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To cite this article: Shannon Zimmerman (2024) The Ideology of Incels: Misogyny and Victimhood as Justification for Political Violence, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 36:2, 166-179, DOI: [10.1080/09546553.2022.2129014](https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2022.2129014)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2022.2129014>



Published online: 26 Oct 2022.



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The Ideology of Incels: Misogyny and Victimhood as Justification for Political Violence

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ABSTRACT

A new group of socio-political actors has emerged from the depths of the internet. Thriving in the online Manosphere, the involuntary celibates, or “Incels,” are men who feel they have been victimized by feminism. Initially just another misogynist social group online, this article argues that Incels are moving beyond social commentary to become a political movement. This article demonstrates that Incels have begun to craft a particularly violent political ideology drawing on a unique form of misogyny rooted in the construction of a counternarrative to hegemonic masculinity. Using critical narrative analysis, this article assesses the discourse and narratives used by the Incels to create their unique worldview and identifies core components of their emerging political ideology to understand how this group may justify the use of political violence as part of their political movement.

KEYWORDS

Misogyny; Manosphere; Incel; political violence; ideology

Introduction

The deadliest vehicle-ramming attack in Canadian history occurred in April 2018, when a young man drove a rented van onto the sidewalk in Toronto, killing ten people and injuring fifteen. Just before the attack, the attacker posted on Facebook, “The Incel rebellion has already begun! We will overthrow all Chads and Stacys! All hail the supreme gentleman Elliot Rodger.”¹ The Toronto van attacker was using the language of a unique, and toxically misogynistic online subculture known as the involuntary celibates or “Incels.” As an Incel, this man targeted women and men or “normies” who he saw as complacent in a world order that discriminated against him. His intent, as stated in his police interrogation, was an act of rebellion designed to “shake the foundations and put the normies in a state of panic.”²

Involuntary celibates or “Incels” are a group of men who believe that the world we live in is a feminist gynarchy. This system unfairly favours attractive men and women to the extent that unattractive men are unable to find romantic and sexual partners. Leveraging digital spaces, Incels have formed an online collective around their identity as victims of this system and their marginalized status as beta or omega males.³ Once a fringe online group, Incels are growing in number and influence, driven by several high-profile attacks. As of 2022, there are at least eight mass violence attacks that can be attributed to the Incel ideology, resulting in more than fifty fatalities. These acts have been labelled as misogynist terrorism as the perpetrators were motivated primarily by their intense hatred of feminism and their desire to instil fear and terror in women as a broader group.⁴

Incels are an extreme representation of a trend of regressive gender attitudes that thrive online. A digital ecosystem of misogynistic chat rooms, blogs, websites, and subreddits have come to form an online community known as the Manosphere.⁵ Referred to as the “online heart of modern misogyny” the Manosphere acts as an echo chamber which justifies and amplifies feelings of male entitlement and rage.⁶ One journalist described it as “that corner of the Internet where boys will be boys, girls will be

objects, and critics will be ‘feminists,’ ‘misandrists’ or ‘enemies.’”⁷ Far from being a few fringe websites, the Manosphere is immense, and emerging as a violent political force.⁸

Four overlapping groups or “tribes” inhabit the Manosphere: Men’s Right’s Activists (MRA), Pick-up Artists (PUA), Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW) and Incels.⁹ For members of the Manosphere, the general population is blind to the inequalities resulting from the sexual revolution and remain oblivious to its harm. Those few who see these injustices are considered to have taken “The Red Pill.” This is a reference to the famous scene in the 1999 film *The Matrix* where Morpheus gives the lead character Neo two choices: take the blue pill and go back to the life he knew; or take the red pill and be awakened to life’s ugly truths. This choice between ignorance and enlightenment has been appropriated by those in the Manosphere to symbolise their “awakening” to “feminism’s misandry and brainwashing”¹⁰ and the “truth of male exploitation and oppression.”¹¹ Once aware of this reality, redpillers must now endeavour to liberate themselves from “a life of feminist delusion.”

