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Misogynist Incels and Male Supremacism

Overview and Recommendations for
Addressing the Threat of Male Supremacist
Violence

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Executive Summary

Mass violence connected to incel ideology has increased public and academic scrutiny of incel communities online. Although not all such communities support violence, and not all those who identify as incel will go on to commit violence, incel communities have drawn the public, academic, and policy world's attention.

The Institute for Research on Male Supremacism recommends the term **misogynist incel** (which can be understood linguistically as similar to the construction of the term “racist skinhead”) to distinguish the male supremacist ideology and movement from personal identification with the term incel. A failure to distinguish people who identify as incels or “involuntarily celibate” (including women) from *misogynist* incels leads to flawed recommendations and significant misunderstandings of the nature of this community, the prevalence of misogyny in our societies, and violence against women. In this brief, we overview the formation and history of the incel community, focusing on the ideology of misogynist incels, and its basis in dehumanization of women and male entitlement, as it connects to the glorification and perpetration of violence.¹

Misogyny is not unique to incels. Male supremacy can be understood as operating on a spectrum, and misogynist incels cannot be separated from broader societal patterns of misogyny. Misogynist incel beliefs develop from a male supremacist culture that consistently fails to mitigate violence against women and girls, and teaches men that they are entitled to women for sexual and romantic fulfillment, and that women are only valued for their instrumentality to these ends. Although misogynist incels use more extreme dehumanizing language and glorification of violence, their belief systems and ideologies are developed from and supported by the cultural and societal contexts in which they live.

Practitioners countering violent extremism, and others, must keep in mind that misogynist incels are not unique in their misogyny, and take care that interventions do not enable other forms of misogyny as solutions to the incel threat. Understanding misogynist incels as one of several contemporary male supremacist movements, the recommendations made at the end of this brief apply broadly to male supremacist ideological violence. Other acts of violence in 2020 connected to misogynist ideology, but not the misogynist incel movement, include the targeting of a woman federal judge by a men's rights lawyer who frequented male separatist Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW) forums.

We make five key recommendations as a starting point to address threats posed by misogynist incel violence and other forms of male supremacy:

- 1.

Support improved mental health services and access as a social good—but don't mistake this for a solution to ideological violence.

2. Provide possible alternatives for intervention programs, and suggest that interventions should draw on examples of programs designed to deal with domestic abuse perpetrators and counter racist violence for specialized counseling.
3. Avoid interventions that reinforce boys' and men's entitlement—collaborations with gender justice organizations can strengthen program design.
4. Intervene early and through routine systems to prevent movement along a spectrum of dehumanization and misogyny toward violent extremes.
5. Fund more research and collaborations into male supremacy broadly, and protect researchers' ability to work in the face of threats and doxing.

Introduction

In Santa Barbara, Calif. in May 2014, a 22-year-old man perpetrated the first attack connected to the “incel” community, a group of people who identify as “involuntarily celibate” due to a claimed inability to find sexual and romantic partners. He set out to kill women at a sorority, but was unable to gain entrance, attacking passersby instead. At the time, most coverage mistakenly identified the perpetrator as a “failed pickup artist,” due to his activity in an online forum oriented toward men dissatisfied with the industry that promised to teach them how to seduce women. For years after the attack, there was no substantial media attention to the incel community. Yet over that same time period, the manifesto and videos produced by the Santa Barbara attacker influenced the development of a movement of misogynist incel men, shaped around entitlement to sex and dehumanization of women.

In 2018, an attack in Toronto perpetrated by a self-identified incel man, running over and killing 10 people with a van, drew widespread attention from North American media to the incel community for the first time. This attack was followed six months later by a misogynist attack on a yoga class in Tallahassee, Fla., by a man who had previously compared himself to the Santa Barbara perpetrator.

In the years since, incel communities have captured a piece of the public, academic, and the policy world’s imagination. Numerous news pieces, journal articles, policy papers, and other coverage have appeared. However, this attention has carried significant and potentially harmful oversights and misconceptions, beginning with the way the term incel is used. The (heterosexual, cisgender) men-only misogynist movement whose growth is of concern now should be differentiated from the original use of the term, which dates to a 1990s gender-neutral community founded by a bisexual woman. The Institute for Research on Male Supremacism recommends the term **misogynist incel** (similar to the construction of the term “racist skinhead”) to distinguish the male supremacist ideology and movement from personal identification with the term incel. This term will be used throughout the report.

In this policy brief, we explore the history of incel identity and the development of a new misogynist ideology, explaining core concepts related to dehumanization and entitlement, significant frameworks such as the “red pill” and “black pill,” and violence as central to the movement ideology. In this brief format, we provide only a short overview of additional issues worthy of extensive analysis, such as race in incel communities. Our focus here is on conveying information most relevant to understanding and addressing potential violence by misogynist incel perpetrators.

This policy brief analyzes the language used by misogynist, racist, and far-right groups, the intensity of which may be disturbing for some readers. Examples of speech discussed include topics of sexual violence, pedophilia, racist speech, and suicide.

History

As the women's rights movement undermined the patriarchal status quo in the 1970s, the seeds for new ideologies and movements aiming to reinstate men's dominance were planted in the United States and Canada. This included new secular misogynist ideologies, like the men's rights movement, which denies the existence of patriarchy and presents men, not women, as the true victims of sexism and discrimination.² The so-called "seduction" industry developed, an enterprise to sell seminars and media promising to teach men how to seduce or pick up women, leading to these men being called pick-up artists (PUAs).

