

Incels

An overview of online “involuntary celibate” subcultures

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT?

This document provides an overview of **Incels** and is one in a series of extremism briefing notes produced by the [Institute for Strategic Dialogue](#) (ISD) out of a long-running partnership with Microsoft*. The purpose of these documents is to provide **entry-level context and background** about various extremist and conspiratorial narratives and movements. These are not intended as comprehensive deep-dives. Rather, they present key concepts, (conspiracy) theories, terminology and imagery deployed by the given movements or narratives. Further reading recommendations are provided at the end of each document, should readers want to learn more.

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CONTENT WARNING: this document contains material that may be harmful, triggering or traumatizing to some readers.

FAQ

How are these briefing notes produced?

They are informed by both literature review and digital research using **publicly accessible** websites, social media pages, channels and forums. This briefing note was published in August 2020 and is based on [research](#) conducted by ISD after the attacks against two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand in 2019.

What topics do they cover?

Topics span the ideological spectrum, covering prevalent extremist theories and narratives, as well as specific extremist movements. The scope ranges, with some briefing notes covering specific conspiracy theories like “The Great Replacement”, and others looking at broader, overarching issues like extreme misogyny online.

Additional questions?

Get in touch with ISD at info@isdglobal.org.



Incels - short for “involuntary celibates”. Incels “forge a sense of identity around a perceived inability to form sexual or romantic relationships”. They may blame themselves, society at large and specifically women (most self-identified Incels are men) for these perceived failures, and therefore feel a bitterness towards women and themselves.

Incels form part of what has been dubbed the “manosphere”, an umbrella term referring to interconnected misogynistic communities online. **The manosphere is dangerous because it is founded in and fuelled by hatred of women.** Individuals and networks in the “manosphere” express conspiratorial and often violent beliefs about women, where a woman’s only value is her ability to procreate or to fulfil the sexual needs and desires of men, where women are referred to as subhuman sexual objects, and where feminism is seen as an enemy of mankind.

The “manosphere”, especially Incels, has been affiliated with [acts of violence](#). Incel-related violence is increasingly regarded as a form of terrorism - in Canada, for example, the perpetrator of a fatal stabbing was [charged](#) with terrorism offences.

High-profile instances of Incel-related violence

Isla Vista, California (2014)

[Elliot Rodger](#) killed seven (including himself) and injured an additional fourteen in a rampage attack. He is revered in many Incel forums.

Roseburg, Oregon (2015)

[Chris Harper Mercer](#) killed ten (including himself). His writings glorified mass killers including Elliot Rodger and expressed anger over his perceived lack of sexual success, expressing anger over his perceived lack of sexual success.

Aztec, New Mexico (2017)

[William Edward Atchison](#) killed two at a high school and then shoots himself. He previously praised Elliot Rodger online.

Toronto, Canada (2018)

[Alek Minassian](#) killed ten and injures 15 in a vehicle-ramming attack. On his social media channels, he expressed admiration for and being inspired by Elliot Rodger, and that he hopes his own attack will in turn inspire more violence. Importantly, Minassian’s claim of Inceldom was refuted by investigators as well as the Judge who sentenced him. Minassian himself later conceded during the trial that he had lied about his motivations to gain notoriety.

Glendale, Arizona (2020)

A man who [identified as an Incel](#) online attacked a mall, injuring three.

Since 2015, [at least 53 people have been killed in Incel-related violence](#). While many Incels condemn these acts of violence (as well as the increasingly misogynistic direction of Incel communities more broadly), some have lionized their perpetrators. Elliot Rodger, for example, is sometimes referred to as “Saint Elliot” or “Supreme Gentleman Elliot Rodger”.

Background

While Incel-related violence is a relatively new phenomenon, the label of “Incel” has been used since the 1990s, when a Canadian college student created a website titled the “Involuntary Celibacy Project”. The website sought to help those struggling with dating and intimate relations with others. The first Incel forum was therefore intended as a support community for individuals to exchange experiences with, and anxieties about, dating. It wasn’t until the early 2000s that spin-offs of the original forum arose - these forums were less-moderated, allowing misogynistic views to persist and ultimately steering Incel communities more and more towards hatred of women.