This article contributes to the literature on terrorism and political violence in two ways. First, studies on terrorism and political violence have generally overlooked the key role that misogyny plays as a political force.¹² In her 2020 book *Disordered Violence*, Gentry noted that major terrorism studies journals have never published on “patriarchal terrorism” or its related terms.¹³ This is despite the fact that scholars have long argued that misogyny plays an important role in most politically motivated violence.¹⁴ The case of the Incels is a unique inclusion because misogyny is not just a factor in their worldview, but its defining characteristic. Incels have crafted their sexual alienation a “master status rooted in misogyny.”¹⁵ As J. M. Berger at the International Center for Counter-Terrorism noted, “Misogyny isn’t new, and ideological misogyny isn’t new. Having a distinct movement that is primarily defined by misogyny is [fairly] novel.”¹⁶ Jaki et al.¹⁷ and Beale et al.¹⁸ have shown that users on Incel forums deem the use of violence against women as recent both acceptable and desirable and O’Donnell and Shor¹⁹ connected this violence to nascent attempts by Incels to pursue policy change. Regardless, scholarship on Incels generally questions the political nature of the movement. Hoffman, Ware and Shapiro conclude that the “Incel worldview is not obviously political” though they acknowledge that the groups “core ethos revolves around the subjugation and repression of a group and its violence is designed to have far-reaching societal effects . . .”²⁰ Cottee simply states that “they [Incels] do not advance a clear or coherent political agenda. There is no incel position on economics, governance, crime and punishment or anything else of great political importance.”²¹ This article contributes to this debate by arguing that while earlier iterations of the Incel movement were fragmented and more focused on personal challenges, the group has evolved to articulate increasingly complex worldviews, including political objectives revolving around the commodification and distribution of women’s bodies, making it a nascent political movement that already engages in political violence to further its misogynist objectives.

Second, this article contributes a new perspective to existing literature on misogyny and terrorism by illustrating that misogynist political violence can be driven by counternarratives to hegemonic masculinity. First fully articulated by Connell as a theory of gender in 1987, hegemonic masculinity is the favoured masculinity within the society which legitimises unequal gender relations between men and women.²² Men’s Rights Activists, Pick-Up Artists and MGTOW appear to ascribe to what is considered “traditional” cis-gendered masculinity that is hegemonic in most Western societies. It is generally understood that extreme manifestations of hegemonic masculinity can take the form of terrorist acts.²³ However, this article shows that Incel masculinity appears to be rooted in a counternarrative where Incels are the “sexual subaltern” in conflict with traditional hegemonic masculinities which they simultaneously admire and despise. Despite refuting hegemonic masculinity, violence is still the chosen pathway for political change because Incels identification as victim is used to justify acts of political violence.

This article is structured as follows: section one provides the research methodology drawing on critical narrative analysis. Section two assesses Incel discourses and narratives observed on the Incel dedicated website www.incels.is, the manifestos of Elliot Rodger and Alek Minassian, and previous academic research. Critical narrative analysis is applied to assess the Incel worldview and draw out the

narratives and positions around gender that direct and politically motivate Incel violence, including the self-positioning as victim through the articulation of a counternarrative to hegemonic masculinity. The final section presents the nascent political ideologies discernible within Incel spaces and their misogyny-based revolutionary desires.

Methodology

Scholars of extreme groups emphasise the need for “close-up” research to situate such groups within existing narratives and avoid pathologizing theoretical frameworks that automatically label them as aberrant or abnormal.²⁴ Unfortunately, the online and anonymous nature of the Incel community makes in-person research impossible. Direct engagement online is also problematic. The Incel community is deeply hostile to outsiders, in particular researchers and journalists.²⁵ Instead, the researcher spent six months undertaking a “period of cultural familiarisation,” by visiting Incel sites online to cultivate broad grasp of the Incel worldview.²⁶ They limited their interaction in the forums to “lurking” i.e., observing conversations online without participating. This is not an unusual behaviour for even regular participants of Incel forums, where often individuals access sites but do not actively post. Lurking has been used to achieve a level of familiarity necessary to see the Incel world “from the inside.”²⁷

There are multiple online spaces where Incels gather. Incels are most widely connected with Reddit, an online discussion forum. Reddit hosts thousands of subreddits, which are individual forums dedicated to specific topics. Despite the very permissive nature of Reddit, both the Incel’s initial subreddit /r/incels and its replacement /r/braincels were banned from the platform due to violations of Reddit’s content policies. An alternative to Reddit was created, incels.me. Incels.me was then suspended in 2018 due to violating the .me registry’s anti-abuse policy and its successor, incels.co was refused renewal of their domain name.²⁸ The most recent iteration of this site—which is essentially copied from other domains—is incels.is and it has successfully maintained much of its membership from the previous sites.²⁹ Incels.is’ rules limit participation to those who identify as Incels or those who have swallowed the Black Pill, meaning they may not identify as an Incel but ascribe to the ideology and are indistinguishable from other members.³⁰ As of mid-2021, incels.is had over 13,000 members from around the world, though predominantly English-speaking countries. While the Incel community is diverse and exists across several platforms, these sites share many of the same users and the discourse and narratives are virtually indistinguishable.

