



PORNOGRAPHY IN THE INCELOSPHERE

CultureReframed

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Introduction

There is now a voluminous body of social scientific knowledge about what Levin and Nolan (2017) refer to as “the violence of hate,”¹ one that focuses primarily on face-to-face and online crimes against certain racial/ethnic and religious groups and members of the LGBTQ+ community. There is, however, as Bates (2020) puts it, “an extremism that nobody is talking about” and that is “men who hate women” (p. 2). She also reminds us that:

We do not use the word “terrorism” when describing a crime of mass murder committed by a white man with the explicit intention of creating terror and spreading hatred against a specific demographic group – even though that is the definition of terrorism – if the demographic in question is women... We do not call his online journey a “radicalization” or use the word “extremism” to label the online communities in which he immersed himself, though we would reach for those words in an instant when describing other, similar types of crimes, committed by other, different types of men. We do not examine what led him to commit those acts or how he became so full of hate. (p. 3)

A growing number of right-wing factions found in the digital world are extensively misogynistic and promote male entitlement (Schwartz, 2021). One prime example is the *incel movement*. The hate spewed by incels predated the internet, but this movement was splintered until the emergence of contemporary technology. The internet now not only facilitates easy access to peaceful, like-minded people, but it has also, to a certain extent, created an environment that normalizes the hatred of women and racial/ethnic minority groups. Though the incel community is, as uncovered by Bates (2020) and others, “the most violent corner of the so-called manosphere,” most people have never heard of incels and thus much more political, scholarly, and media attention to the harms caused by them is fundamentally important (p. 7).

Some research suggests a strong association between violence against women, pornography, and incel misogyny. The main objective of this white paper is to review the extant social scientific literature on this connection. Prior to doing so, it is first necessary to supply a brief history of the incel movement, also known as *the incelosphere* (Center for Countering Digital Hate, 2022).

What Are Incels?

The term *incel* was originally created in the 1990s by a Canadian woman who developed a website for lonely singles (DeKeseredy & Rennison, 2019; Yang & Gillis, 2018). It now means “involuntary celibate,” and members of the incel movement are patriarchal men who assert that they cannot have sex with women but want to. An incel, according to Incels.Me, is a “person who is not in a relationship nor has had sex in a significant amount of time, despite numerous attempts” (p. 1). Incels are also anti-feminist men who have sharp disdain for “Chads” and “Stacys.” Chads are, as Incel.Me describes them, “sexually satisfied men, charismatic, tall, good looking, confident, muscular,” and “Stacys” are stereotypically attractive women who reject incels’ sexual advances (p. 1). Further, the incel movement consists of what Kimmel (2017) defines as a “new breed of angry white men” who are experiencing *aggrieved entitlement*:

It is that sense that those benefits to which you believed yourself entitled have been snatched away from you by unseen forces larger and more powerful. You feel yourself to be the heir to a great promise, the American dream, which has turned into an impossible fantasy for the very people who were supposed to inherit it. (p. 18, *emphasis in original*)

Incels declare that:

Inceldom has no relation with violence, misogyny, or illegal activities of any kind. Every once in a while, when a tragedy happens, the term incel is thrown around and we get an influx of guests. We do not advocate any illegal activity, nor do we allow it on the site. (Incel.Me, 2018, p. 1)

Yet, as the Center for Countering Digital Hate (2022) uncovered, incels and other online misogynistic all-male groups “argue with each other, support each other, share ideas, promote each other’s lexicon and values. In short, they are brothers-in-arms in a war against women” (p. 7). Also, countless online postings by incel members praise mass murderer Elliot Rodger, who is a hero and/or martyr in the incelosphere. For example, Alek Minassian, another mass murderer to be briefly discussed later in this section, ended a Facebook post before his 2018 rampage with the statement “All hail the Supreme Gentleman Elliot Rodger” (CNN U.S., 2018, p. 1).