Today, Incel forums are overwhelmingly male-dominated and rife with misogyny that ranges in severity from broader generalizations of women to pro-rape discourse. While many users in Incel forums condemn violent rhetoric and behavior, violent Incel discourse and propaganda is now readily available across **Incel-dedicated sites**, fringe platforms like **4chan** and **8Kun**, as well as more mainstream sites like **Reddit**.

Overlap with extremism

Research by the [Southern Poverty Law Center](#) (SPLC) shows there is some cross-pollination between Incels and racially or ethnically motivated violent extremism (REMVE). While affiliates of one may not explicitly identify as the other, there have been references to REMVE ideology in Incel forums. Incel forums are often riddled with racist stereotyping, for example, including the fetishization and objectification of Asian women and the belief that features considered to be Aryan are superior to all others. On the other hand, REMVE communities, especially white supremacist ones, are full of toxic masculinity, expressed through anti-LGBTQ and anti-feminist sentiment that blames both for the perceived decline of the white race.

Some Incels explicitly identify with REMVE, labeling themselves “stormcels”, in which “storm” refers to *Stormfront*, a popular white supremacist website rife with othering and dehumanization on racial grounds. Stormcels add white supremacist undertones to their sexual grievances, stating, for example, that they will not engage in sexual activity with non-white women.

There is also some reference to violent jihadist movements in Incel forums, where terms like “jihadmaxxing” or “taking the jihadpill” are used to encourage Muslim Incels to join violent jihadist groups to access sexual relationships (inspired by e.g. Islamic State propaganda that offers its “mujahideen” promises of marriage).

Importantly, while Incel-related violence merits concern from public and online safety stakeholders, many Incels condemn violence, and are more likely to self-harm than to harm others. According to William Costello, 34% of self-identified Incels could be clinically diagnosed with severe depression, and 42% with moderately severe depression. **A survey of an Incel forum found 82.3% of respondents (all self-identified Incels) had considered suicide.** Incel forums are therefore also rife with often graphic discussions around suicide and self-harm.



Related Narratives and Terminology*

Incels deploy coded language to characterize how they perceive themselves, others and their stations in life. This section explores different categories of Incel terminology.

Alphas, Betas and Omega:

Incels generally self-identify as Betas or Omegas, where, in contrast, Alphas are men who are considered sexually “successful” and traditionally handsome, and are characterized as confident, assertive and dominant.

Chads, Stacys and Beckys:

Similarly to Alphas, Chads are considered the opposite of Incels in that they are “successful” with women and “conventionally handsome”. Incels may refer to Chads in a mocking sense or with admiration. Incels may also use [racialized versions of Chad](#), including "Chadpreet", "Chaddam", "Chang". In some cases, Incels may use "Tyrone" to refer to black "Chads". These are generally founded in racist stereotypes and are but one example of how Incels may integrate misogyny with other forms of bias.

Stacys are the female equivalent to Chads, but are generally referred to more negatively than Chads. Stacys are often characterized as beautiful, hyper-feminine but “dumb” and promiscuous. Incels believe Stacys will only go for Chads or “Alphas”. Beckys are considered more basic and therefore beneath Stacys in terms of appearance.