Women face disproportionate gender-based violence, from domestic abuse to sexual violence to serial killings. Their movements for equality have also been met with violence. Men—including police officers—assaulted women suffragists protesting for their right to vote in the early 1900s, responding to the threat to men's dominance. As the feminist movement further transformed the system of men's control, in 1989 a Canadian man perpetrated the first solo act of mass violence documented as primarily motivated by misogynist ideology. He stated his motivation for an attack on women engineering students at Montreal's École Polytechnique, as "fighting feminism." (Until 2020, the 14 women killed marked Canada's most deadly act of mass violence.)³

The expansion of internet access and online discussion forums in the 1990s and 2000s enabled new online communities and wider spread of ideologies—including cross-pollination by users bringing ideas and beliefs across forums. The first PUA forum, alt.seduction.fast, founded in 1994, facilitated the industry's expansion to a community subculture.⁴ Among the new forums emerging in the 1990s was Alana's Involuntary Celibacy Project, where the term incel was coined. Founded by a bisexual woman in Toronto, the forum aimed to support people who wanted but lacked romantic relationships.⁵ While this forum was not designed from a misogynist worldview, the audiences for pickup artist and incel communities overlapped with respect to men dissatisfied with their sexual experience and shaped by the sexual entitlement and dehumanization toward women endemic in society. (The anonymous forum 4chan, founded in 2003, became another favored space for pickup artists (PUAs), incels, and varied misogynist and racist perspectives to interact.)⁶

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PUAs' belief in a "sexual marketplace" influences the misogynist element of the incel community. According to this framework, every person has a "sexual market value" (SMV) informed by characteristics including, but not limited to: physical looks, fitness, age, wealth, and social class. PUA forums claim that feminism brought about and women control this system, seeking men with a higher SMV than their own (termed "female hypergamy"). This leads, they assert, to a distribution of women following the 80/20 rule: 80 percent of women pursue the top 20 percent of men, leaving the bottom 20 percent of women for the remaining 80 percent of men.⁷ PUAs suggest men improve their SMV by learning "game" (techniques to seduce women), earning more money, and/or improving their physical appearance through working out. This presents women as shallow, manipulatable, and undeserving of respect or empathy, and men as victims of an unfair feminist system. These beliefs also feed red pill philosophy (discussed later), which "awakens" men to the supposed reality of feminist control.

In the mid-2000s, game strategies and PUA culture gained pop culture recognition through the best-selling 2005 book *The Game* by journalist Neil Strauss, who immersed himself in PUA culture, followed by a 2007 VH1 reality show *The Pick-Up Artist*.⁸ PUA sexual entitlement, objectification of women, and dismissiveness toward consent encourage sexual harassment and assault, and has been connected to mass violence. In August 2009, a 48-year-old white man, a devoted follower of the seduction industry, killed three women at an aerobics class in Collier Township, Penn. His blog recounts his justifications for the attack: lack of sexual and romantic relationships, anger at sexually active girls and women, and rejection by all "30 million" single women.⁹ Following PUA industry advice, he emphasized working out and financial security, expecting this formula should deliver women. PUA forums, which advise men in coercion and force under euphemisms such as defeating "last-minute resistance" (LMR), are rife with personal accounts of actions that amount to committing sexual assault. In a rare occurrence in which the perpetrators faced criminal repercussions, two instructors with a pickup artist company and their student were convicted for the 2013 rape of a San Diego woman, committed as part of their "bootcamp" training. Faced with police investigatory negligence, the survivor herself

investigated and discovered her assault detailed in the student's online "field report" on a PUA forum.¹⁰

PUAHate.com launched a couple months after the Collier Township attack as a forum for men angry at the PUA industry for failing to deliver the promised results (sex with women), but unsurprisingly became a space for hatred against women. The vitriol toward women attracted incel men who had unsuccessfully attempted PUA techniques and those who never tried "game." One such 22-year-old perpetrated the first attack connected to the incel community, killing six people in Santa Barbara in May 2014. He wrote that PUAHate "confirmed many of the theories [he] had about how wicked and degenerate women really are" and "how bleak and cruel the world is due to the evilness of women."¹¹ PUAHate shut down after the spotlight from the attack, relaunching as SlutHate.com, a name that reflected its focus on women, becoming a major forum for misogynist incel men.

The Santa Barbara attack marks a point at which the men's misogynist incel ideology begins to coalesce as a separate movement organized online, characterized by dehumanization of women, male sexual entitlement, and glorification of violence. (Though little demographic data is available, user surveys and qualitative review suggest that the community comprises mostly boys and men in their teens and twenties, a slight majority of whom are white.¹²) Misogynist incels laud the Santa Barbara perpetrator, who killed himself after the attack, as a patron saint and martyr. His autobiographical manifesto became a foundational movement document. While it does not use the term incel, the perpetrator posted on PUAHate.com encouraging incel violence and implying his identification. "If we can't solve our problems, we must DESTROY our problems," he wrote. "One day incels will realize their true strength and numbers, and will overthrow this oppressive feminist system."¹³

In assessing this movement, it is vital to distinguish identification as an incel, in line with its original meaning, from the misogynist incel ideology that develops later. Men, like women and non-binary people, can identify as incels or involuntarily celibate, or struggle with finding sexual relationships, without following male supremacist ideology. For instance, the subreddit r/ForeverAlone, named after a 4chan meme depicting (a man's) loneliness, intentionally distanced itself from the misogynist iteration of incel beliefs.

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The 2014 Santa Barbara attack was one manifestation of the growth of misogynist online mobilization, as membership of male supremacist forums grew to the tens of thousands. The attack preceded, by a few months, the well-known #Gamergate incident, a harassment campaign that targeted women and feminist video game developers and reviewers under the guise of defending ethics in journalism.¹⁴ It brought initial mainstream media attention to the growth of misogynist and racist mobilization online, which by 2016 would be widely known as the alt-right and part of the support for the election of the then-President Donald Trump.¹⁵ While #Gamergate turned mainstream media attention to this phenomenon, it was but a symptom of a mobilization already well underway.