On May 23, 2014, in Isla Vista, California, Elliot Rodger murdered a total of six people and injured 13 others before killing himself. Prior to shooting four people outside a sorority house and killing two of them, who were women, he uploaded a video to YouTube titled “Elliot Rodger’s Retribution,”² a misogynistic diatribe that includes these statements:

Girls gave their affection and sex and love to other men, but never to me. I'm 22-years-old and still a virgin. I've never even kissed a girl. I've been through college for two and a half years, more than that actually, and I'm still a virgin. It's not fair. You girls have never been attracted to me. I don't know why you girls aren't attracted to me, but I will punish you all for it. It's an injustice, a crime, because I don't know what you don't see in me. I'm the perfect guy, and yet you throw yourselves at all these obnoxious men instead of me – the supreme gentlemen. I will punish all of you for it. If I can't have you girls, I will destroy you.

You forced me to suffer all my life, and now I'll make you suffer. I've waited a long time for this. I'll give you exactly what you deserve, all of you. All you girls who rejected me and looked down upon me and, you know, treated me like scum while you give yourselves to other men. All of you men, for living a better life than me – all of you sexually active men, I hate you. I hate all of you and I can't wait to give you exactly what you deserve: utter annihilation.

Some of Rodger's words resemble those of many men who commit *intimate femicide* during or after the process of separation/divorce (DeKeseredy & Rennison, 2019): "If I can't have you, no one will" (Polk, 2003, p. 134). Intimate femicide is the killing of females by male partners with whom they have, have had, or want to have, a sexual and/or emotional relationship (Ellis & DeKeseredy, 1997).

Returning to Alek Minassian, in Toronto, Ontario, Canada on April 23, 2018, he drove a rented van onto a curb on Young Street, south of Finch Avenue, and deliberately ran down pedestrians, resulting in the worst mass murder thus far in Toronto's history (Yang & Gillis, 2018). His attack left 10 people dead (8 of whom are women) and 16 people injured. Since then, dozens more have been murdered by self-proclaimed incels around the world. Moreover, the Center for Countering Digital Hate's (2022) recent study of the incel forum found that its members post about rape every 29 seconds. The Center's study will also be referred to in subsequent sections of this paper, but the report based on it does not name the incel forum it examined to "avoid giving it publicity" (p. 6). The Center, however, claims that this forum is the largest one online.

The hatred of women is just one element of the incel ideology. Incels have strong connections to other extreme right-wing movements like those promoting unbridled gun ownership, homophobia, racist discourses and practices, and policies and laws aimed at ending women's control over their reproductive health (DeKeseredy, 2022). Below are some of the most popular threads located on the incel forum, which was founded in 2017 by Diego Joaquin Galante (also known as "Sergeant Incel") (Nashrulla, 2019) and studied by the Center for Countering Digital Hate (2022):

- American culture is centered around n*ggers.
- Society should return to tradition.
- I just want to go back to exploring new lands, killing enemies and raping countless foids.³
- With religion collapsing, foids celebrate the new age of globohomo, drag fags, pedos and zoophiles.
- Earth needs an extinction event.
- I hate modern day.
- Women, like most western governments, want to uphold the current hierarchy, want you to have nothing, and want you to be happy with it.
- It's one of the Jews' tactics to control the world. And you can thank the Jews for destroying and altering this culture into a negative connotation of its former self.
- I think every virgin male should be granted a few guns, licenses, and unlimited van rentals paid for by the government.
- The future is masculinity – pure white masculinity. No weakness, no vulnerability, no femininity, no sex. Just pure, glorious strength and might as we conquer the cosmos and enslave it to us. (*cited in Jgin, 2023, p. 1*)

Social Media & Incels: What is Used & What is Posted?

What types of social media are used by incels and what do they post? Turning to the first question, the Center for Countering Digital Hate (2022) examined the number of links to websites from the incel forum between January 2021 and July 2022 and uncovered that links to YouTube were posted over 14,000 times, making it the most linked-to site on the platform. Reddit ranked second with over 5,000 links and links to other popular social media networks were also frequently uploaded, with 1,149 links to Twitter and 862 to TikTok respectively. Incel communities are also on Facebook, 4chan, and on various sites run by incels themselves. Note, too, that the Center for Countering Digital Hate found that the U.S. accounted for the vast majority (43.8%) of web traffic to the incel forum, followed by the United Kingdom (7.5%) and Poland (4.2%). Moreover, the forum has 17,000 members and receives approximately 2.6 million visitors each month.

