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What Role Has Social Media Played in Violence Perpetrated by Incels?

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Peace Studies Capstone Thesis

What role has social media played in violence perpetrated by Incels?

Olivia Young

May 15, 2019

INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to answer the question, **what role has social media played in violence perpetrated by Incels?**

Incels, or involuntary celibates, are members of a misogynistic online subculture that define themselves as unable to find sexual partners. Incels feel hatred for women and sexually active males stemming from their belief that women are required to give sex to them, and that they have been denied this right by women who choose alpha males over them.

The term incel was coined in 1997 by a queer woman who started a support website for those unable find a romantic partner (Beauchamp). In the next 20 years, the online community began to intermingle with “mens rights” websites and incels mutated into an all-male group espousing hatred for women and even advocating violence (Beauchamp). Incels have been responsible for a number of violent attacks and mass killings in recent years. Since 2014, at least 7 deadly attacks have taken place with ties to the incel movement. These attacks are increasing in frequency and the number of users of online incel forums is growing. The fact that this hate group has committed violence in the real world suggests that incels are a threat to peace and it is imperative that they be seriously researched.

The discipline of peace studies holds that violence against women and misogyny must be condemned. In order to have a just society, women must not only be free from physical violence, sexual harassment, and intimidation, but also enjoy respect and equality. Even when incels do not directly commit violence, their hateful rhetoric dehumanizes women and encourages harassment and aggression. Misogynistic hate groups like incels are a threat to peace in society.

Due to the novelty of the incel movement, there is very little academic research on them. In particular, their use of social media to organize and its role in incel violence is worthy of consideration. Compared to other hate groups, incels are unique in that they did not exist as an established group prior to the advent of social media. It is unknown what implications this will have for the actions of incels going forward. Given the growing role of the internet and social media in today's society, it is reasonable to assume that hate groups will continue to mobilize online, presenting a real yet undefined threat. As such, the role of social media in real world violence perpetrated by hate groups like incels must be examined.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media

By definition, social media is used by individuals to interact with others online. Social media provides a mechanism for individuals to find others they relate to and form online communities. Though typically the implications of this are positive, many researchers have found that extremist and hate groups are using this new technology to organize, and according to Ganesh, “the explosion of digital hate culture represents the dark side of the democratizing power of social media,” (Ganesh 31).

Similarly, Hawdon found that “the rise of social media has opened additional avenues for promoting activism and radicalism that allow a plethora of hate groups to establish an online presence” (Hawdon, 39). This is largely because, as Meleagrou-Hitchens et al. found, online forums and chat rooms “allow members of extremist organizations to interact with each other, discuss political and other current events and bond as a cohort in ways that traditional websites could not accommodate,” (Meleagrou-Hitchens et al., 1238). In fact, Patton et al. argue that the internet provides the perfect forum for group polarization. Group polarization theory holds that like-minded individuals may become collectively more extreme than their individual views in group settings (Patton et al., A55). This theory can be applied to the psychology of hate groups in general, but may have even more relevance when applied to their online interactions. Because there is no consequence for expressing extremist views online, those with extremist views are more likely to find like-minded individuals online and form more extreme subgroup ideologies. This paper will further examine how these social media forums are being used to radicalize these individuals.

One factor that contributes to radicalization is online anonymity. Both Patton et al. and Meleagrou-Hitchens et al. found that hate groups thrived in online discussion forums where users created anonymous profiles as opposed to using personal accounts. “This anonymity frees individuals from normative and social constraints of behavior, and is evidenced by increased hostility and inappropriate behavior” (Patton et al., A55).

Research suggests that isolation from other views is another factor contributing to the development of extremist groups on social media. Colleoni et al. have found that social media can function as an “echo chamber” because the user chooses which opinions and content are viewed, isolating themselves from dissenting opinions and allowing radical views to be amplified (Colleoni et al., 2014). This helps users embrace extreme ideas, and skews their sense of reality so that, according to Meleagrou-Hitchens et al, “extremist attitudes and violence are no longer taboos but are seen as positive and desirable” (Meleagrou-Hitchens et al., 1241). This also leads members of the group to overestimate the amount of people who share these extreme opinions. The echo-chamber “helps to create an impression among online followers that a critical mass has built up within the movement” (Meleagrou-Hitchens et al., 1239). This skewed perspective motivates individuals to become further involved in the movement and more extreme in their actions.

Differential association theory holds that individuals learn criminal behavior through interaction with others (Hawdon, 44). This idea clearly applies to communication and online interaction. Hawdon demonstrates that online hate groups can act as sources of differential association: As users of online hate forums interact more with this content, they are further directed towards those sharing their ideology and directed away from those who disagree with them. This process will “serve to increase their exposure to definitions of the world that teach

them the motives for, techniques of, attitudes toward, and rationalizations of hate-inspired violence” (Hawdon, 45). This paper will examine the way that these forums have sped up some processes of human interaction, leading to the formation of larger and more connected radical groups.