Through the process of “lurking” for several months, the researcher was able to observe the evolving Incel worldview on incels.is in a great deal of detail. General observations yielded the data necessary to identify and examine broader Incel discourses. The researcher was then able to identify and follow multiple debates occurring between posts about ideology and potential “systemic” solutions to the Incel plight. By following these debates over the period of several months, the researcher was able to identify which form of political organisation (sexual Marxism) resonated with most posters. Posts discussing political responses to “Inceldom” also often alluded to Incel desires to establish a world governed by an alternative to traditional hegemonic masculinity. It was through these debates that the researcher was able to explore Incel’s complex relationships with masculinity and their subsequent attempts to create a counternarrative which both cast them as superior but victimised and therefore entitled to engage in violence to restore “political equilibrium.”

Due to ethical considerations, this paper limits its use of direct quotes from Incel sites. Conclusions drawn from the empirical research are therefore provided as general conclusions and rely on previously published academic work, publicly posted manifestos, or comments with self-identified Incels with public personas for direct quotes. Many of these posts drew upon or referred to the manifestos of the two most well-known Incels who have committed political acts of violence, Elliot Rodger and Alek Manassian. As such, this article, includes these sources in the analysis. This article combines findings from the empirical research with previous work by Ging,³¹ Baele et al.,³² Menzie³³ and others to identify the most dominant terms and narratives used by Incels to situate Incel political narratives within their broader discourses.

To analyse the gathered data and understand its role in the broader context of the Incel worldview, this article engages critical narrative analysis (CNA).³⁴ Epistemologically, CNA approaches the world as a social construction created by our understanding of events rather than there existing an objective or external reality.³⁵ To capture this perceived reality, CNA merges critical discourse analysis and narrative analysis to assess both the micro (personal) and the macro (social) where individuals engage specific discourse to create narratives that help them make sense of the world.³⁶ Discourse is the “public process through which meanings are progressively and dynamically achieved” through the consistent use of language in particular contexts.³⁷ In this study, the public process is the posting to public discussion boards on www.incels.is. The language used is the highly specialised vernacular that has emerged in the Manosphere in general but is most comprehensively used by Incels. Discourse analysis then looks at discourse as “language as a form of social practice.”³⁸ This study will assess the unique language used by Incels to articulate their worldview, paying specific attention political and ideological concepts that are being engaged to help the author make sense of the world.³⁹ This should then make intelligible the ideological foundations of that discourse.⁴⁰

Discourse analysis is combined with narrative analysis to show how Incels use specific language to narrate, and therefore make sense of, their lived experiences.⁴¹ Individuals act as storytellers who interpret their experiences through words and then organise those words into narratives, endowing those experiences with meaning.⁴² In the process, they create a particular social order within, and inherent to, their worldview.⁴³ This social order indicates perceived understandings of power relations and forms the basis for political ideology. If politics can be understood as “a struggle for power, between those who seek to assert and maintain their power and those who seek to resist it . . .”⁴⁴ then narratives “help us understand ourselves as political beings Insofar as narratives affect our perceptions of political reality, which in turn affects our actions in response to or in anticipation of political events, narrative plays a critical role in the construction of political behavior.”⁴⁵ Here it must be noted that narratives represent particular political identities and ideologies but do not necessarily reflect an objective “political reality.”⁴⁶

Narrative research is particularly useful in the study of Incels because of its sensitivity to positionality and the related political implications.⁴⁷ Narratives which emphasise positionality, as Incel narratives do, focus on relations of power i.e., who has power and who does not. In most narratives, actors attempt to seize the dominant position to leverage or challenge the existing narrative.⁴⁸ In the case of Incels, however, their narrative places them in the position of the victim or the oppressed. In doing so, Incels have created a counternarrative to the dominant hegemonic masculinities that are generally seen as driving the existing social order.⁴⁹

The next section applies critical narrative analysis to the discourses found on www.incels.is, the manifestos of Elliot Rodger and Alek Minassian, and other academic studies. This analysis reveals how highly gendered and dehumanising discourse has allowed Incels to create a narrative in which they are the ultimate victims in a repressive sexual hierarchy. They then use this position to justify their resort to violence in an attempt to overthrow their perceived oppressors.