What do incels post? The best answers to date are also provided by the Center for Countering Digital Hate (2022), which found that the incel forum is a “self-proclaimed heterosexual male-only forum” that “prohibits women and the LGBTQ+ community and non-incels from attaining membership” (p. 12). What is more:

Over a fifth of the posts in the forum feature misogynist, racist, antisemitic or anti-LGBTQ+ language, with 16% of posts featuring misogynist slurs (p. 6).

Forum threads are mainly centered around frustration about relationships and the “black pill ideology,” which revolves around the core belief that the ability to establish romantic relationships is determined by appearance and therefore genetics. (p. 11)

Tranchese and Sugiura’s (2021) linguistic analysis of the subreddit, called r/incels, (a specific online community and the posts associated with, on the social media website Reddit), shows that there is also a strong connection between incel and mainstream pornography discourse. More specifically, these researchers found that in both discourses:

[M]uch of the denigration of women focuses on their sexuality. Their imagery and language present women as objects who deserve and enjoy sexual abuse and submission, and sex (particularly through the penis and semen) as a weapon to inflict these and express their hate. On r/incels the fact that hatred is the motivation behind the abuse is explicit. In pornography, this motive is often covert and consequently, easier to justify... [T]he men in pornography are the embodiment of Chads. They have constant access to women despite hating them and treating them badly. While incels despise and envy Chads for this, for them these men (and their dominant sexuality) are the only way to obtain their revenge. What all these men have in common is the wish to see women suffer through sex, while drawing pleasure and satisfaction from it. (p. 2728)

Before more closely examining the connection between the incelsphere, porn, and violence against women, it should be made explicit, once again, that violent porn is now mainstream. Routine features of mainstream porn are painful anal penetration, brutal gang rape, and men slapping, pushing, gagging, choking, and pulling women’s hair while they penetrate them orally, vaginally, and anally (*Bridges et al., 2010; DeKeseredy et al., 2023; Fritz et al., 2020*). Males constitute most of the perpetrators in porn videos and the targets of their physical and verbal aggression are primarily female. What is more, female performers often show pleasure or respond neutrally to male aggression.

Pornography Use and Distribution in the Incelosphere: What We Know and What We Don't Know

As stated in the white paper, *Understanding the Harms of Pornography: The Contributions of Social Scientific Knowledge* (DeKeseredy, 2020), published by Culture Reframed, it is problematic to argue that there is an automatic direct connection between porn and violence against women. Some unknown but presumably large numbers of porn users do not abuse women. Similarly, as Tranchese and Sugiura (2021) remind us, "It is perhaps unattainable to establish with absolute certainty... if Incels have learned about sex and women through pornography or if pornography is their weapon against women. Nonetheless, they reveal how both practices contribute to expanding and reinforcing each other's discourses and range of misogynistic practices" (pp. 2711-2712). Further, what is indisputable, as also noted by Tranchese and Sugiura, is that "Pornographic acts also have tangible effects on real people..." (p. 2714). In fact, in the words of Bridges et al. (2016, p. 1), "Research on pornography and violence against women in particular is long-standing, robust, and generally points to a positive association between the two..."

What porn and incel culture definitely have in common is that both degrade women and present them as objects who deserve and enjoy sexual abuse. As well, sex is presented in both discourses as a weapon to express hatred of women (Tranchese & Sugiura, 2021). For instance, porn actor and producer Bill Margold said, "the most violent we can get is the cum shot on the face. Men get off behind that, because they get even with the women they can't have (Dines, 2010, p. xxvi). Coming back to Tranchese & Sugiura, "these words resonate with incels' desire to cause women pain for preferring Chads to them and use sex to get even with women that they feel they will never have" (p. 2728). Their claim is exemplified by this common invective featured on incel message boards: "Society has become a place of worship for females and it's so fucking wrong, they're not Gods, they are just fucking cum-dumpsters" (quoted in Tolentino, 2018, p. 1). Incels, too, often use other language pervasive in porn, such as labeling women as "whores," "cumrags," and they describe them as being "ploughed by cocks" (Hart & Huber, 2023).

While we know incel discourses resemble those prominently featured in porn, there is still much we do not know about the connection between porn and the incelosphere. Consider these unanswered questions raised by Hart and Huber (2023):

- What kinds of pornography are those engaging with the incel community using?
- How does their engagement with pornography influence their views of women and their engagement with the incel community?
- How does this compare with pornography use in wider society?
- Does pornography play an important bonding role in the incel community (p. 10)?