Online Extremism and Violence

As the extremism of these online groups grows, so does their tendency to become violent. Studies have found that hate spread online has been recurrently tied to extremism and violence in the real-world, including mass shootings (Johnson et al., 1). Patton et al. argues that there is a direct link between virtual hostility and actual violence, stating “if increased online hostility is correlated with increased violence, there are real-world consequences of the online disinhibition effect” (Patton et al., A55). Dharmapala and McAdams found that the growth of online hate networks and the tendency of members to positively reinforce violent behavior lead to the “opportunity for fame” within the group as a motivating factor for members to express their hatred in the real world. Perpetrators of violent crimes are often idolized, and particularly in the digital age, “individuals who commit hate crimes can expect to gain widespread acclaim from sympathetic strangers who live far from the locations of the crimes” (Dharmapala & McAdams, 95). The extent to which fame is a motivating factor for violence is worthy of more investigation.

Yet despite these real-world consequences, social media is still a gray area when it comes to legislation. The internet blurs lines between countries, governments, and the private sector. Multiple governments and online platforms are implementing campaigns attempting to combat online hate speech (Álvarez-Benjumea & Winter, 224). However, they have had limited large-scale success as there is not consensus across the web on what is “free speech” and what can be censored. Ganesh notes that online hate groups take advantage of this by migrating “from one

host that might shut a site down to one with completely different community guidelines or terms of service” (Ganesh, 37). This makes it extremely difficult for any governing bodies to silence hate speech. An area worthy of investigation is how successful censorship efforts online are at curbing real world hate crimes.

Limited research has been carried out on this; Álvarez-Benjumea and Winter conducted a study on online hate groups and censorship, and found that “participants were less likely to make use of hostile speech when they were presented with an environment in which previous extreme hate content had been censored,” (Álvarez-Benjumea & Winter, 233). This aligns with the larger concentration of hate on forums such as 4chan and Reddit with less regulation. Reddit is a online forum made up of multiple subreddits, or smaller discussion forums pertaining to specific topics, that each have their own community regulations, moderators, and codes of conduct (Ganesh, 37). For this reason, Reddit is one of the most popular forums for hate groups, and will be a point of focus in this paper’s research. As social media continues to grow its role in society, academia must examine further the links between online hate and real-world violence.

The Alt-Right

Online hate groups can take many ideological forms, however, based on data from Hawdon and Sweeney & Perliger, in recent years there has been a significant increase in far-right hate groups, known as the alt-right. Hawdon found that “the number of active right-wing hate groups operating in the United States increased by 66 percent between 2000 and 2010 and exceeded 1,000 in 2010” (39), and since then has increased at even greater rates. Sweeney and Perliger noted the worldwide trend of an increase in far-right violence since the 2016 election of President Donald Trump in the United States (52). Similarly, California State University at San

Bernardino's Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism found that hate crimes in American cities increased by nearly 20 percent during 2017 (Sweeney & Perliger, 52). According to the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), "2018 was a particularly active year for right-wing extremist murders: every single extremist killing — from Pittsburgh to Parkland — had a link to right-wing extremism" ("Murder and Extremism in the United States in 2018"). Not only was there an increase in far-right hate crimes, but increases in hate on social media also trended towards the far-right; Ganesh asserts that "digital hate culture is united by a shared politics of negation: against liberalism, egalitarianism, political correctness and the like, more so than any consistent ideology" (31).

Under the umbrella of right-wing hate are a number of identity groups that all value internal homogenization, nativism and tradition (Sweeney & Perliger, 53). Right-wing cybercultures share a common spirit and have made use of new media in order to expand their audience. According to Ganesh, the processes used by "contemporary right-wing extremism online should be understood as forming a community around forms of intimacy, sense, and feeling that are maligned or considered unacceptable in mainstream society" (Ganesh 33). This hate movement is grounded in its ability to repackage various messages of white male supremacy in ways that make them more palatable and appealing to different populations.

Examples of such repackaging of these ideals can be seen in the development of "the manosphere," an antifeminist coalition of men's rights activists, anti-feminists, pickup artists and alleged experts in sexual conquest (Ganesh 34). The manosphere is a collection of websites based on ideologies of male supremacy. Like white supremacy, male supremacy is driven by fear and anger at the loss of white male status. The ADL and the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) both categorize male supremacy as an extremist ideology held by hate groups.

According to the SPLC, the manosphere “has spawned a network of online communities that advocate violence against women. On these sites, women are called ‘foids,’ or ‘femoids,’ a term combining ‘female’ and ‘humanoid’ to suggest that women are not fully human” (“Male Supremacy”). This is an example of how niche online communities form their own jargon, further integrating and polarizing users within these communities.

Another example of this specialized jargon is the philosophy of the “Red Pill,” which emerged from the many subcultures of the manosphere. The Red Pill is an analogy derived from the 1999 film *The Matrix*, where taking a “Red Pill” means becoming enlightened to life’s ugly truths. As Ganesh describes it, “the Red Pill philosophy purports to awaken men to feminism’s misandry and brainwashing. To be ‘Red-Pilled’ in the parlance of the manosphere is to internalize these ‘truths’ and to develop sexual strategy based on exploiting the purported hard-wired sexual inclinations of all women” (Ganesh 34).