Labels in a sexual and social hierarchy

For Incels, their narrative begins with the sexual revolution, which they argue has unfairly altered the supply of available women. The increasing use of birth control and changing norms around monogamy gave women the ability to have multiple partners. Because of this, Incels believe that the importance of physical characteristics such as broad shoulders, strong chin and prominent foreheads increased while other, more mutable characteristics such as personality and wealth became of secondary concern. A common Incel argument is that post-sexual revolution the most attractive 20 percent of men now have preferential access to 80 percent of the available women.⁵⁰ The majority of men, therefore, must fight for what is left over. One particularly victimised group, the Incels, are denied access altogether. The result is a “gynocentric dictatorship” based on the oppression of men while facilitating female hypergamy.⁵¹

Because Incels meet exclusively online, the building blocks for the Incel worldview is heavily dependent on language. Incel vernacular is endowed with intensely sexual and socio-moral value that Incels use to identify and organise “others.” The labels applied by Incels indicate both a person’s position in the sexual hierarchy and the perceived moral value of those individuals. This is possible because, in the Incel world view, the higher your position in the sexual hierarchy the lower your moral value. Understanding the positioning implicit in these labels makes intelligible the political subtexts within Incel narratives and the perceived power dynamics they are attempting to address through political action.

The Incel sexual hierarchy is based off what is considered “traditional” cis-gendered masculinity that is hegemonic in most Western societies. This masculinity has its roots in the industrial era and promotes the concept of the male breadwinner, toughness, physical strength, attractiveness, and sexist views while subordinating alternative or non-normative masculinities.⁵² While the other groups in the Manosphere revolve around promoting or leveraging this hegemonic masculinity, Incels simultaneously reject it via their creation of a counternarrative while reifying it by using it as an organising principle of their worldview.

Focusing on masculine and feminine stereotypes, Incels place themselves and non-Incels into a sexual hierarchy divided into Stacy, Chads, Normies/Betas, Beckys and Incels. Stacy is the label applied to women with a high sexual market value. They are hyperfeminine, hypersexual, and attractive. Incels simultaneously desire Stacy and revile her because she fails to adhere to heteropatriarchal standards. Not only does she not provide access to sex on demand, she benefits from her femininity by using sexual access to manipulate men, to gain access to financial and material resources—but only if the man is attractive enough.⁵³ Offsetting their high sexual value, Stacy is considered of low socio-moral value because they are seen as manipulative, shallow, inherently unfaithful and unable to meaningfully contribute to the labour force.⁵⁴

Less attractive (but still attractive) women are labelled Beckys. They are considered feminists who want male attention, particularly from Chads, but also want to dominate men. Beckys have some sexual market value and can still obtain access to sex. They will settle for a beta male but will cast him aside as soon as a Chad becomes available. They are also considered by Incels to have less desirable personalities than a Stacy. Beckys are portrayed as basic, bitter, needy, rabid feminists with poor attitudes.⁵⁵ Regarding unattractive women, Incels do not seem to acknowledge the possibility of women being involuntary celibates. Female Incels or Femcels are seen as either choosing to be voluntary celibate or, more likely, accused of being “fraud fakecels” seeking to get attention and validation from the Incels.⁵⁶

The male equivalent of a Stacy is a Chad. Chads are the embodiment of all the traits of hegemonic masculinity that Incels simultaneously desire and despise. Attractive, muscular, and popular, Chads are the genetically superior “alpha” males. These traits allow Chads free access to the female bodies that Incels so desire. It is also assumed that Chads looks and popularity will make it easy for them to achieve other types of success more easily. As one Incel lamented:

No matter how much of a failure you are, you would get everything in life (and I mean EVERYTHING) if you looked good enough, but you don’t, and no matter how much effort you put into life you will always be a slave or a rotter while some Chad will mog your entire life without any effort, just by showing his face. He will get women, fame and money without moving a single finger to get it. All effort is meaningless.⁵⁷

The largest group of people in the Incel hierarchy are normies or betas. Normies are “average.” They have social lives, and, while they may not be as attractive as Chad, they are able to find sexual partners. These individuals have not taken the Red Pill and willingly embody complicit masculinities so they can realize some of the benefits of the power imbalances from hegemonic masculinity.⁵⁸ Because of their complicity in the feminist gynarchy, Incels see them as partially responsible for their oppression and therefore legitimate targets for violence.