The only useful way of answering these questions is, as also noted by Hart and Huber (2023), to ask members of the incel community about their use and distribution of porn, how it relates to their incel identity, and how porn contributes to their face-to-face and online treatment of women. This is not to say, though, that there are no other types of research that indicate porn plays a role in the incelsphere. Indeed, interdisciplinary empirical and theoretical work on incels is rapidly expanding, and we are starting to see some research on male peer support in the incelsphere (DeKeseredy, 2022). Male peer support is defined as the attachments to male peers and the resources they provide that encourage and legitimize woman abuse (DeKeseredy, 1988). Further, as described in previous white papers published by Culture Reframed (DeKeseredy, 2020, 2023), the correlation between porn consumption and male youth and emerging adult violence against women in many contexts is related to male peer support. Thus, there is no reason to believe that this linkage is not endemic to the incel community. Actually, what Bowker (1983) said about all-male patriarchal subcultures 40 years ago still holds true today:

This is not a subculture that is confined to a single class, religion, occupational grouping or race. It is spread throughout all parts of society. Men are socialized by other subculture members to accept common definitions of the situation, norms, values, and beliefs about male dominance and the necessity of keeping their wives in line. These violence-supporting social relations may occur at any time and in any place. (pp. 135-136)

Research on male peer support processes inside the incelsphere is in its infancy, but based on the limited amount of empirical work done so far, we can conclude that there are a variety of sociological and social psychological processes by which male peers influence men to abuse women, but, based on the writings of male peer support theorists DeKeseredy and Schwartz (2016), it appears that incels encourage, justify, and support violence against women as a means of repairing the damage done to their masculinity by “Stacys” and other women who fail to live up to their patriarchal standards (Manne, 2018). Incel male peer support influences men to “lash out” against women they cannot control (Bourgeois, 1995), and their digital communication patterns are effective ways to do so. Consider that the Center for Countering Digital Hate (2022) found that incel forum members post about rape every 29 minutes and 89% of posters are supportive of such violent discussions. As Tranchese and Sugiura (2021), discovered:

What incels really hate – and what they blame feminists for – is women who refuse them, women who sleep with several men but say “no” to incels. It is these women who receive most online (sexualized) abuse (Lewis et al., 2017), arguably in an attempt to control them through silencing. This generates a paradoxical situation, in which derogatory terms that refer to “promiscuous” women are not being used for women who participate in sexual acts with numerous men, but for women who say “no.” (p. 2723)

There are various types of male peer support in offline all-male patriarchal cohorts, but decades of research show that the most powerful form is *informational support*, which is guidance and advice that influences men to abuse women. Male peer support theory sees such informational support as a motivational factor, allowing men to develop pro-abuse attitudes and behaviors as a result of the encouragement and support of other males, if not the broader culture at large (*Brubaker, 2019*). However, in the case of the incel forum, the millions of visits greatly exceed the number of “conversations” driven by a small number of “powerusers.” For instance, the Center for Countering Digital Hate (2002) found that since January, 2021, postings were driven mainly by a “dedicated core” of roughly 400 such users who made nearly three-quarters of all posts.

It is not uncommon for patriarchal male peer support networks like the incel community to have a small number of charismatic leaders who, like former President Donald Trump, embody hegemonic masculine qualities and offer the bulk of informational support (*DeKeseredy, 2019; Joosse & Willey, 2020*). Hegemonic masculinity is the dominant form of masculinity in the U.S. and in many, if not most, other countries (*Connell, 1995; Katz, 2016*), which is not surprising because most societies around the world are patriarchal (*DeKeseredy, 2021; Renzetti, 2018*). The basic components of hegemonic masculinity are: (a) avoid all things feminine; (b) restrict emotions severely; (c) show toughness and aggression; (d) exhibit self-reliance; (e) strive for achievement and status; (f) exhibit nonrelational attitudes toward sexuality; and (g) engage in homophobia (*Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; DeKeseredy, 2017; Levant, 1994; Ptacek, 2023; Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 1997*). Masculinities studies show that men are encouraged to live up to these ideals and are sanctioned for not doing so (*DeKeseredy, 2019; West & Zimmerman, 1987*). Furthermore, following arguments made by masculinities theorist James Messerschmidt (1993), participating in the incel forum “is a resource, when other resources are unavailable, for accomplishing masculinity” (p. 85).