The Foundational Manifesto

The manifesto and videos created by the Santa Barbara perpetrator present his lack of sexual access to women on-demand as not just individual grievance but an injustice, a frame that is found in both leftist and rightist social movement-building.¹⁶ Prior research on mass shooters finds that a sense of entitlement to take “revenge against those who have wronged you” transmutes grievances into violence. Perpetrators need to believe their actions are justified and legitimate. They believe in their own superiority and feel “humiliated by their presumed inferiors,” as when the Santa Barbara perpetrator complains he is treated like a mouse when he is a god.¹⁷ He claims to be the “true victim,” that women and humanity “struck first” in “the war” by denying the pleasure to which he felt entitled. He frames not having sexual access to women as an “injustice,” a “crime” perpetrated against him, emphasizing that his attack is “retribution.” References to himself as a “magnificent gentleman” and “supreme gentleman” underscore his self-image as the hero of the story.

His decision to target a sorority as a symbol of the most sexually desirable and unattainable women (i.e., white, blonde, and attractive) particularly demonstrates the terroristic intent in the 2014 attack. The perpetrator researched which sorority had “the most beautiful girls,” to represent “the kind of girls I’ve always desired but was never able to have because they all look down on me.” The manifesto states the desire to inspire terror in women: “I cannot kill every single female on earth, but I can deliver a devastating blow that will shake all of them to the core of their wicked hearts.” Unable to gain access to the selected target on the day of his attack, the perpetrator opened fire on nearby pedestrians.

Dehumanization of women, in multiple forms, is central to the misogynist incel community, and a pervasive aspect of the Santa Barbara manifesto. This should raise significant concern, as research by the Dangerous Speech Project finds that dehumanization is a hallmark of dangerous speech that paves the way for ideological extremist violence by stripping away inhibitions for carrying out violence and removing victims from moral consideration.¹⁸

Core to male sexual entitlement is a dehumanizing view of women as objects to serve men; this instrumentality has been identified as the “defining feature of objectification.” Objectified people are reduced to “things,” to possessions to be owned, to a means to goals.¹⁹ Sexual objectification, specifically, “reduces women to their appearance, body, or individual body parts. This leads to a perception of women as interchangeable with others possessing the same physical characteristics.”²⁰ The Santa Barbara perpetrator refers repeatedly to blondes, depicted as interchangeable and nonunique, as the focus of his desire (demonstrating an obsession with white women). At one point, he describes “giving the female gender one last chance to provide me with the pleasures I

deserved from them.”²¹ The phrasing of expectation that the female gender should provide sexual pleasure evokes objectification and instrumentality. He views women as wronging him by not performing their function (sexual gratification).

The manifesto also approaches women with a mix of animalistic dehumanization and demonization, asserting, “Women are vicious, evil, barbaric animals, and they need to be treated as such.” The manifesto states that women “think like beasts, and in truth, they are beasts. Women are incapable of having morals or thinking rationally.”²² Animalistic dehumanization stimulates feelings of “contempt and disgust” and is commonly deployed in support of genocide.²³ The Santa Barbara perpetrator imagines a “pure” world where women are put in concentration camps to be “deliberately starved to death,” using those who survive for “breeding.” (Obsession with purity is another hallmark of dangerous speech.) Demonization amps up dehumanization to the level of a crusade, for instance, calling on incels to “overthrow this oppressive feminist system.” It “creates moral justification to act against a group perceived as inherently [and irredeemably] evil.”²⁴ Violence against the target becomes not only justified but a moral good, even an imperative.

Men the Santa Barbara perpetrator perceives as sexually successful appear as secondary targets in his rhetoric. The perpetrator dehumanizes popular men as pleasure-seeking “brutes,” and refers to both men and women with statements like, “you are animals and I will slaughter you like animals.” Despite being half-Asian himself the perpetrator expresses heightened rage when he sees “inferior” Black, Latino, or “full-blooded” Asian men with white women, and claims, “I deserve it more” as a “descendant of British aristocracy.”²⁵

Increasing Rhetoric of Dehumanization

The themes found in the Santa Barbara manifesto have been picked up, elaborated on, and evolved in new directions in misogynist incel discourse. A Sluthate.com comment six months after the 2014 attack, on a thread about “incel shooting sprees,” explicitly stated the instrumentality toward and commoditization of women’s bodies, asserting that every person deserves to have basic needs met like food, shelter, and, “if you are a male, sexual access to attractive females as that is considered a basic need for men as well.”²⁶

New objectifying terms in the guise of memes developed, growing through the online forum 4chan. The “beautiful blondes” of the Santa Barbara manifesto are exemplified by the meme of “Stacys” (also “Stacies”), sexually desirable (high SMV) white women stereotyped as blonde and curvy. Meanwhile, “attractive, popular men who are sexually successful with women” are memed as “Chads.”²⁷ The 2018 Toronto van attack perpetrator called for the overthrow of Chads and Stacys.²⁸ Memes are often taken as not serious, ironic or humorous, but they also can be assessed as forms of objectification: All sexually desirable women are so interchangeable they are given the same name, a term that reduces them to a set of sexualized physical characteristics. (Another, meme “Becky,” refers to women viewed as less desirable—but more attainable—however, this term appears infrequently in misogynist incel forums.) Even Chads are interchangeable and defined by appearance, significant given that such men have been secondary targets for violence. Misogynist incels have racialized—and racist—terms for non-white Chads; the most-used such term, “Tyrone,” refers to Black men, who are viewed as having a sexual advantage with women.