Surrounding the Red Pill community is a sense of zealotry that unites various extreme right-wing groups (Ganesh, 36). Ideas of “truth” and using “alternative media” are used to convert online users to extreme, all-encompassing views. By using social media and the internet to unite various branches of the alt-right, the Red Pill community creates a “cyberculture in which a broad, transnational coalition of groups can congregate and mobilize under a shared mentality and worldview” (Ganesh, 36). Attempts to censor this content or condemn it as hate speech, strengthen claims that Red-Pillers “speak a truth that is being suppressed by power” (Ganesh, 37). This sentiment has helped members of the Red Pill community to expand their audiences quickly and spread hate while avoiding legal consequences.

Incels

Within the Red Pill universe are a group of men who call themselves incels. Nagle conducted an extensive content analysis of online incel culture, noting they often refer to themselves as “betas,” an “ironic inversion of the fabled swagger of the alpha male. Whereas alphas tend to be macho, sporty, and mainstream in their tastes, betas see themselves as less dominant males, withdrawn, obsessional, and curatorial in their cultural habits” (Nagle, 64). These men feel hatred for women and sexually active alpha males stemming from their belief that women are required to give sex to them, and that they have been denied this right by women who choose alpha males over them. Despite the strong alt-right roots of the manosphere, incel-dom bears characteristics of the counterculture left as well (Nagle, 64). Incels embrace anarchy and deny traditional values of religion and family. As such, the incel ideology carves “out a cultural politics that rejects both the strict moral values of conservatism and the constraining political correctness that beta adherents associate with feminism and liberalism” (Nagle, 73). Incels did not exist as an organized group prior to the advent of social media. Due to the novelty of the incel movement, there is very little academic literature on them. This paper aims to begin filling this gap by undertaking an examination of incel behavior online and in the real world.

“Gamergate” and Geek Masculinity

Social media has been instrumental in the formation of Incel identity. As found by Nagle, incels bear “the unmistakable signs of a new, net-bred brand of misogyny. It exists squarely within the libertarian ethos that infuse[s] computer cultures” (Nagle, 70). Incels often take part in cyberbullying behaviors by harassing women or antagonizing feminists online. Patton et al. identified two forms of cyberbullying behavior exhibited by individuals on social media:

“trolling, the act of writing inflammatory posts meant to illicit responses from readers and flaming, or hostile expression towards others” (Patton et al., A56). In 2014, an organized campaign of online abuse known as Gamergate occurred against several women in the video game industry. It involved harassment such as doxing (releasing personal details about an individual online), threats of rape and death threats. Feminist scholar Salter argues that Gamergate reflects “the masculine impulse to defend particular technologies, such as video games and the internet, from perceived encroachment by women and more diverse users,” (Salter, 248) and uses the term “geek masculinity” to refer to this dependence on technological hegemony. The concept of geek masculinity underscores the incels and their “beta-revolution.” As opposed to physical bullying, “traditionally defined geeks may have the added advantage of technical skills and proficiency” (Patton et al., A55) when it comes to cyber bullying, making it easier for them to manifest masculine aggression online than in traditional settings. It is therefore not a coincidence that online platforms frequented by incels, particularly 4chan, 8chan, Reddit and Twitter, were particularly conducive to Gamergate’s misogynist campaigns (Salter, 248). Lewis et al. suggest that “part of the logic of victimization of women on social networking sites is to exclude certain voices from cyberspace” (Lewis et al., 1464). So, although some users of the manosphere may undertake these actions simply out of hatred for women, others did so for more strategic reasons; “online abuse polices women’s voices, thereby limiting their use of online fora for feminist activism” (Lewis et al., 1464).

Incels in the Real World

Incels are not simply online trolls. In fact, as Nagle notes, “this particular brand of computer-enabled detachment easily seeps into a mindset of entitled violence” (Nagle, 64), and

has already sparked a number of mass killings. Violence perpetrated by Elliot Rodger in 2014, Chris Harper-Mercer in 2015, Alek Minassian in 2018, Scott P. Beierle in 2018, and more have been attributed to incels (“Male Supremacy”). The ADL now tracks incidents connected to “the misogynistic incel/manosphere movement as extremist-related killings” (“Murder and Extremism in the United States in 2018”). As the incel movement grows online, so does the number of violent attacks perpetrated by incels in the real world.

Incels constitute a real and present threat to society, and further research on them is imperative. This paper will aim to fill some of the holes in research on incels, and to focus in particular on the connection between social media hate and real-world violence perpetrated by incels.

METHODOLOGY

In order to discover the role of social media in incel violence I underwent a content analysis from two different angles: incel social media, and incel violence.

I chose to do a content analysis of incel social media in order to learn more about incel ideology and how hatred and violence were espoused on these websites. Forums I examined included incels.me, r/trucels, /incels.co/, redpilltalk.com, and lookism.net. I also found incels.wiki, an online encyclopedia created by incels, to be very useful. Although not a discussion forum, incels.wiki helped me understand slang and acronyms used by incels and also clarify a consensus on incel ideology. I also made an effort to find the social media of specific perpetrators of incel violence and study their online activity prior to their attacks as well as the legacy of their violence on the forums. I took screenshots and recorded the content of these posts, noting trends in language and ideology.