Not only do powerusers’ peers publicly support the claim that sexual assault and other forms of abuse are legitimate means of reasserting patriarchy (*Dragiewicz, 2008*), they also serve as role models because some of them engage in lethal and nonlethal forms of violence against women “they feel have wronged them” (*Bates, 2020, p. 182*). The precise number of incels who physically hurt women is thus far unclear, but what is known is that much of incel violence is digital and involves using image-based sexual abuse (sometimes referred to as revenge porn) against women they dislike, who left or broke up with them, or who try to stop their misogynist activities (*DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2016; Salter & Crofts, 2015*).⁴ For example, some studies reviewed by Henry et al. (2021) found that there are all-male forums that “specialize” in the sharing and trading of non-consensual photos and/or videos taken of current or former female partners.

A more recent trend in image-based sexual abuse is, using artificial intelligence, posting *deepfake pornography*. There is a major demand for such porn, as revealed by a growing number of online communities, forums, services, and websites (*Adjer et al., 2019*).

Deepfaking entails replacing the face of one person with another one's to make it appear that a person is featured in a porn video when they are not (*Henry et al., 2021; Okolie, 2023*). Moreover, some deepfake tools are used to "spit out" images depicting rape and child abuse because no one was hurt in the creation of such content, and thus it does not violate any laws (*Hunter, 2023*).

Incel communities, of course, are not the only online male peer support subcultures. Extensive research done by DeKeseredy (2022), Dragiewicz (2008, 2011, 2018), and others (e.g., Kimmel, 2017) show that conservative men's and fathers' rights groups encourage men to hurt their ex-partners by portraying image-based sexual abuse and physical violence as acceptable solutions to their problems. Reflect, too, on the overwhelming amount of male misogynistic social media responses to actor Johnny Depp's defamation trial against his ex-wife Amber Heard. There was a concerted anti-feminist effort to ferociously mobilize against Heard, and as Scott (2022) observes, Depp's legal victory is also that of angry white men. "The rage of men whose grievances are inchoate and inexhaustible found expression in a 58-year-old movie star's humiliation of his 36-year-old former wife" (p. 1).

In sum, the research reviewed here tells us much, but there are still many unanswered questions and new avenues to explore. As well, it is always important to keep in mind that the incelosphere is a reflection of patriarchal offline environments. The organic growth of the internet, including its harmful elements, has globalized access to misogynistic hate discourses in converged online and offline environments. Incel messages can be distributed to millions of people around the world in seconds due to faster means of disseminating digital media, as the internet facilitates access for those seeking communication with like-minded patriarchal men.

Still, based on their study of the connections between incels and porn, Tranchese and Sugiura (2021) are right to direct us to the fact that while incel electronic communication processes reflect offline or "real world" male peer support patterns and "enable the exponential replication of misogyny by inventing, spreading, and reproducing techniques to attack women (online and offline), online misogyny is not a product of the technology, but a result of the society that shaped it" (p. 2729). In fact, just as racism is deeply rooted in the legal system, so is misogyny. Feminist legal scholar Julie Suk (2023), for instance, shows that:

Misogyny is conventionally understood as woman-hatred, but it is much more, and much worse for women, than hatred. Misogyny is the set of [legal] practices that keep women down in order to keep everyone and everything else up... Even in liberal constitutional democracies that celebrate the rule of law, enforce legal gender equality, criminalize violence against women, and prohibit sex discrimination in the workplace and schools, the state fails persistently to investigate, punish, eradicate, and prevent

violence against women, from rape to femicide to workplace sexual harassment to campus sexual assault. The law enables men, and the society designed to fulfill their vision, to benefit from keeping women down, albeit in ways that are hidden from view. (pp. 2-3)

Patriarchy, too, is an “age-old structure” born long before the advent of the internet (Gilligan & Snider, 2018), and men have been physically, sexually, psychologically, and economically abusing women for centuries (DeKeseredy & Donnermeyer, 2023; Dobash & Dobash, 1979). Miller (2017) reminds us that, “Patriarchy... as embedded in the Old and New Testaments in the Bible and in Roman legal precepts, has been a powerful organizing concept with which social order has been understood, maintained, enforced, contested, adjudicated and dreamt about over two millennia in Western history” (p. 3). Men who hate women and the violence they use against women are not brand-new problems and the incelosphere exacerbates a long-standing condition. It is, then, in this current era, “patriarchy enhancing... and maintains or strengthens the given patriarchal order of a culture or society” (Applin et al., 2023, p. 1103).