Incels fall at the very bottom of the sexual hierarchy, representing subordinate or marginalized masculinities who are seen as aberrant or lesser.⁵⁹ Incels judge themselves as having no sexual capital

whatsoever due to their poor genetics. As on one Incel lamented “My genes have already determined that I will never lose my virginity.”⁶⁰ Their belief of genetic inferiority is so important to them that Incels have devoted entire subreddits, and webpages to what they call the scientific blackpill. These sites provide pseudo-scientific criteria for determining genetics and testosterone levels by factors such as height, facial features, skull shape, shoulder width, and penis size. Because these physical characteristics are predetermined, there are limited avenues for Incels to move up in the existing sexual hierarchy—a major theme in their narratives which drives their emerging political ideals. In their words “genetic determinism is the ultimate truth.”⁶¹

Incels have embraced their victimhood as a core part of their narrative. They see themselves as triply victimised, first by their genetics, then by the women who reject them and, lastly, by the society for its indifference towards their plight.⁶² As Elliot Rodger lamented, “. . . All I ever wanted was to love women, and in turn to be loved by them back. Their behavior towards me has only earned my hatred, and rightfully so! I am the true victim in all of this.”⁶³ This victimhood is the cornerstone of Incel narratives and a major driving force for their push for political change by almost any means. However, unlike most marginalised masculinities, this article has found that Incels do not see the solution to their marginalisation as embodying the hegemonic masculine role of Chad. While Chads have sexual desirability, Incels also view them as obnoxious, scum, jocks, brutes, and Neanderthals, indicating that they have physical superiority but lack socio-moral value.⁶⁴ At the same time, Incels see Chad as exploited by women, abused by them for access to his superior genes and available resources. In the end, Chad may benefit from sexual access but is overall victimised by the gynocentric system. Rather than accepting marginalisation within this system or attempting to change their position, Incels view themselves as outside the system altogether.

Gates defines counternarrative as “subaltern knowledge” and “the means by which groups contest . . . dominant reality and the framework of assumptions that supports it.”⁶⁵ Counternarratives, by their very nature, are political in that they attempt to restore equilibrium or address an identified problem with the intention of redefining social and political reality for the purpose of social change. Within their counternarrative, the language and narrative Incels engage articulate a perceived role as the pinnacle of moral and even social hierarchy because they can see the “truth” about the world, rather than being duped by the “feminist delusion.”⁶⁶ Elliot Rodger, the Incel who perpetrated the Isla Vista attacks, described himself as a the “perfect guy” a “civilised man of intelligence” and the “Supreme Gentleman.”⁶⁷ Rodger’s violent actions are seen by other Incels as an expression of “righteous power” used to reject the hegemonic model and replace it with a more just system and the “violence celebrated, idealized, and, on occasion, practiced by the incel community can be reframed and justified as liberation from their position as the oppressed, the punishment of those who more successfully exist and operate within a gendered hegemonic power structure, and the creation of a more just world.”⁶⁸ For his devotion to a righteous cause, Rodger is commonly referred to as “Saint Elliot” on Incel forums. Similarly, Chris Harper-Mercer, the Umpqua Community College shooter, described himself and Rodger as “elite” and “people who stand with the Gods.”⁶⁹ Trapped at the bottom of the sexual hierarchy and with their place at the top of the socio-moral hierarchy unacknowledged, Incels understand themselves as the “sexual subaltern” who are locked in competition with other narratives which all claim to represent political reality. Incels then use this position as morally superior beings/oppressed victim to justify violence for political change.