Two other disparaging terms popularized through 4chan are used frequently by misogynist incels as well as the alt-right: “normies” and “cucks.” The word cuck, shortened from cuckold (a man whose wife or partner is sexually unfaithful), disparages certain men as servile, submissive, and weak. Cucks, Chads, Stacys, and Beckys are all “normies,” men and women viewed as conforming to society, i.e., “normal,” non-incels. This categorization sets up an in-group/out-group dynamic also characteristic of dangerous speech. Misogynist incel men have voiced support for violence committed even by non-incels because the victims were normies. For instance, r/Incels posters lauded the 2017 Las Vegas shooter, who killed 58 people attending a concert, for killing normies, sympathizing and identifying with the perpetrator, even though he had a live-in girlfriend and was not an incel.²⁹

While most studies and media on incels have focused on the terms Chads and Stacys as distinguishing the community, this does not accurately reflect the severity and popularity of dehumanization toward women in contemporary misogynist incel forums. Mechanistic dehumanization, not significant in the

Santa Barbara manifesto, has become central to misogynist incel rhetoric, reducing women to machines with no capacity for emotion. This “sanitizes violence against the target,” so that killing is reduced to “pulling the plug of an inanimate object. In fact, sometimes denying the other group the ability to feel any emotion may motivate excusing one’s own collective abuses against them.”³⁰ It is similar to objectification in perceiving its targets as interchangeable and instrumental. The terms “femoid” or “foid,” abbreviations for “female humanoid” or “Female Humanoid Organism,” have far outpaced the use of the term Stacy. On incels.co, foid is used four times as often as Stacy/Stacie. Yet Chad remains the primary term for “sexually successful” men. While other men can be targets, women are the focus of misogynist incel dehumanization and violence.

Beyond the memes and ubiquitous mechanistic dehumanization, misogynist incel men have developed an array of other dehumanizing and derogatory terms for women. In particular, objectifying language refers to women by demeaning terms for their genitalia, most popularly “roasties” (a vulgar way of describing labia), or just reduces women to “holes.” On incels.co, roastie appears almost as much as Stacy/Stacie. Terms for women considered undesirable for lacking idealized physical features include animalistic epithets, for example, “landwhales,” and racist epithets, such as “noodlewhores,” a term for Asian women. To give a sense of how common basic dehumanization is when making reference to women, femoid(s)/foid(s) alone are used a third as frequently as the neutral terms women/woman/girl(s) on incels.co.

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Promotion and Glorification of Violence

Following the 2014 attack, positive references to the Santa Barbara perpetrator, such as “Supreme Gentleman,” which he called himself, as a saint became popular in misogynist incel spaces such as SlutHate.com, 4chan, and later incels.co.³¹ Encouraging others to “go ER” (the initials of the Santa Barbara perpetrator), meaning to commit mass murder and then kill oneself, is one of many ways violence is promoted and glorified. Misogynist incels celebrate the anniversary of the attack, May 23, as the perpetrator’s saint’s day. Supporters have lamented that the perpetrator failed to gain access to the sorority and kill more women as planned, and suggested other targets, for instance, a post advocating, “If incels go ER they should target feminists. Gender studies class would be a good location to go ER.”³² Mass fear and intimidation through violence is often promoted as the only means of achieving change for inceldom (see The Black Pill section for more on this.)

Glorification of men’s violence, whether perpetrated by an incel or not, has become a distinguishing characteristic of the misogynist incel movement, as with the support for the 2017 Las Vegas shooting. Posts tagged as “lifefuel” often celebrate interpersonal or mass violence against women or normies. Such posts range from sharing news articles about cases of sexual violence or murder of women to the celebration of school shootings or mass killings of normies. Moonshot CVE tracked three categories of interpersonal violence that appear on incel forums: “violent criminal behavior—including violence against women; actions to emotionally hurt or humiliate women; and actions to make women physically uncomfortable and fearful.”³³ “Based,” which they define as “not caring about being politically incorrect,” though can also be understood as calling something awesome or righteous, is also used to approve of interpersonal violence. Misogynist incels claim a number of men who committed attacks before widespread use of the term incel, such as the Oklahoma City bomber and the Virginia Tech shooter, as sharing their identity and as “saints” or “heroes” (or “hERos”).³⁴ The shared features of most of the chosen saints are men who perpetuated mass violence, had demonstrated some form of violence or animosity toward women, and in some cases had a history of isolation or social exclusion.

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Misogynist incel men have advocated for the legalization of violent actions to punish and control women, such as rape and beating. Posts have suggested legalized violence against women partners as a justified response to disobedience, not providing sex, or otherwise failing to “fulfill their feminine role.”³⁵ This aligns them with elements of the PUA and Red Pill movements that defend and seek to legalize violence against women. Nostalgia for traditional gender norms, for a past in which women were coerced by societal structure into marriage as a means of support, pervades male supremacist ideologies. Jordan Peterson, a psychologist and professor at the University of Toronto and an ideologue popular with Red Pill adherents, advocated the concept of “enforced monogamy” as the “cure” for mass violence like the 2018 Toronto van attack driven by anger over women’s rejection.³⁶ This appeals to misogynist incels as a means of overcoming the 80/20 rule and distributing women, one to each man.

Another disturbing development in the past few years has been rhetoric supporting pedophilia. Some misogynist incel men attempt to justify pedophilia by stating that underage girls (particularly preteen) are more likely to be “pure” by not yet having had sexual contact and are easier to influence and control. They claim that being with a pure girl is the only way to truly “ascend incelhood,” as women who have had previous sexual relationships are tainted, and sex with them borders on being cuckolded. Nathan Larson—creator of misogynist sites including incelocalypse and “raping girls is fun,” and an active participant on other misogynist incel forums—is a major promoter of pedophilia and rape. (He also ran for Congress in Virginia in 2018 to promote this agenda.)³⁷ The acceptance of Larson in these spaces (which practice gatekeeping around incel identity), despite not being an incel, suggests that his misogynist content and agenda was valued. On incels.co, he regularly posted advocating the legalization of pedophilia, incest, and rape, until being banned for in-fighting.