What is to be Done About the Incelosphere?

One highly problematic answer to this question is to use another new technology – sex robots – which *New York Times* columnist Ross Douthat (2018) views as solutions to misogyny and related violent crimes committed by incels. Actually, artificially intelligent robots are highly likely to intensify male sexual violence (DeKeseredy & Rennison, 2019). Take what happened to “Samantha,” a sex robot displayed at the 2017 Arts Electronic Festival in Linz, Austria. She was so savagely attacked by a group of men and “badly soiled” that she had to be sent back to Barcelona for “repairs and cleaning after being left so filthy and broken by the never-ending male attention” (Barrie, 2017, p. 1). In other words, Samantha was gang raped. This behavior is labeled *streamlining* in South Africa. It is:

essentially a rape by two or more perpetrators. It is an unambiguously defiling and humiliating act, and is often a punishment, yet at the same time, it is an act that is often regarded by its perpetrators as rooted in a sense of entitlement. (Jewkes et al., 2006, p. 2950)

Sex robots are too new to allow for properly designed social scientific studies, but there are strong indicators that they eroticize non-consent (Norris, 2017). For example,

U.S. robotics company True Companion sells a sex robot – “Roxy” - with programmable personalities, including “Frigid Farah,” which allows it to resist men’s sexual advances. According to Noel Sharkey, a professor of artificial intelligence at the University of Sheffield, the idea is that “robots would resist your sexual advances so that you could rape them” (*cited in Shead, 2017, p. 1*). To make matters worse, there are now child sex robots and sex dolls on the market, and some academics (*e.g., Cheok & Levy, 2017*) claim that they could provide men with legitimate outlets for their criminal sexual desires. This is especially troubling considering incel communities promote and tolerate pedophilia. Truth be told, over a quarter of incel forum users have posted pedophilia keywords and discussions of pedophilia show that 53% are supportive (*Center for Countering Digital Hate, 2022*).

Unsurprisingly, sex robots also promote the sexual objectification of women. They leave men:

with the impression that a good woman is just like their robotic sex toys; compliant, always ready to have sex and have a perfect, in their opinion, body... It teaches them that if a woman does not act like their ideal, desirable sex toy that they are not to be treated as equals to robots. As a result, the robots will be treated more humanely than women will be. (*Kezer, 2019, p. 1*)

Again, more research is necessary, but it is fair to hypothesize that the negative consequences of using sex robots will greatly outweigh the positive ones. For example, millions of people have grown up viewing online porn, and large numbers of them now regard violent sex, in which women are humiliated and defiled, as normal (*DeKeseredy et al., 2023; Foubert, 2022*). It is terrifying to think that, as Kleeman (*2017*) surmises, “Similarly, the generation growing up when sex robots are commonplace might see brutally selfish sex as both desirable and achievable” (*p. 1*).

There are much more effective and safer ways of responding to online incel misogyny, and the first step is to recognize it as form of violent right-wing extremism, one that is strongly connected to other dangerous far-right organizations (*Bates, 2020; DeKeseredy, 2022b*). The Canadian government has even gone so far as to categorize incel violence as terrorism and law enforcement officials based in Canada and in the U.S. include incel activities in their threat assessments (*New America, 2023*).

The second and equally important step is to develop a coalition of broader progressive constituencies that prioritize gender and sexuality as well as race/ethnicity and social class in their efforts to curb hate crime. Reducing gun use and ownership, mass shootings, participation in racist and anti-immigration activities, and threats to women’s access to the complete range of reproductive rights means using resistance initiatives that connect

the incelosphere to other forms of right-wing extremism (*DeKeseredy, 2022*). This requires a multi-pronged approach, one that must involve a dedicated effort to develop “a new politics of sameness,” a type of politics that recognizes that a diverse range of people, regardless of their gender, sexual identity, or race/ethnicity are subordinated to the capitalist, patriarchal, and racist motives of neo-liberalism (*Winlow et al., 2019, p. 43*).