Hope, cope, rope or rebellion

The language Incels use to describe and organise themselves and others underpins the core Incel narrative, that social relations are a sexual marketplace where a person’s value is tied to immutable genetic factors. Unable to change their position in this worldview, Incel ideology offers a number of strategies for Incels to make their way in way in the existing “gynarchy,” colloquially categorised as “hope, cope, or rope.” “Hope” is the idea that men who have lost the “genetic lottery” can overcome these challenges through efforts at self-improvement. Referred to as “maxxing” this includes

increasing their desirability by getting a pet (petmaxxing), earning money (moneymaxxing) or going to the gym (gymmaxxing).⁷⁰ “Cope” refers to Incels cultivating coping strategies to deal with their subordinated statuses, while acknowledging that this status is immutable. Coping can range from playing video games, spending time on Incel forums, and consuming pornography to focusing on hobbies or earning money. Incels who are “coping” still resent their position but are trying to ameliorate its negative impact on them. The third option, “rope,” refers to giving up, either by ceasing all attempts at self-improvement and LDAR (lay down and rot) or through suicide. These strategies are common enough that they have their own separate discussion tags on incels.is. However, as Incels have grown as a group and witnessed the impact that their actions can have, both online and in real life, a fourth option has begun to emerge—political change through violence.

Some Incels are not content with getting by in the sexual hierarchy they see themselves trapped in. For them, the only real solution to their condition is systemic change. This desire for collective action raises the need for a socio-political platform, grounded in the Incel worldview, around which Incels can organise. As one Incel put it, “[T]his is a political movement, friend. We talk about how people act and how they should be governed, that is politics.”⁷¹ A few nascent political ideologies have already begun to emerge from Incel spaces. One Incel pondered the possibilities of gene editing technology that would allow men to produce asexually.⁷² Elliot Rodger went so far as to envision a world where sexuality would not exist. This world could be obtained by killing the majority of women while a select few would be kept for breeding in labs through artificial insemination.⁷³ However, while many of Rodger’s other ideas about women and society appear to have resonated with the broader Incel community, his vision for addressing Inceldom has not. Instead, the most fully formed alternative to the existing gynarchy put forth by Incels revolves around a Marxist style model of sexual distribution.

A sexual Marxist utopia

The most common, if nascent, Incel ideology revolves around a Marxist style model of sexual distribution where women are reduced to commodities and distributed equally amongst men. This Ideology appeals to Incels’ general belief that social hierarchy is based on sexual marked value. It also encompasses both Incel’s misogyny and their dehumanisation of women with their desire for sex.

This idea of a sexual Marxist utopia stems from Incels distorted interpretation of sexual economics. As mentioned earlier, Incels believe that Sexual Market Value (SMV) for both men and women before the sexual revolution was based on a mix of biological factors and the ideas, customs, and social behaviour which constitute the current culture.⁷⁴ A mix of biology and culture allowed physically unattractive men to compensate for their looks in other ways, such as being financially successful. However, Incels argue that the women’s empowerment movement and access to birth control unfairly altered the supply of available women. This situation was exacerbated by societal progress as traditional male roles were replaced by “technology, industrialization and systems of wealth distribution.”⁷⁵ The result was an unbalanced “sexual marketplace” where women flock to attractive “alpha” males who have surplus access to female bodies while “normies” or “beta” males struggle to obtain a sexual partner due to their diminished SMV.⁷⁶

Gary Becker first compared sexual dynamics to economics when he applied ideas of human capital to the division of labour in the home and economics of the family.⁷⁷ Roy Baumeister and Kathleen Vohs built upon this position to argue that, when it comes to sex, women are the suppliers of a scarce resource and men make up the demand.⁷⁸ While Baumeister posits that the sexual revolution of the 1970s has provided more opportunities for sex, Incels argue that such opportunities are unevenly and unfairly distributed. Chads, with their desirable genetic attributes, have excessive access to sex no longer mitigated by the requirement of marriage. As one Incel noted, “[W]hat’s different today is Chad is never tied down to one partner (same with foids). This is what destroyed the SMP.”⁷⁹ Before Chad

has to marry Stacey and he was eliminated from the market.” Once the stabilizer of monogamy disappeared, Incels believe a profoundly unequal sexual market balance occurred.

