

Opinion – Incels: New Political Actors Emerging from the Manosphere?

Written by Shannon Zimmerman

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<https://www.e-ir.info/2024/06/24/opinion-incels-new-political-actors-emerging-from-the-manosphere/>

SHANNON ZIMMERMAN, JUN 24 2024

The deadliest vehicle-ramming attack in Canada was preceded by an opaque Facebook post that called for an 'Incel Rebellion'. Just minutes later, a young man drove a rented van down a busy Toronto sidewalk, killing 10 people, and injuring 15 others. This tactic has been advocated for by al-Qaeda, endorsed by ISIS, and popular with other jihadist terrorists. In this case, however, the attack was undertaken by someone holding an entirely different ideology, the violent misogyny associated with the involuntary celibates or Incels.

Incels are a group of "heterosexual men who blame women and society for their lack of romantic success." Originally an online lonely hearts club for men and women, Incels as a group have evolved to become a pessimistic, misogynistic, male-only micro-culture. Lacking a clear political motive, early Incel attacks were not identified as terrorism. However, as the movement has grown and matured, their political motives – and impact – are beginning to coalesce into a nascent political platform centred on justifying male dominance and rolling back women's rights. The group thrives in the Manosphere, a series of difficult-to-moderate websites, online chat rooms, and blogs that create a digital ecosystem where misogyny and anti-feminism are the norm. Graeme Wood writes: "These communities become, like ISIS, instruments of conscience-annihilation, and the lonely losers within them become desensitized and, ultimately, morally inverted."

In order to make sense of the world in which they find themselves, Incels have crafted a worldview that organises society into a sexual hierarchy based on physical characteristics. Attractive men and women or 'Chads' and 'Stacy's' are at the top, average men and women or 'normies' and 'Becky's' are in the middle, and the unlucky genetic losers or 'Incels' are at the bottom. This unequal sexual hierarchy is the result of feminism and the sexual revolution, which has allowed women more agency in who they chose as sexual partners. Women – who incels view as exploitative, shallow, manipulative and essentially sub-human – use access to sex as a lever of control, giving sex to attractive Chads, bartering sex to normies in return for material gains, and denying sex to Incels completely.

Priced out of the sexual marketplace, Incels believe feminism and its benefactors are denying them their entitled access to female bodies whenever they want, and preventing them from achieving the ideal life as described by patriarchal ideals. This worldview has come to be known as TheRedPill. Incels who have taken TheRedPill have become enlightened to the existing gynarchy we live in, where feminism exploits and oppresses men. Everyone else is considered BluePilled (i.e., oblivious to the unequal system and the incels plight.)

To help them navigate the feminist gynarchy they feel trapped in, Incels have embraced a suite of strategies known as 'hope, cope, or rope.' 'Hope' is the idea that there is some opportunity for Incels to increase their desirability. This includes working on their appearance (looksmaxxing), going to the gym (gymmaxxing), earning more money (moneymaxxing), or even getting a pet (petmaxxing). This option gives individual Incel's some agency but does nothing to address their broader systemic grievances. Incels can also 'cope' with their situation by distracting themselves from it by playing video games, spending time on Incel forums, or consuming pornography, thereby reducing its negative impact on their lives. The result of this strategy, however, is continued isolation and loneliness. The third strategy of 'rope' highlights the pessimism and hopelessness that underly much Incel ideology. This option refers to an individual giving up all efforts to make their situation better; that is, to LDAR (lay down and rot) or commit

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suicide.

For most Incels, these three strategies are the cornerstone of how they survive in a world they find, at best, unfairly aligned against them, and at worst, unbearable. For a small number of Incels, however, a fourth option has emerged – rebellion. This is when Incels translate their violent online fantasies into real life actions to make the Incel plight visible to the rest of the world.

The idea of an Incel or beta rebellion, is loosely based around the idea that

If we [Incels] can't solve our problems we must DESTROY our problems... One day incels will realize their true strength and numbers, and will overthrow this oppressive feminist system.

Initially a fantasy, this idea has become more salient as Incel communities have evolved, grown, and become increasingly extreme through the emergence of TheBlackpill. The BlackPill maintains Incels' RedPilled worldview but rejects any aspects of self-help, feeling that no amount of effort will make up for bad genetics. For those who are BlackPilled, the only solution is societal level change.

Blackpilled Incels' desire for collective action has triggered the formation of a nascent socio-political ideology that can drive unified, and presumably violent, political action. Previously, most discussions around Incel violence stopped short of identifying it as terrorism. This is because, at first glance, Incels lack a political agenda. The rhetoric on Incel forums revolves around airing of personal grievances and rants against women, feminism, and their supporters. But even here, the seeds of a violent political ideology are prevalent. Incels want normies (i.e., anyone who is not them) to suffer, and live in constant fear. Some Incels overtly advocate for committing acts of violence against civilians, encouraging each other to "go ER" or be a "hERo" (emphasising the initials of Elliot Rodger, a well-known Incel who murdered six in Isla Vista California). As one Incel succinctly put it: "[T]his is a political movement, friend. We talk about how people act and how they should be governed, that is politics." What makes this political movement particularly dangerous is that BlackPilled Incels feel like they have nothing left to live for. They are, therefore, often willing to die in their efforts to terrorise society into addressing their plight. By imposing their ideology on others through the commission or threat of violence, Incels' violent misogyny becomes intensely political.

Even terrorism experts initially sceptical of the threat posed by Incels now acknowledge that they need to be taken seriously by law enforcement and the counterterrorism community. Beginning in 2018, the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), and the Anti-Defamation League all began to track male supremacy as an extremist ideology. In January 2019, a young man was arrested for planning a massacre at a Women's March. The day before he had posted on Facebook, "I'm planning on shooting up a public place... killing as many girls as I see." He eventually pled guilty to a charge of attempted threat of terrorism, in what might be the first US terrorism-related sentence given for a crime driven by Incel ideology. In 2020, a teenage boy who identified as an Incel was charged with terrorism after stabbing a woman to death in Canada. Royal Canadian Mounted Police stressed that "Terrorism comes in many forms and it's important to note that it is not restricted to any particular group, religion or ideology." In February 2021, the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation acknowledged that the left-right spectrum of terrorist ideologies was no longer fit-for-purpose and there was a need to recognise niche issues as drivers of terrorist acts. Here, he specifically mentioned violent misogynists such as Incels. This emerging recognition that Incel violence counts as political violence, indicates that this is a group of actors with an emerging political footprint that must be considered.

About the author:

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