In order to examine real world violence perpetrated by incels, I also underwent a content analysis of news articles on incel attacks. I researched every attack with connections to the incel movement to obtain as much information as possible about the perpetrator, their ideology and their social media in order to understand the connection between their online activity and the violence they committed.

After doing my research, I grouped my findings by topic, outlining incel ideology, posts about violence, and noting trends in the online activity of perpetrators of incel violence. I also noted references to specific attacks and perpetrators on incel forums.

In undertaking this exploration, I was aware of my own bias in order to minimize the impact it had on data. I am a peace studies major, a woman, and a feminist, I personally do not

support incels hatred or violence. I attempted to be as objective as possible in my research by being aware of this bias and letting logical relevance of posts and perpetrator information guide my research as opposed to sensationalism or my personal feelings. I was also careful to not wrongly attribute motives behind any violent attack as incel-related but to let the posts and the perpetrators own words speak for themselves. Because activity on these forums has the potential to lead to real world violence, I decided not to make any posts in these forums myself or interact directly with other users for ethical reasons and to minimize my impact on the data.

FINDINGS

The Online Incel Universe

The online spaces that incels occupy are full of unique terminology and concepts that users have developed. A crucial aspect of incel ideology involves trying to quantify unquantifiable things such as love, sex, and physical attractiveness using acronyms and numbers.

For example, LMS stands for “looks money status” (“LMS”), and is a concept suggesting that females are only attracted by looks, money, and status, as opposed to personality, character, or

Board index ‹ Main ‹ Ratings ‹ What PSL am I? looksmaxxing tips gtfih

What PSL am I? looksmaxxing tips gtfih

Post Reply Search this topic... Search

Figure 1

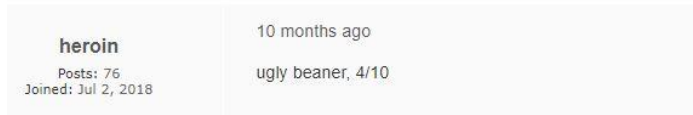
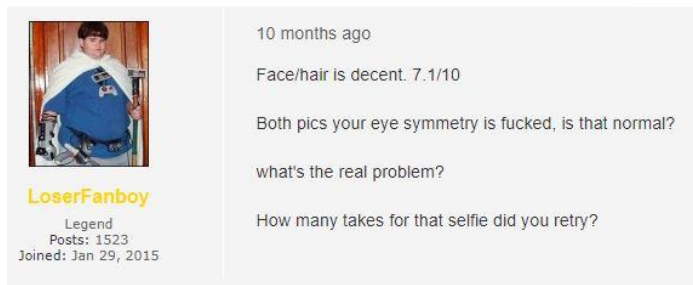


Figure 2

intelligence. SMV is an abbreviation for “sexual marketplace value,” a rating of

physical attractiveness measured on a

decile scale (“Decile”). Incels also refer

to this as a “PSL rating” (“Decile”),

referring to Puahate.com, Sluthate.com,

and Lookism.net. These are popular incel

forums where users often post pictures of

themselves and ask other users to rate

their appearance (see figures 1 and 2).



Figure 3

Exploring the “rate me” threads on these forums indicates that incels have a technical obsession with appearance. Note figure 3, where users have responded to a poll asking why they are incels. Listed as response options are detailed physical characteristics, even specifying particular numbers and units such as penis 13 cm or less. This desire of incels to pinpoint a single quantifiable reason they don’t have a partner indicates their lack of understanding of the organic aspect of human connection. Most incels are introverted and many are on the spectrum (“Asperger’s Syndrome”). Incel psychology is worthy of more in-depth research, but based on this exploration of the forums, it seems incels have a tendency towards a black-and-white worldview, and blame their inceldom on surface level factors.

This is largely based on the belief, referred to by incels as “lookism,” that physical attractiveness is the only factor women use to select partners, and therefore incels are being mistreated due to their low SMV (“Lookism”). This belief system is used by incels both to put themselves down, and to dismiss women as shallow.

Hypergamy

Another important concept central to the incel worldview is the idea of “hypergamy,” or the natural inclination of women to “trade up” when looking for a partner (“Hypergamy”).

According to incels.wiki, “femooids are naturally drawn to a small % of men and are not sexually generous” (“Hypergamy”). This belief holds that not only are women naturally flawed, but that

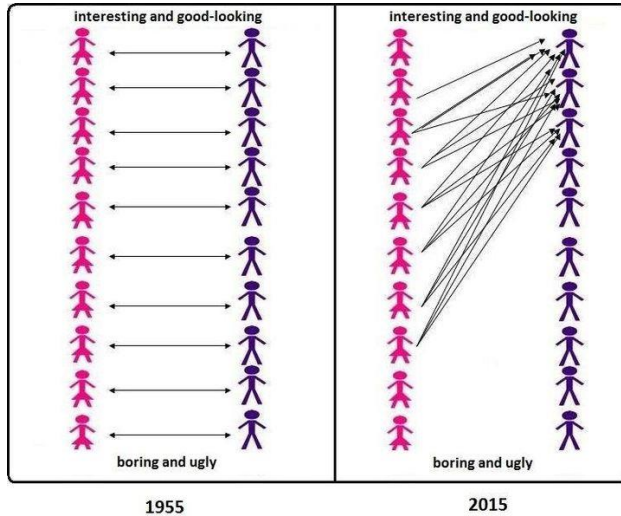


Figure 4

Men Are Nothing More Than Clowns To The Modern Woman

© March 31, 2014 Culture Roosh Edit

I have a bank of rotating stock questions I ask women that let me know how I should proceed with my game. One of the questions I used to ask was “Do you need a man?” Out of the dozens of times I asked it, not a single girl answered yes. Even in Eastern Europe, a woman needs a man as much as a cat needs milk. They would prefer the best man or the best milk, but they can surely live without.