At this point, Incels diverge from established sexual economics theory. Despite Baumeister and Vohs’ warnings not to do so,⁸⁰ Incels have stripped references to culture from the concept of the sexual marketplace and applied the principles of economic theory to analyse sexual transactions in monetary terms.⁸¹ For Incels, the sexual revolution increased women’s sexual market value while reducing and redefining male market value. Women’s newfound ability to choose multiple partners and with whom she reproduces, increased the importance of physical characteristics such as broad shoulders, strong chin and prominent foreheads. Other, more mutable characteristics became of secondary concern. This emphasis on genetics for reproductive purposes has resulted in some men being “priced out of the market,” denying men not only sex but intimate relationships all based on “a few millimetres of bone.” One way for addressing this imbalance is the overthrow of the current sexual marketplace and its replacement with a Marxist style distribution of access to women’s bodies. In this Incel political alternative, there still exists a sexual marketplace but rather than having men and women as the actors, women are the product, men are the consumers and the system has “... all the foids evenly distributed among everyone.”⁸² At the same time, the value of hegemonic masculinity is subverted because competition between men (and for women) no longer exists, thus solving the plight of the Incels.

This political ideology resonates with Incels because their discourse already simultaneously dehumanises and sexualises women. Incels argue that through the process of evolution women have become an entirely different “species” or even subhuman.⁸³ They are alternatively called “femoids,” “foids,” “FHOs” (Female Humanoid Organism), “feminazis,” “femtards,” and “cunts” or, in reference to their sexual value, “Roastie” (a vulgar way of describing a woman’s labia and indicating she has promiscuous sex), “holes,” and “cumdumpsters.”⁸⁴ Overall, these terms are used more often than woman/women, indicative of the general belief by Incels that women are subhuman and reduced to their biological and sexual roles.⁸⁵ Incel narratives then cast women as “attractive commodities” to be “had” and their bodies the property of the men who “own” them to be distributed, used for sexual gratification, and replaced at will.⁸⁶ One Incel argued “[W]omen should be bred like cattle and traded as commodities” while another advocated to “make them legally objects.”⁸⁷ The commodification of women can clearly be seen more broadly in the Red Pill argument that sex robots, virtual reality simulations, Real Dolls, and other sex commodities will not just substitute for the real women’s bodies but would be capable competing with them.⁸⁸

While much time is spent in Incel forums hypothesising about life in this sexual Marxist utopia, the majority of Incels acknowledge that the creation of such a system is highly unlikely, noting that “[t]rue communism can’t be achieved. People are too selfish and it just ends up being a brutal dictatorship” while at the same time conceding “... if there was sexual communism I would be onboard. It will be good to have all the foids evenly distributed among everyone.”⁸⁹ For them, “[t]rue communism is impossible, due to human nature, but if it could be achieved, it would be utopia for Incels.”⁹⁰ Fantasising how this system might be run is simply another “cope” that allows them to accept their current condition. A very small minority of Incels, however, are willing to go to extreme lengths to fight their perceived oppression, take revenge on those who have wronged them, and destroy the feminist gynarchy at any cost. These Incels have taken the violent rhetoric from the online forums—much of which is hyperbole—and applied it to real life. The result is an extremist political ideology focused on terrorising women and normies and spreading the Blackpill until a “critical mass” is reached which enables systemic change.

The Incel rebellion

A small minority of Incels have begun to pursue a “beta uprising” or “Incel rebellion.” These Incels have jettisoned the self-help aspects of the Red Pill philosophy to embrace what is called the Black Pill. From their perspective all efforts at self-improvement will never offset the reality of their genes. Their life situation is one of “chronic existential misery, of total abjection and abasement, of relentless torment and never-ending trauma” caused by sexual frustration and loneliness.⁹¹ The result is

a dangerous mixture of nihilistic hopelessness and intense rage. So extreme is Incel's perceived victimisation that any and all violence, including self-destructive violence, is acceptable to seek relief. This is where we see the enactment of Incel-inspired terrorism which Cottee defines as "violence against civilians carried out in the name of incelism or the incel cause."⁹²

Black pill Incels justify their use of political violence by emphasising their victim position within the feminist gynarchy. Narrative positioning is often equated with relations of opposition, much like the military meaning of taking up a position against an enemy.⁹³ Cottee found such a similarly combative relationship in the Incel worldview, noting that it is profoundly Manichean: placing Incels in opposition to virtually all "Normies" i.e. everyone else.⁹⁴ Feelings of collective victimhood have been shown to enhance feelings of fear and anger towards "outgroups."⁹⁵ As one Incel put it "CHAD IS THE ENEMY. FOIDS ARE THE ENEMY. NORMIES ARE THE ENEMY. NON INCELS ARE THE ENEMY."⁹⁶ This fear and anger paired with a desire to place blame for perceived wrongs leads to what Burke described as "victimage."⁹⁷ When victimage stems from perceived structural violence, as is the case with the Incels, the result is resentment and the subsequent desire for revenge.⁹⁸ Collective victimhood also acts as a psychological buffer, consolidating social identities and providing moral justification for inflicting harm on "the enemy."⁹⁹ For Incels, their victimisation makes violence not only acceptable but necessary and legitimate.¹⁰⁰ For them, "[r]esistance is our right and our duty. Death to oppressors."¹⁰¹

