive you as an accused rapist – ‘OK, he got away with it.’ You should be anonymous until you are charged. If a person is charged, there's no reason to keep a name secret. At the moment, it's too easy to cry ‘rape’.”

Dillon's experience reflects the dark side of YouTube's ability to create overnight stars. Thousands of YouTubers, eager to replicate the success of figures such as Zoella, the beauty and fashion vlogger-turned-author, earn six-figures annually from their channels.



Dillon was abused online after being accused of rape (Teri Pengilley)

Dillon attracted 50,000 subscribers to his YouTube channel and, whilst still a student, was on the verge of signing a deal with a music promotion company. He received a taste of the “boyband” lifestyle.

“You get recognition very quickly. You are invited to appear at YouTube events. Most of the fans there were girls. I had a girlfriend for the first year I was vlogging. It was something you kept secret. You don’t want fans to think he’s got a girlfriend.”

Dillon was harbouring another secret: he was also “experimenting” with boys. Tate Wolverson, an aspiring actor and the first boy Dillon says he had a sexual relationship with, was the first individual to publicly accuse Dillon on YouTube, claiming he was pressured into having sex.

“I was very upset that people posted rape allegations on YouTube,” said Dillon, whose mobile phone and computers were seized. “If you have an accusation as serious as that, the first place you take it to is the police.

“It felt like someone has seen their friends make a video so other guys saw it as an opportunity. It was a way for people to get YouTube views by jumping on the bandwagon. It’s such a serious allegation, the person is arrested straight away.”

An immediate side-effect of the accusations was that Dillon was “outed”. He said: “I never spoke to my family about it before. I wanted to do it when I was in a steady relationship. I wanted to sit down and say ‘I’m gay’ when I was in a relationship.”

Dillon was able to download iMessage exchanges discussing the night of the alleged rape in 2013 which he claimed demonstrated that the events of that night had been consensual. Police examined the YouTube videos posted by his accusers and found their allegations wanting.

Young YouTube vlogging stars









Dillon was told he almost certainly wouldn't have a case to answer but it took six months before he was formally cleared.

"Some of the complaints were fabricated, they had made a story up," he said. "Perhaps they weren't expecting me to fight back, they thought I'd just accept it. I was told they wanted to make public accusations instead of going to the police. "

Dillon's arrest followed a spate of accusations made against YouTube personalities. Sam Pepper, whose prank videos attracted 2.4 million fans, found himself subject to accusations of sexism and sexual assault after uploading a video featuring himself pinching girls' bottoms. Pepper denied assault and said the video was a "staged social experiment".

A young man thrust into a celebrity lifestyle, Dillon admits he has inadvertently hurt admirers. "I got a bit carried away with having fans. When

people throw themselves at you it's easy to say 'yes.' I don't think I exploited people, we both wanted different things. Now I think about the future, I'm more careful around new people.”

Shunned by some during his studies until his name was cleared, Dillon is now hoping to put the affair behind him and complete his TV production course and pursue a career as a “Graham Norton-style” entertainment presenter.

“I cannot begin to explain the trauma I experienced over the past six months. However, I am happy that I can now begin to rebuild my life and career,” he said. “I haven't made a video for 6 months. When it started I got a lot of hate and abusive messages.”

As well as protecting those wrongly accused of rape, Dillon says, “We must maintain the respect and support for those victims who truly experience the horrendous crime of rape.”

Free to speak out, he plans to re-connect with an audience who may have lost faith in him through the medium he knows best. “I will be posting a video on YouTube,” Dillon said.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/craig-dillon-interview-youtube-vlogger-on-seeking-protection-for-those-accused-of-sex-attacks-online-10219779.html>