Red Pill to Black Pill

The “Red Pill,” a term that comes from the 1999 film *The Matrix*, has become a framework for individuals to describe their awakening to some previously hidden supposed reality. The major contemporary secular male supremacist movements—PUAs, men’s rights activists, The Red Pill, and Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW)—all use this terminology to describe their “realization” that men do not hold systemic power or privilege. Instead, they awaken to the “truth” that socially, economically, and sexually men are at the whims of women’s (and feminists’) power and desires. As in the film, to be blue-pilled is to accept the mainstream narrative and choose to live in ignorance of the truths of the world. Red Pillers see themselves as intellectually superior to “blue-pilled normies.” The Red Pill terminology grew in male supremacist forums and was adopted more broadly by far-right and white supremacist groups to describe their own versions of awakenings, conspiracist worldviews that often overlaps with male supremacist positions, such as antifeminism.³⁸

Beginning around 2016, misogynist incel forums began to shift from a Red Pill to an increasing “Black Pill” mentality. This belief system accepts the Red Pill view of society dominated by women but rejects individual-level attempts such as learning game to achieve a sexual relationship with women as misguided, asserting that only change at a societal level has the possibility to be effective. Black Pill adherents believe that looks are genetically determined, and that women choose sexual partners based solely on physical features (“lookism”), so whether or not a person will be an incel is predetermined.³⁹ Misogynist incels attempt to prove the truth of the Black Pill through misreadings of scientific studies, online dating datasets, and their own “experiments” to prove that women only care about a man’s physical looks. Although some incels still seek out plastic surgery, work out (“gym maxxing”), or try to otherwise improve their physical features, many believe such strategies are pointless as incelhood is a problem with society, not the individual. Blackpilled incels are aware of appearance and sociability/game strategies and reject them as solutions.

The Black Pill philosophy typically offers only two options for what to do with their new accepted reality: accept their fate as an incel or try to change society to their benefit—usually advocated as potentially achievable by means of mass violence and terror, not politics or other methods of change. “Copes” are looked down on as methods of coping with without changing the unjust system, including denying the reality of the Black Pill.

For those who choose to accept their blackpilled fate, suicide is often presented as the most inevitable solution; it is also encouraged in misogynist incel communities, as a form of sacrificial violence and/or martyrdom. Incels talk about potential self-harm, giving up hope, or suicide by using phrases such as

“rope” (committing suicide by hanging oneself), “LDAR” (lay down and rot), or “suifuel” (suicide fuel). “Suifuel,” “it’s over,” “brutal,” and “it never began,” are popular responses to and tags for posts that members feel exemplify the truth of the Black Pill. Internal polls shared on incels.co have asked members when they think they will “rope.” In some cases, users explicitly state, “I have to kill myself,” or say that they will commit suicide by the time they are a certain age if they are still an incel.⁴⁰ While some fellow members respond to suicidal comments with sympathy, others urge posters on with harmful comments, asking those who have expressed suicidal ideation why they are still posting and have not yet attempted suicide. When active members stop posting for an extended period of time, this frequently leads to forum speculation that they have completed suicide; however, that absence could instead represent men withdrawing from the online community, and data is not currently available to ascertain what is occurring.

Regardless, there is a substantial difference between a community being vulnerable to self-harm and promoting and threatening violence against others. Members expressing suicidal ideation on misogynist incel forums are also encouraged to “go ER” or “be a hERo,” meaning to commit mass murder before committing suicide. Many misogynist incels don’t just advocate for suicide as a solution to incelism, but also to create structural change through first committing mass violence. As with the Santa Barbara perpetrator, martyrdom is revered; the Toronto van attacker told police he had hoped to commit “suicide by cop,” a common plan for perpetrators of mass violence.⁴¹ For Black Pill adherents seeking to change society rather than simply accept their fate, the use of mass violence to forcibly overthrow the system and force normies to take notice is positioned as a key pathway to structural change.

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A November 2014 Sluthate.com thread on “incel shooting sprees” demonstrates the roots of this thinking, arguing that such mass bloodshed is “the only way that sluts and alphas will realize and accept that there are serious consequences for allowing so many males to live their lives in misery.”⁴² This use of mass violence to create social change in favor of incels’ worldview has been referred to as the “Incel Rebellion” or “Beta Uprising.” The 2018 Toronto van attack perpetrator stated that the “Incel Rebellion has already begun” in a Facebook post just prior

to his attack, and two days before he had posted on 4chan that “there would be another beta uprising.” Misogynist incels that glorify violence posit that by eliminating women and Chads they are working to “purify” society and to frighten those who have not taken the Red Pill or the Black Pill.⁴³

A Brief Overview of Intersections with Race and Class

Another component of the Black Pill is the claimed realities of racial hierarchy in the pursuit of sexual and romantic relationships. In misogynist incel communities, the acronym “JBW” (Just Be White) is a popular expression of white men’s perceived sexual advantages. Data released by dating websites and applications that point to a preference for white men over other ethnicities are pointed to as evidence of all women’s racism, another justification for dehumanizing women. A catch-all label, “ethniccels,” refers to non-white incels, with posts that aims to scientifically prove the undesirability of non-white men in the West and beyond. The “Scientific Blackpill” draws on studies that have shown how Black and Latino men are hypersexualized and viewed as hypermasculine, while Asian men are desexualized and seen as feminine/weak in Western countries.⁴⁴ In incel communities, labels such as “rice-cel” (an East or Southeast Asian incel) or “currycel” (a South Asian incel) are used to refer to the struggles of these incels as unique, pointing out their physical undesirability and emasculation. The Santa Barbara perpetrator (who had a white father and Asian mother) is presented as evidence that Asian men are viewed as less attractive in Western countries and to claim that mixed race people (particularly men) are more mentally unstable as a result of this. These beliefs are presented as justification for the violent acts he committed, faulting women and a “degenerate society” that allowed for emasculation of Asian men and “race-mixing.” The perspectives on race both demonstrate the influence of white supremacist beliefs and are used as ground to further justify violence by non-white men.

A 2020 member survey of a misogynist incel forum found that the majority of respondents were young men under 25, living with their parents while working or attending school. The class dimension of incel communities has been a subject of speculation, particularly the use of the term NEET: “not in employment, education, or training.”⁴⁵ However, evidence to demonstrate that economic strain motivates incel misogyny and violence is lacking. The term NEET does not necessarily relate at all to sexual activity; men who do not identify as incel call themselves NEET on online forums like 4chan, and the majority of incels do work or attend school. Anecdotes describing being NEET in misogynist incel forums indicate it can be in part a choice to opt out from the economy as part of a Black Pill mentality, permitting young men with familial safety nets to choose not to pursue employment as irrelevant to their incel status. Similarly, the term “LDAR” can be less suggestive of suicidal ideation and more of refusing to take an active part in society in the face of perceived systemic injustice.