There is definitely not a single woman alive in the Western world who *needs* a man. While in the past a woman had to put forth effort to obtain a husband who would help her survive, today she is protected by a welfare state that ensures she will never go hungry or spend one night on the street. Even a child she has out of wedlock from a drunken night out will not have to suffer from her mistake, and that’s in spite of the fact that many nations already provide her with free contraception to compensate for her lack of judgement in selecting worthy mates.

Figure 5

their sexual liberation is directly harmful to all men who are not in in the top 10% of physical attractiveness. In the mind of the incel, “today, sexuality is very liberated, and women are extremely hypergamous, moreso than men, to the point of causing increasingly rampant inceldom among the male population” (“Hypergamy”).

Like other factions of the alt-right, incels look back with fondness at past decades such as the 50s, albeit for different reasons (see figure 4). For incels, a return to traditional cultural and gender roles, and a limiting of women’s autonomy, would mean that they were guaranteed a mate simply because they were men. The idea that women don’t need them and have the freedom to choose other overs them is central to the rage of the incel (see figure 5).

The Chads and Stacys

Playing into the black-and-white incel worldview is the creation of particular archetypes to categorize people. These characters are, predictably, defined by their sex. Women are either a “Stacy” or a “Becky.” Stacy, a stereotypical mean girl or cheerleader type, is unintelligent, vain,



Figure 6

and entitled, but gets everything she wants due to the fact she is so attractive. According to incels.wiki, “Stacy is the ultimate embodiment of every wicked, depraved aspect of feminine nature,” (“Stacy”). Stacy represents, therefore, how incels view all women: as objects they desire and despise when they cannot have. Referenced less often is the character Becky, a woman who is less attractive than Stacy but still herself—due to hypergamy—interested in only the top 10% of men. This makes her also worthy of incels hatred.

The male equivalent of Stacy is Chad. Chad is the stereotypical alpha male: strong, attractive, confident, desired by women, and sexually active (“Chad”). Chad represents the top 10% of all men and all women are attracted to Chad. Due to the concept of hypergamy, “Chads are the only male beneficiaries of the sexual revolution” (“Chad”). Chad is the polar opposite of a the “beta” incel, in fact, there are countless memes created by incels that compare themselves to Chad and demonstrate Chad’s superiority (see figure 7). Incels spend much of their time on forums either praising Chad for his godlike masculinity or fantasizing about killing Chad. This, along with the incel obsession with rating themselves, reflects a strange fascination among incels



Figure 7

with self-hatred, another area of incel psychology worthy of research. Users on incel forums often reinforce their inferiority in traditional society, which serves to fan the flames of their hatred and incentivize them to commit violence against the “normies,” a term used to describe members of mainstream society (“Normie”).

Incels and Race

See Also [edit | edit source]

- 5'2 balding Indian janitor
- Gymcel
- Mentalcel
- Autistcel
- Elbowcel
- Wristcel
- Acnecel
- Americel
- Arabcel
- Baldcel
- Blackcel

Figure 8

Incels have an interesting perspective on race. Race is often cited as a factor contributing to one’s status as an incel. Like other factions of the Alt-Right, incels have a tendency to hold white supremacist views and use racist language. Ironically, many incels hold African American males in high regard because they believe them to be very masculine. Incels view men of Asian descent as less masculine, calling them “ricecels” or “currycels” (“Ricecel”).

Ethnic Variations [\[edit \]](#) [\[edit source \]](#)

- **Black** - Tyrone
- **Latino** - Rico
- **Asian** - Chang Thunderwang
- **Indian** - Chadpreet
- **French** - Gaston
- **Italian** - Chaddio
- **Portuguese** - Afonso
- **English** - Jason
- **Russian** - Eroha

Figure 9

Much like the incel community itself, incel-created words and characters grow and mutate in corners of the internet breeding endless variations. In fact, there are countless variations of the word incel (see figure 8), and sometimes different names are used to reference Chad based on his race (see figure 9).

There are also other male personas including Brad, Tanner, and Melvin, who fall below Chad on the decile scale (“Chad”). However, despite all these extraneous names and characters, Chad and Stacy are by far the most important characters to the incel ideology and are mentioned most often in online posts.