Advocates of the Incel rebellion or beta uprising incite multiple types of violence ranging from women-specific violence such as rape and acid attacks to mass violence against normies in general.¹⁰² Women are singled out as deserving targets for retribution for both overt and passive forms of violence such as denial of safety and protection.¹⁰³ Often, however violence is not directed at specific individuals but towards the broader discursive groups of Chads, Stacys and Normies whom the Incel narrative has identified as responsible for/complicit in their victimisation.¹⁰⁴ The escalation of violence against women to mass murder events can be understood as a way of "doing gender" that can be classified, in some contexts, as terrorist attacks.¹⁰⁵ In this way Incel violence serves multiple purposes, including revenge, achieving hegemonic male status, publicising the plight of Incels and overthrowing the feminist gynarchy that oppresses them.

Mass violence attacks have proven so popular on Incel forums that they have dubbed them "going ER" after the Isla Vista attacker Elliot Rodger. Incels constantly wonder when the next attack will occur, provide suggestions for how to make it more deadly than the last, and encourage others online to be the next "hERo." These are not unfocused expressions of aggression but rather "acts of political violence with explicit political and ideological aims committed by males who identify as part of the Incel community . . ."¹⁰⁶ By engaging in acts of mass violence, Incels gain both revenge against those they consider having wronged them and are able to embody (however briefly) the position of the ultimate hegemonic male.¹⁰⁷

Alongside revenge and (re)gaining status, violence is also used to publicise the Incel plight and attract people to the Incel cause.¹⁰⁸ The day after the murders of nine people at Umpqua Community College in Oregon in 2015, a 4chan user posted "[t]he first of our kind has struck fear into the hearts of America . . . This is only the beginning. The Beta Rebellion as begun. Soon, more of our brothers will take up arms to become martyrs to this revolution."¹⁰⁹ Similarly, after his van attack, Manassian told his police interrogators that "I was thinking that I would inspire future masses to join me in my uprising."¹¹⁰ In this he was successful. Manassian's attack was welcomed by Incels who called his actions "Lifefuel," dubbed Manassian an Incel "Saint" and began multiple threads discussing possible future attacks and how they might be undertaken.¹¹¹ The ultimate goal of all of this violence is to, in the words of Elliot Rodger, overthrow "this oppressive feminist system" by fomenting a revolution in which unattractive men engage in organized mass violence against a system designed to withhold sex from them.¹¹²

Conclusion

The internet and the emergence of the Manosphere has provided an online space for groups with gender regressive discourses and narratives to thrive. The Incels represent the most extreme of these

groups with a worldview that revolves around misogyny. Initially just another misogynist group online, this article has shown that Incels are moving beyond social commentary to become a political movement. Drawing on their sexual alienation, Incels have begun to craft a violent political ideology rooted in a unique form of misogyny based on a counternarrative to hegemonic masculinity. This ideology has cast Incels as both the victims of a feminist gynarchy and superior beings capable of seeing the world as it truly is—a feminist gynarchy based on the exploitation of men. Unfairly victimised, and viewing no alternatives except violent dissent, some blackpilled Incels desire to follow in the footsteps of their patron “saint” Elliot Rodger who declared in the Epilogue of his manifesto:

My orchestration of the Day of Retribution is my attempt to do everything, in my power, to destroy everything I cannot have. All of those beautiful girls I’ve desired so much in my life, but can never have because they despise and loathe me, I will destroy. All of those popular people who live hedonistic lives of pleasure, I will destroy, because they never accepted me as one of them. I will kill them all and make them suffer, just as they have made me suffer. It is only fair.¹¹³

The Incel movement continues to grow and become more extreme. With a swelling presence online that is increasingly moving offline the need to understand this group, their evolving ideology, and their ultimate political intent is more pressing than ever.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Ethics declaration

Ethical clearance for human research for this project has been received from the RMIT University Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) via the Research Ethics Platform (REP). Review Reference number 2021-24567-15107.

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