On the other hand, when considering the potential impact of economic status, higher class status may increase a sense of entitlement for those adhering to a

red pill philosophy that views wealth as part of sexual market value. The Santa Barbara perpetrator described attending red carpet premieres thanks to his director father; his parents paid for his college tuition, rent, car, and a monthly allowance of 500 dollars, plus monetary gifts from grandparents, which he saved to buy the guns for his attack. (Given that he dropped out of school and did not work, he could be categorized as “NEET,” but this would certainly not imply his class privilege accurately.)⁴⁶ He viewed women’s inattention even with his expensive car and designer clothes as part of the injustice against him, suggesting that money increased his expectation and feeling of entitlement.

Mass Violence and Terrorism since Santa Barbara

Since 2014, multiple perpetrators of mass violence and attempted violence in the United States and Canada have referenced the Santa Barbara perpetrator or been connected to misogynist incel ideology. In the first couple of years following the attack, there was one serious thwarted threat of mass violence, and one successful attack that referenced the 2014 attack: In 2015, the Santa Barbara perpetrator was praised in the manifesto of the Umpqua Community College shooter, who also wrote about his own lack of sexual relationships.⁴⁷ (In December 2017 and February 2018, two mass shootings occurred in which the perpetrators had mentioned the Santa Barbara perpetrator positively online, though without indication that misogynist incel ideology motivated them.)

The media awareness of incels changed with the April 2018 Toronto van attack, by a perpetrator who explicitly wrote before killing 10 people, “The Incel Rebellion has already begun! We will overthrow all the Chads and Stacys! All hail the Supreme Gentleman [Santa Barbara perpetrator]!”⁴⁸ While most of these perpetrators of mass violence killed themselves at the end of their attacks, the Toronto van perpetrator survived and went on to describe his knowledge of misogynist incel ideology in a police interview (he is now undergoing trial). This attack was followed six months later by a 40-year-old man, who had compared his younger self to the Santa Barbara perpetrator, opened fire at a yoga class in Tallahassee, Fla., killing two women, cementing the new attention to the ideology.⁴⁹ Any time perpetrators choose spaces associated symbolically with young attractive women, such as a sorority or yoga class, that suggests a misogynist and potentially terrorist motivation, similar to the targeting of synagogues or mosques to represent anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim ideologies.

Military and law enforcement in the United States began to pay more attention to incels following the June 2019 shooting (no fatalities) at the Earle Cabell Federal Building in Dallas, Texas by a perpetrator who had posted memes associated with incel communities.⁵⁰ In Canada, another attack in Toronto in February 2020, in which a man used a machete to kill one woman and injure another who worked at Crown Spa erotic massage, was charged for the first time as incel extremist terrorism.⁵¹ In May 2020, at the Westgate shopping center in Arizona, a man shot three people while live-streaming video before being arrested. (None of the victims died.) He identified himself as an incel who had been rejected by women, seeking to target couples, to make them feel his pain.⁵² In June 2020, a Virginia bomb-maker was arrested after injuring himself with his own explosives. Investigators found a letter imagining targeting “hot cheerleaders,” with the statement, “I will not be afraid of the consequences no matter what I will be heroic I will make a statement like Elliott Rodgers did.”⁵³

While focused on North America, as thus far related mass violence has been geographically circumscribed, the online nature of this movement facilitates its influence across countries with English-speaking populations and should be approached as a transnational threat. In 2020, for instance, a bomb-maker connected to the misogynist incel movement was arrested in Britain.⁵⁴ And a recent report by the Swedish Defence Research Institute found that the United States and United Kingdom were the most common nationalities across incel forums, but that Sweden had the most participants on a per capita ratio.⁵⁵

The question of whether to label acts of misogynist incel violence as terrorism has been ongoing. Namely, the debate centers around both what movements and acts are included under the definition of terrorism as well as the discussions over the pros and cons of labeling a group or an act “terrorist.” Not all attacks perpetrated by misogynist incels should be categorized as terrorist acts; however, acts of mass violence with clear ideological motivations and goals, like the 2014 Santa Barbara attack and 2018 Toronto van attack, fit the category of terrorism. The Santa Barbara perpetrator makes clear that because he “cannot kill every single female on earth,” he plans an attack to create fear and hopes to inspire others.⁵⁶

Though misogynist incels are often perceived as a movement without political aims, violent perpetrators have the same type of far-reaching aims that white nationalists have: to completely change the culture and politics of society to favor their own group. Political ideas supported by misogynist incels range from concentration camps for women to mandating government-sponsored girlfriends and enforced monogamy to wiping out most of the existing “alpha” men and women. The Santa Barbara perpetrator had his own vision for an ideal society that his manifesto conveys. The specifics of a political agenda are not cohesively developed for the overall movement; however, they see themselves as an oppressed group that can only improve their situation through a total overthrow and restructuring of society.

Though misogynist incels are often perceived as a movement without political aims, violent perpetrators have the same type of far-reaching aims that white nationalists have.

While incels have taken up a prominent place in popular consciousness since 2018, approaches that remain aware of other forms of male supremacism will be more effective. Some mainstream journalists have erred in attempting to connect unrelated misogynist violence in Europe and North America to incels. In the case of the February 2020 attack in Hanau, Germany by a far-right perpetrator, some outlets rushed to claim the attacker was an incel because of a passage in his manifesto stating that he had not been in a relationship with a woman for 18 years. The manifesto demonstrated misogynist beliefs, but not a connection to incel ideology. As scholars Greta Jasser, Megan Kelly, and Ann-Kathrin Rothermel have written, this focus only on incels obscures the extent to which male supremacism and misogyny animates beliefs and violence outside that specific movement.