Progressive coalitions called for here recognize that there is a strong association between membership in organizations seeking to reassert male supremacy and intimate violence against women and girls (*Belew & Gutierrez, 2021; Dhaliwal & Kelly, 2020; DeKeseredy & Rennison, 2019; Dragiewicz, 2018*). Violence against women, in fact, is the background for a host of other harms caused by alternative right coalitions and other major social problems that plague contemporary society (e.g., poverty) (*DeKeseredy, 2022; DePrince, 2022*). It is also a social issue that helps to energize institutional change and helps break down boundaries across organizations, government agencies, and social sectors. Violence against women as a social issue is a catalyst for discovering new ways of working together and helping one another, and it encourages people to see how we are all affected by woman abuses and how we directly or indirectly contribute to its perpetration through our values, attitudes, and behaviors (*DeKeseredy & MacLeod, 1997*).

Directly relevant to the role of patriarchal male peer support examined in this white paper is the value of “men who hate men who hate women” (*Bates, 2020*), also termed in some academic and activist circles as feminist, pro-feminist, or anti-sexist men (*DeKeseredy et al., 2017; Messner et al., 2015*). Such men are involved in the ongoing process of changing themselves, self-examination, and self-discovery (*DeKeseredy et al., 2017*), with the ultimate goal of shedding their “patriarchal baggage” (*Thorne-Finch, 1992*). Though constituting a relatively small but growing group, these men work individually and collectively to change other men. Depending on their time and energy, some feminist men work on the dual level of changing individual people and social institutions. Others have limited goals. Most limited of all are those who only privately support the principles of feminism and restrict their efforts to creating and maintaining egalitarian relationships. This separation of private and public attempts to eliminate patriarchy continues to be one of the most central challenges for feminist men (*DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2013*).

Bates (2020) recommends, and rightfully so, that feminist men’s work should be incorporated into mainstream education to prevent boys from becoming incels. It is, indeed, time for more male teachers, administrators, and athletic coaches to “step up to the plate” and demonstrate some progressive leadership by offering programs on gender issues in their schools. They can also do things on a personal level (*Katz, 2006*), such as talking to male students and faculty in assemblies, classes, at sporting events, in faculty and school training, and in private conversations (*DeKeseredy & Corsianos, 2016*). It would also be useful for school staff to employ the following strategies informed by the work of Bates (2020), Messerschmidt (2012), Thorne-Finch (1992, pp. 236-237), and Warshaw (1988, pp. 161-164):

- Confront students, teachers, and athletic staff who speak about violence against women and misogynistic social media in an approving manner.
- Confront students and staff who perpetuate and legitimate rape myths.
- Take every opportunity to speak out against misogynistic social media and other symptoms of gender inequality.
- Create social media forums about the harms of misogyny and how men and boys can work together to curb patriarchal discourses and practices.
- Develop school curricula that make gender, healthy relationships, and sexuality a core subject.

Fathers can help play a vital role in preventing young boys from joining the incel movement and thus need to do some anti-sexist work at home because their masculinity ideology is a powerful determinant of their son's expressions of masculinity (*Perales et al., 2023*). It is unclear exactly how many North American men do this, but we can safely infer that most fathers are "well-meaning men" and outnumber abusive men. A well-meaning man is one:

who believes women should be respected. A well-meaning man would not assault a woman. A well-meaning man, on the surface, at least, believes in equality for women. A well-meaning man believes in women's rights. A well-meaning man honors the women in his life. A well-meaning man, for all practical purposes, is a nice guy, a good guy. (*Porter, 2006, p. 1*)

How many well-meaning men have long discussions with their sons about online misogyny, woman abuse, and sexism in general? The answer is probably "not many." This is problematic and must change because preventative or remedial programs designed to foster young men's healthy masculinities are most successful if they involve fathers (*Perales et al., 2023*). The adage "Like Father, Like Son" applies to this recommendation and Katz's (2006) advice reinforces it:

Clearly one of the most important roles a father – or a father figure – can play in his son's life is to teach by example. If men are always respectful toward women and never verbally or physically abuse them, their sons in all likelihood will learn to be similarly respectful. Nonetheless, every man who has a son should be constantly aware that how he treats women is not just between him and the women – there is a little set of eyes that is always watching him and picking up cues about how a man is supposed to act. If a man says demeaning and dismissive things about women, his son hears it. If he laughs at sexist jokes and makes objectifying comments about women's bodies as he watches TV, his son hears it (*p. 234*).