Incels in the Real World: Elliot Rodger

Numerous violent killings in the US have been linked to Incels; perhaps most notably the Isla Vista killings, perpetrated by Elliot Rodger. On May 23, 2014, 22-year-old Rodger went on a shooting and stabbing spree in Isla Vista California, near the UC Santa Barbara campus. He killed 6 people and injured 14 others before shooting himself (Wright). Before beginning the attack, Rodger uploaded a video entitled “Elliot Rodger’s Retribution” to YouTube, and emailed his manifesto, “My Twisted World,” to his parents. These works detailed his frustration at being a “kissless virgin,” his jealousy of sexually active men, and hatred of women for rejecting him and desire to “punish you all” (Rodger, “Elliot Rodger’s Retribution”).

Rodger’s ideology held that as a virgin, he could not be respected. He regarded women as commodities and believed that the only way he could gain membership to humanity was through obtaining money and women. Rodger believed women were flawed for not noticing him and held them responsible for his unhappiness. Rodger writes extensively about his hatred for happy

couples, and his desire for “hot blonde women,” who never noticed him (Rodger, “My Twisted World”). His manifesto contained detailed plans for what he called his “day of retribution.” Elliot writes, “I will torture some of the good looking people before I kill them, assuming that the good looking ones had the best sex lives. All of that pleasure they had in life, I will punish by bringing them pain and suffering” (Rodger, “My Twisted World”). He also describes what he calls his War on Women, writing “I will punish all females for the crime of depriving me of sex. They have starved me of sex for my entire youth, and gave that pleasure to other men” (Rodger, “My Twisted World”).

Prior to the attacks, Rodger posted similar videos to his YouTube channel lamenting his virginity and espousing hatred for happy couples. He was also active on a forum called PUAhate, which focused on anti-pick-up-artist sentiment but also espoused red pill and incel rhetoric. After Rodger’s attack, PUAhate was shut down and users migrated to Sluthate.com (Wright). In his manifesto, Rodger wrote that the posts he found on PUAhate “confirmed many of the theories I had about how wicked and degenerate women really are” (Rodger, “My Twisted World”). This admonition by Rodger is an example of how online hate forums can encourage users to act on their extreme views.

Elliot Rodger’s Legacy



Figure 10

Incel forums also provided an avenue for Elliot Rodger’s legacy to live on after his death. His Retribution video and subsequent violent actions lead Rodger to be idolized by the incel community. Five years later, these forums are still full of posts heralding him. Many users on incel forums use

Sunday at 1:07 PM

#14

Having 4 daughters is already fucked up, and then finding out they aren't even yours after raising them...He should just go ER on his family tbh 😂

Figure 11

pictures of Rodger as their avatar, post memes or references to him, and use the acronym “ER” to refer to the types of violent acts he committed (see figures 10 and 11).

The favorable reference to Rodger already implies the encouragement of such violence, and many posts go as far as to recommend taking violent action. In figure 11, the poster suggests another user should “go ER” on his family, meaning kill them. While many of these posts may be intended to be funny and not to illicit actual violence, it is important to note that some have serious real-world implications.

Chris Harper-Mercer

In October of 2015, Chris Harper-Mercer killed nine students and injured nine more before shooting himself at Umpqua Community College in Roseburg, Oregon where he was a student (Yardley). Like Rodger, Harper-Mercer wrote a manifesto prior to the shooting. Harper-Mercer wrote how his whole life he felt lonely and hated, “here I am, 26, with no friends, no job, no girlfriend, a virgin. I long ago realized that society likes to deny people like me these things. People who are elite, people who stand with the gods” (Yardley). The elite people like him he referenced were “Elliot Rodger, Vester Flanagan, the Columbine kids, Adam Lanza and Seung Cho” (Yardley). In a blog post discussing Vester Flanagan, who filmed himself murdering two people and uploaded the video to social media earlier in 2015, Harper-Mercer said “seems the more people you kill, the more you’re in the limelight” (“Umpqua Community College Shooting”).

The night before Harper-Mercer’s attack, a poster on an incel thread of 4chan, an anonymous imageboard forum, warned users not to go to school the next day if they live in the

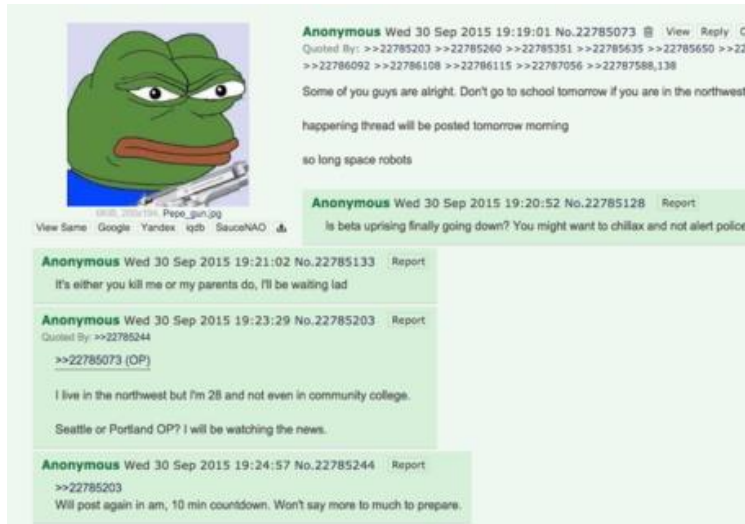


Figure 11

northwest (see figure 12). One responder asked if the beta revolution was finally going down, while others wished the shooter luck and gave him tips on committing a mass shooting. The post is believed by the FBI to have been authored by Harper-Mercer (“Umpqua Community College Shooting”).