Recommendations

The first step in addressing misogynist incel violence and terrorism is recognizing the problem for what it is, a form of male supremacy. Since 2018, law enforcement in the United States and Canada have taken steps to include misogynist incels in their threat assessments. Some commenters have opposed Canada's recent categorization of incel ideological violence as terrorism, arguing it gave too much attention and significance to a fringe movement—yet two out of three of the largest acts of mass violence in Canada's history were motivated primarily by misogynist ideology. Yet, significant issues exist with how misogynist incel ideology is currently approached in CVE, that may make interventions targeted at the misogynist incel community not only ineffective but also risk further endangering women. We advance alternate understandings and responses for addressing misogynist incel violence more effectively and without doing harm.⁵⁸ (For suggestions specific to the media, [see the one-pager](#) published by the Institute for Research on Male Supremacy.)

1. Support improved mental health services and access as a social good—but do not mistake this for a solution to ideological violence.

Suicide rates in the world and in the United States in particular have increased in the past 20 years, and loneliness has been declared a public health issue.⁵⁹ Adequate universal mental health care access falls far short, and increased access to therapy and other services is a social good, including for self-identified incels—men, women, and non-binary people—and any people dealing with depression, loneliness, or other mental health issues.

However, we caution against approaching mental health issues as the main driver of misogynist violence, or therapeutic treatment as a solution. A 2020 counterterrorism journal article exemplifies the approach of recommending mental health services to prevent incel violence, stating, “Arguably, the most effective way to prevent an incel from ‘going ER’ is by proactively addressing his suicidal impulses.”⁶⁰ This is a misplaced focus.

While many mass violence perpetrators intend to kill themselves or commit “suicide by cop” at the end of their attack, potentially to avoid imprisonment (the Santa Barbara and Toronto van attack perpetrators cited this as their reason), this is not always the case. In the misogynist incel-connected attacks in 2020, the perpetrators did not attempt to kill themselves. **Ideologically motivated violence, thus, can occur without perpetrators committing self-harm.** There are decades of examples of white supremacist, anti-abortion, and other ideological violence unconnected to suicide attempts.

Second, the focus on mental health treats loneliness and depression as the root cause of incel violence, rather than misogyny and male entitlement. Yet for most

populations, impulses toward self-harm do not manifest in a decision to kill others. **Avoid reinforcing misogynist incel men’s sense of being the only people who truly experience suffering.** Vulnerable populations at the highest risk for attempted suicide and depression, for instance, queer young people, do not perpetrate mass violence. Entitlement, superiority, and a feeling of moral justification animate perpetrators of mass violence, who are most often cisgender, heterosexual, white men.

Avoid reinforcing misogynist incel men’s sense of being the only people who truly experience suffering.

Last, mental health services are not designed to treat ideology, because misogyny, supremacy, and other harmful ideologies are not mental health issues. So, while many misogynist incel men refuse therapy as an ineffective solution to what they view as systemic problems, others tried therapy but retained their misogynist ideology and returned to the online communities. The Santa Barbara perpetrator received extensive mental health support and therapy due to his parents, including meeting a weekly counselor in an informal social setting to address his “loneliness.” He responded dismissively, maintaining his worldview: “I don’t know why my parents wasted money on therapy, as it will never help me in my struggle against such a cruel and unjust world.”⁶¹

A misplaced focus on mental health issues as leading to violence can also harm how people with depression or other psychological conditions are perceived; for instance, autistic advocacy groups have spoken out against claims blaming autism for attacks.⁶² We recommend funders support policies to increase the quality of and access to mental health services—including improvements in training regarding recognizing and addressing misogynist, dehumanizing, and abusive belief systems—with input from mental health advocacy groups, especially those led by the communities they serve, without pushing this as a solution to misogynist violence.

2. Instead, interventions should draw on examples of programs designed to deal with domestic abuse perpetrators and counter racist violence for specialized counseling.

Acts of misogynist mass violence exist on a continuum alongside other gender-based harassment and violence, including intimate partner abuse, stalking, rape,

and murder. Perpetrators of mass violence (virtually always men) acting from any ideological motivation usually have in common histories of abuse or harassment of women. The Santa Barbara perpetrator began by harassing women on the street, including throwing drinks from his car.

Recommendations for dealing with potential incel violence have suggested helping these men form intimate relationships with women, with the expectation that this will mitigate their “desire for dominance.”⁶³ But without addressing the underlying misogynist beliefs, this endangers potential women partners. In online posts, misogynist incels have expressed that violence against women partners would be justified for failing to meet their sexual or other expectations. While they voice anger at lacking sexual relationships with women, their worldview demonstrates similarities with that of intimate partner abuse perpetrators. Domestic abuse perpetrators feel entitled, wronged when they do not get what they want, and justified in violence in response, seeing themselves as victims when women do not conform to their expectations. They hold hostile sexist beliefs and endorse traditional gender roles. Threats to commit suicide are used as part of an abusive toolkit for manipulating and controlling victims.

Shifting the sphere of potential violence from the public sphere to private is not a successful intervention.

We recommend funding programming to address misogynist incel men that learns not only from existing deradicalization programs aimed at extremist ideologies, which have benefits and flaws, but also from domestic abuse perpetrator intervention programs. These programs confront beliefs such as male entitlement, strict gender roles, and ownership of women; they recognize that mental health issues can exist concurrently with but are separate from abusive behavior, and require appropriate approaches to address each issue without conflating them.

3. Avoid interventions that reinforce boys’ and men’s entitlement—collaborations with gender justice organizations can strengthen program design.