Some technological work is also necessary in the struggle against digital misogyny, but it is beyond the scope of this paper to specify all that is needed. Some potentially effective means worth briefly mentioning here are a few of those recommended by the Center for Countering Digital Hate (2022), which include:

- Deplatforming incel YouTube channels.
- Deranking incelosphere sites in Google searches.
- Addressing digital harms to children that drive users to incelosphere communities.
- Creating online-offline referral mechanisms to offer support services and resources directly to at-risk individuals, offering reassurances on privacy.
- Infrastructure providers withdrawing their services from the incelosphere network (pp. 42-44).

There are many other strategies that could easily be proposed in this paper and that are informed by a rich, gendered understanding of online hate. And, it is likely that even more new approaches will be required as we encounter both new technologies and various societal changes that will affect and shape gender relations. Certainly, 35 years ago, we would have never thought about “sexting” becoming an integral part of peer culture. What is next? Many progressive scholars, practitioners, and activists are afraid to hear the answer, given the potential for major patriarchal damage that has been mixed in with the tremendous changes for good provided by the internet, smart phones, and other modern technology.

Conclusions

This white paper is not the first attempt to declare online misogyny like that perpetuated and legitimated by incels as a hate crime. Nonetheless, though there may be (and has been for a few decades) a strong international emphasis on naming face-to-face violence against women as a hate crime and as a violation of human rights, there is still much work to do and thus far little has been done to eliminate and prevent the creation of cyber communities like those populated by incels. This is partially the fault of the social scientific research community, which has thus far done a minimal amount of empirical and theoretical work to raise awareness about the incelosphere.

I would be remiss, though, if I did not state that a growing number of feminist scholars are helping to shed more light on the incelosphere and other misogynistic online

communities. As well, the connections between Australian and U.S. experts in the field are especially strong and will contribute to new global perspectives on gendered hate in this digital era. For instance, both Australian and U.S. scholars draw attention to the value of male peer support theory in sociological efforts to understand the damage done by incels.⁵ This is not surprising because male peer support for various types of woman abuse seems to be ubiquitous and definitely has a long history. Still, male peer support theorists have yet to answer the important question of how all-male patriarchal collectives like the incel movement form or come together.

Related to the point made in the last sentence of the above paragraph is this observation made by Thorburn et al. (2023): “Ultimately, there is much still unknown about the nature, reach and impacts of incel subcultures, yet their prevalence across the Anglosphere speaks to the pervasion of a masculine group identity grounded in hierarchy, misogyny and aggrieved entitlement” (p. 252). Both points are true, but the field will not advance unless rigorous research is done outside of the Global North and in non-English speaking communities, and the results should be featured in widely read and cited academic periodicals. This work will often require translators and, hopefully, leading publishers of journals like Sage, Oxford University Press, and Taylor and Francis will recognize the importance of covering the costs of translational work. All the same, regardless of what new empirical and theoretical approaches are used to help develop a better understanding of incel subcultures in the Global North and Global South, we must always keep this question at the forefront of our minds: “What is to be done about the incelsphere?”

Notes

¹ This is the main title of their book, which is now in its fourth edition.

² See www.nydailynews.com/news/national/elliott-rodger-retribution-santa-barbara-shooter-sick-words-article-1.1804761.

³ This term is short for “female humanoids” or “females” (*Jgin, 2023*).

⁴ Image-based sexual abuse websites and blogs first appeared on the internet in 2000 and started to gain U.S. national attention in 2010 following Hunter Moore’s creating of *IsAnyoneUp.com* (*Lamphere & Pikciunas, 2016*).

⁵ See, for example, DeKeseredy and Rennison (*2019*) and Thorburn et al. (*2023*).

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