Figure 12

After the attack, users on the thread hailed the shooting as a victory for incels, making posts like that of figure 13, where a user says “The Beta Rebellion has begun.”

Beta Uprising Meme



Figure 13

At the time of Harper-Mercer’s attack, the idea of a “Beta Rebellion” was not new in the incelsphere. A popular meme about the “beta uprising” began circulating on a 4chan sub-section called "ROBOT 90001" (/r9k/) shortly after Elliot Rodger’s attacks in 2014. Harper-Mercer posted the meme in his warning post (see figure 14), and after his attack, its use grew exponentially (Beran). The meme (see figure x),

depicting alt-right mascot Pepe the frog, is a rallying cry for “beta” males to rise violently up against the “normies.”

Alek Minassian

On April 23, 2018, Alek Minassian stated in a Facebook post that “the incel rebellion has already begun” (Figure 15), a term synonymous with the Beta Uprising. Minutes later, he



Figure 14

intentionally drove a van into pedestrians on a busy street in Toronto, killing 10 people and injuring 14, the majority of whom were women (Wendling).

Minassian referenced Elliot Rodger in the post, calling him the “Supreme Gentleman,” a nickname Rodger gave himself in his Retribution video (Rodger,

“Elliot Rodger’s Retribution”), indicating Minassian may have been motivated by Rodger, or a

Two months prior to Cruz's attack, William Atchison went on a shooting spree at his former high school in Aztec, New Mexico, killing two students and himself (Zadrozny & Collins). While Atchison also didn't appear to specifically identify as an incel, he did idolize Elliot Rodger along with other mass shooters. For years prior to his death, Atchison posted on alt-right message boards such as 4chan and The Daily Stormer. An active troll, Atchison used usernames including Elliot Rodger, Seung-Hui Cho, Adam Lanza, and "Future Mass Shooter" (Zadrozny & Collins). He posted violent and hateful rants on these sites, and even had an encounter with the FBI in 2016, but they deemed him not a threat (Zadrozny & Collins). This underpins a dilemma law enforcement faces when trying to combat online hate and threats of violence, what should be taken seriously? The internet, including the manosphere, is full of trolls who post hateful and violent messages simply to get a reaction. But some of those posters go on to kill people in the real world.

Scott Beierle

On November 2, 2018, Scott Beierle, entered a yoga studio in Tallahassee, Florida where he shot 6 women and pistol-whipped a man before fatally shooting himself. Two of the women he shot died (Fineout). Beierle did not appear to target anyone specifically in the attack, but had been arrested several times for previous violent actions towards women (Fineout). According to Tallahassee Police Chief Michael DeLeo, "materials authored by him included themes of rape, torture and murder. A website he maintained prompted one woman to alert the FBI months before the shooting" (Fineout). Beierle also had a YouTube channel where he filmed multiple videos expressing racist and misogynistic opinions, in which he called women "sluts," "whores," and "cunts," and talked about ripping their heads off (Beierle). Though there does not appear to

be evidence that Beierle was active on incel forums, his use of social media such as YouTube to espouse violent, misogynistic rhetoric likely played the same role in his escalation that the forums did in the cases of other perpetrators.

Beierle can further be connected to incels as in one of his videos called “Plight of the Adolescent Male,” he mentioned Elliot Rodger, saying “I’d like to send a message now to the adolescent males... that are in the position, the situation, the disposition of Elliot Rodger, of not getting any, no love, no nothing. This endless wasteland that breeds this longing and this frustration. That was me, certainly, as an adolescent,” (Beierle). Due to Beierle’s reference to Rodger, violently misogynistic ideology, and apparent targeting of women in his attack, he is considered an incel on most online forums and news articles.

George Sodini

Beierle’s attack was reminiscent of a mass shooting that occurred in 2009 at an LA Fitness in Collier Township, Pennsylvania. George Sodini, 48, entered a women’s aerobics class where he injured 9, and killed 3 women and himself (Hamill). Reportedly, Sodini left a note inside a gym bag at the scene describing his hatred for women (Hamill). For 9 months prior to the shooting, Sodini was active in an online diary, where he made entries detailing his sexual frustrations and rejections by women. “Girls and women don’t even give me a second look ANYWHERE,” Sodini wrote, “Who knows why? I am not ugly or too weird. No sex since July 1990 either (I was 29)... I dress good, am clean-shaven, bathe, touch of cologne – yet 30 million women rejected me – over an 18 or 25-year period” (Sodini).

Sodini was also active in the pickup artist community, having purchased the book *How to Date Young Women: For Men Over 35* (North) and writing in his diary about his repeated

attempts and techniques to pick up a woman. Pickup artistry, controversial in the incelsphere, often espouses a worldview where women are seen as “targets” for men to coerce into sex (North). This misogynist view of women as commodities, less human than men, contributes both to the incel ideology that women owe men sex, and to the propensity for these men to lash out violently when they are denied something they want by a woman.