Suggested interventions that encourage misogynist incel men to learn better social skills and take care of their appearance lean in the direction of PUA arguments that incel violence could be avoided if only the perpetrator learned “game.” In both cases, the intended outcome, explicit or not, is to prevent violence by helping misogynist incel men to form sexual relationships and leave incelism behind. Blackpilled incels refuse such personal solutions as ineffective. Those open to “maxxing” (self-improvement) end up in another culture based on objectification and misogyny toward women. Not receiving the expected outcome (sexual access to women) from utilizing these techniques in the past has further reinforced and radicalized misogynist incel beliefs.

In 2020, a competition held at Arizona State University encouraged student-designed projects to combat hate speech and related violence. The winner was a proposed youth intervention program; a video created to advertise the program shows how well-meaning approaches can reinforce boys' and men's entitlement. The video depicts a scenario in which a boy texts a girl asking her out, is declined, and then insults her directly and to a friend. The second scenario shows what the program teaches should be done, using "emotional intelligence, self-concept and healthy coping skills": The boy wishes the girl well, asks out someone else, and she accepts.⁶⁴ This reinforces an unhealthy narrative of an expected reward structure, that the reason for basic decency is not based on empathy or humanization but to gain girls' /women's attention and availability. When that does not happen—when the next girl also says no—boys and men feel unjustly deprived of a reward to which they felt entitled by following the script.

Funders should support organizations embedded in feminist and gender justice frameworks to collaborate on programming that can avoid inadvertently supporting boys' and men's entitlement and other such unintentional errors. Countering violent extremism organizations often lack a deep gender justice praxis, so encouraging and supporting collaborations bringing together these areas of expertise can lead to stronger program designs. CVE itself has been a field dominated by men, and funding should support women's voices, experiences, and expertise as an integral part of shaping programs directed at dealing with the misogyny that impact them.

4. Intervene early and through routine systems to prevent movement along a spectrum of dehumanization and misogyny toward violent extremes.

Misogynist incel ideology and other extreme male supremacist ideologies exist on a continuum, developing from mainstream structures of male supremacy, entitlement, and objectification of women. Given that boys often begin participating in misogynist forums in their teens, effective prevention necessitates interventions starting in childhood that address the roots of misogyny. Tomkinson et al (2020) emphasize routine systems of intervention and suggest that "further education of community workers, police, politicians and teachers to engage with misogyny's threat to public security would simultaneously solve some of the pitfalls of contemporary responses to gender-based violence more broadly."⁶⁵

Education initiatives starting in childhood that focus on consent, healthy boundaries, and mutual respect are a significant starting point. Comprehensive sexual education offers a valuable means for delivering such content—and, in the United States, has been targeted by Christian conservatives and replaced in many locales with abstinence-only education that teaches gender stereotypes and victim-blaming. Other subjects also play a role in dehumanizing or humanizing women. The standard English literary canon taught in U.S. schools is dominated

by works considered classics written by white men that center only boys/men as protagonists.⁶⁶ Many of these classics perpetuate male entitlement and sympathize with male sexual frustration, ignore consent, and present women as props or fantasies for men, with little contestation from instructors. Updating curricula drawing on a feminist and antiracist perspective to reflect a diversity of characters and authors—expressing the experiences of and humanizing women, along with other excluded populations—can work against sliding into misogynist beliefs.

Much of the funding for CVE goes to deradicalization programs or short-term interventions geared toward preventing at-risk individuals at the eleventh hour from violence. Deplatforming is another popular method that can be effective, but is limited in its ability to prevent the spread of supremacist ideology, and must be combined with offline strategies. We recommend that funders practice longer-term creative thinking and fund diverse social justice organizations working on issues such as comprehensive sexuality education and education justice to shape prevention of ideological violence through structural change.

5. Fund more research and collaborations into male supremacy broadly and protect researchers' ability to work in the face of threats and doxing.

One of the most-needed resources for combating misogynist violence is dedicated funding to conducting research in this area.⁶⁷ More detailed policy proposals, educational curricula, program designs, and other initiatives would follow from greater access to funding. We also recommend that specific funding to support collaborations between organizations and researchers bringing different areas of expertise is necessary for a robust strategy to challenge these ideologies and mobilizations. Given that misogynist violence has only recently been recognized in the CVE and counterterrorism fields, organizations often lack experts who are well versed in issues like violence against women, male supremacy, and misogyny.

While most recent misogynist mass violence has been connected to incel ideology, in 2020 a men's rights lawyer who also frequented MGTOW forums targeted a federal judge, a Latina woman, killing her adult son, and had a list of other women judges on his intended hitlist.⁶⁸ Additionally, the fathers' rights movement has a long history of global violence, including hoax bombings and kidnapping attempts.⁶⁹ For funders, offering grants for researching and understanding male supremacy broadly, not just incels, is crucial to addressing gaps that could pose future threats.

In addition, while most tech solutions to misogyny, racism, and other forms of hateful or dehumanization speech have focused on deplatforming perpetrators, we suggest a greater emphasis on preserving the ability of researchers and organizers to share their work in public. Individuals doing research in this area,

particularly women, require protections against harassment and doxing (revealing of personal information such as home address and phone number to facilitate threats and in-person harassment) that often accompany this work. Threats to personal security—and the safety of family—act as a deterrent to work in this area, as the harassers intend. We recommend funders set up a pool where any researcher working on misogynist mobilizations and other subjects with a high risk of doxing can apply to receive a grant for digital security services, expanding the work that the Urgent Action Fund for Women’s Rights⁷⁰ already does to support the safety of researchers and activists. Funding should support trainings on digital security for researchers that look at supremacist and violent actors. Tech companies whose platforms facilitate harassment and doxing should contribute to this funding as part of their commitment to protecting free speech.

Even with increased security protections, both the risks of work on male supremacism and the strain of the dehumanizing subject matter itself strain the ability of researchers to do this work. Many researchers, journalists, and activists lack access to therapy and mental health services to help them process the psychological impact of studying misogynist content and violence. Many therapists may not be well equipped themselves to support clients doing this kind of work. We recommend an investment in designing and creating services to support researchers working on these topics, and funding communities and conferences where researchers can support one another.

Notes

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