Rejection Killings

This phenomenon, known as “rejection killings,” has been occupying a growing space in the public awareness. Countless women are murdered every year by men who’s advances they reject (Valenti). While most perpetrators of these attacks do not identify as incels. Their violent actions, misogynistic rhetoric, hatred of women, and belief in their entitlement to sex mean their rage comes from the same place as incels. Perpetrators of these attacks, as well as perpetrators of rape, domestic abuse, and other forms of violence against women represent a large group of the population susceptible to radicalization by incels or the Alt-Right.

In some cases, anger over rejection by a woman spurs these men not only to lash out violently against the woman, but to commit indiscriminatory mass killings. One example is Dimitrios Pagourtzis, a 17-year-old who killed 10 and wounded 13 at Santa Fe High School in Texas in May of 2018 (Hennessy-Fiske & Pearce). The family of Shana Fisher, one of Pagourtzis’s victims, told the LA Times that Pagourtzis had been harassing their daughter. After months of repeated advances, Fisher stood up to Pagourtzis and told him no in class, a week later Pagourtzis murdered her and 9 others (Hennessy-Fiske & Pearce). Pagourtzis social media was full of violent and neo-Nazi imagery (WQAD Digital Team).

Seung-Hui Cho, who killed 32 people and himself in 2007 at Virginia Tech (CNN Library), is sometimes linked to incel violence. University police stated that prior to the attack Seung-Hui Cho had been accused of harassing two female students (Montagne & Abramson), and a female teacher had raised concerns about Cho's violent writings. About a month before the attacks, Cho reportedly hired an escort who rejected his sexual advances because he was "creeping [her] out" (Parry). Because of this, on many incel websites, Cho is believed to be an incel-ideological killer. Incels.wiki alleges that Cho was rejected by a girl who served him with a restraining order, angering him and inciting him to commit the attack ("Seung-Hui Cho"), this cannot be confirmed by any reliable source. While the extent to which Cho's ideology aligned with that of incels is unknown, his idolization by other incels is significant.

CONCLUSION

Social media has played a crucial role in incel violence by assisting the formation of an incel community, and the idolization of violence within that community.

Social media was key in forming incels as a hate group because it connected them and provided a community conducive to radicalization. Building off of previously outlined research on group polarization theory and differential association theory, this exploration found that these normal social and psychological dynamics were at play in online incel groups. All the incel forums examined were anonymous, and little to no non-incel opinions were expressed there. This supports that incel social media provides an isolated, anonymous community and presents users with more definitions favorable to committing hate crimes than unfavorable.

These dynamics may have a particularly strong impact on incels, as they tend to be antisocial and are likely not active members of real-life social groups. Therefore, the internet is functioning as their primary social circle. As evidenced through the endless subforums, memes, language, and characters discovered through this paper's content analysis, there is a whole world that exists online that is a reality for these users and needs to be taken seriously. This online reality has created an incel echo-chamber where users are being radicalized at an increased rate than in real-world hate groups.

These findings also suggest that without social media, the incel group would not have formed to the extent it has. Due to social taboos and the tendency of incels to be reclusive, it is unlikely that incels would realistically have found each other and organized in the real world. While individuals may still have held incel viewpoints, they would not have had the mechanism to connect with each other, form an ideological group, and be radicalized without social media.

Not only was social media crucial in forming the incel community, it has also played a key role in inciting members of the community to commit violence in the real world. Elliot Rodger's attack legitimized incels as a hate group with violent, real-world actors. His violence was positively reinforced in incel forums and was part of a trend of killers being idolized online. In these cases, the victims are forgotten, while the perpetrator is remembered and becomes a household name. Previously outlined research found fame to be a motivating factor for members of hate groups to commit violence. This exploration supports that fame is a key incentive in incel violence. Nearly every perpetrator of incel related violence examined idolized previous attackers, some even explicitly stating the connection between committing mass killings and becoming famous. The fact that previous incel attackers gained significant fame and adoration provides a model for incels where acting on their hatred in the real world gets them the love and respect they crave, as well as the revenge against mainstream society that they want.

Perpetrators like Minassian and Harper-Mercer posted on incel forums idolizing Rodger and announced their attacks, then committed mass killings and were themselves idolized on the forums, further legitimizing the violence espoused on incel social media. Social media and online hate groups should be treated as seriously as real-world hatred as they have been shown to be just as lethal.

Finally, incels have the potential to radicalize or merge with other far right hate groups. Characteristics of the incel movement, such as the anger of white male, idolization of guns and violence, red pill subculture, and use of online hate and memes, are attractive to the Alt-Right. The fact that non incels such as Cruz and Atchison posted to social media idolizing Rodger, indicates the ability of the incel movement to incite those with adjacent ideologies to commit violence. The findings of this exploration suggest that incel violence is part of the same wave of

hatred as other misogynistic attacks such as rejection killings and sexual violence, altogether representing a present and growing threat. Incels are only going to increase in numbers and violence, and their use of social media is a key aspect of this. This exploration concludes that further research is imperative into incel psychology, the effectiveness of censoring online hate in preventing violence, and interpreting online threats.

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APPENDIX A : CONTENT ANALYSIS

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APPENDIX B: IMAGES

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