The Becky



The Stacy

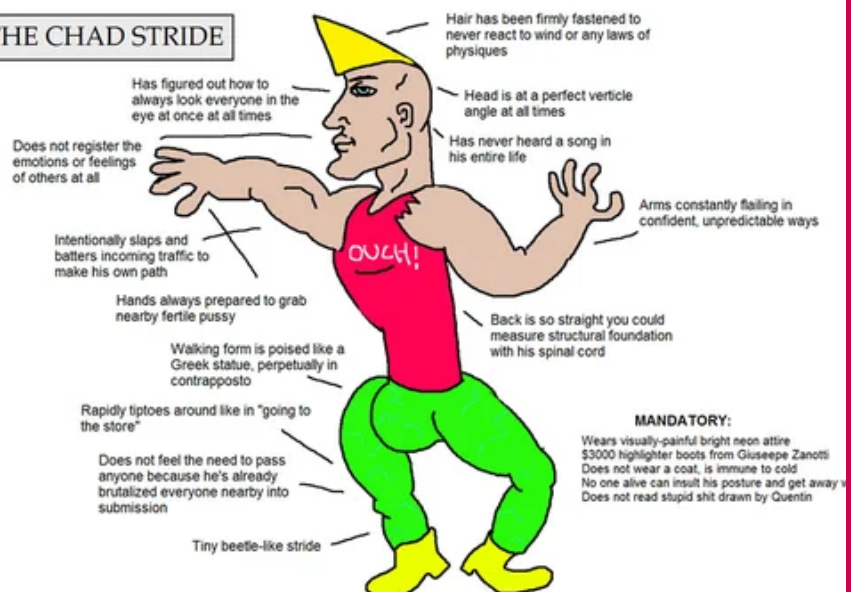


Pictured Right: the Becky vs. the Stacy. [Source](#). Pictured Below: the Chad vs. the Virgin. [Source](#).

"The Virgin Walk"



THE CHAD STRIDE



*narratives and terminology provided are a sample and should not be taken as exhaustive.

Related Narratives and Terminology*

-cel:

Some Incels [add the suffix “cel” to other words](#) to categorize themselves further. This includes:

- **Physical traits they deem responsible for their involuntary celibacy.** Examples include: “acnecel”, “heightcel”, “baldcel”, “stuttercel”.
- **Harmful or illegal desires.** “Pedocel” , for example, is short for “pedophile Incel”. Also prevalent is “rapecel”, or Incels that glorify sexual violence and in some cases advocate for the legalization of rape. These are a very small minority within Incel communities.
- **Other identities.** Some south Asian Incels call themselves “currycels”, for example, while Incels of southeast Asian descent may call themselves “ricecels”. This may also refer to religious identity (e.g. “Muslimcel”).
- **Coping mechanisms** Incels use to deal with their perceived sexual “failings” (e.g. “gymcel”, “escortcel”).
- **Incel status** - some Incels may accuse others of being “fakecels”. Other examples include “nearcels”, which is used to refer to those who rarely have sex but don’t quite qualify as Incels, and “wizardcel”, which is an Incel who is a virgin at 30+ years old.

Dehumanization of women -

In addition to labels like “Becky” and “Stacy”, Incels may use other terms and narratives to belittle and degrade women, including:

- **“AWALT”** - short for “all women are like that”, used to generalize and stereotype women;
- **“Femoids”, “foids” or “FHO”** - short for “female humanoids” or “female humanoid organism”, these terms position women not only as less than men, but as less than human.
- **Hypergamy** - taken from animal biology and applied by Incels and other communities in the “manosphere” to women, hypergamy is the concept of “mating upwards”. Incels believe women are hypergamous and therefore will always seek relationships with men of higher status than themselves, or than the men they are currently with. This, in turn, stereotypes women as disloyal, opportunistic, and greedy. Incels may therefore also refer to women as “branch-swingers” or “vine-swingers” to enforce the belief that women are always seeking “better” men, and are therefore always “swinging” from one relationship to the other for opportunistic reasons, be it money, looks, or the status a certain (Alpha) partner may give them. **The belief that women are hypergamous is core to Incel beliefs.**

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Related Narratives and Terminology*

Other terms and suffixes:

- **-maxxing:** suffix used to indicate that an Incel is trying to improve an aspect or multiple aspects of their lives in order to achieve sexually. Examples include “looksmaxxing” and “gymmaxxing”, where Incels strive to “better” their physical appearance, “moneymaxxing”, where an Incel tries to improve his financial status in order to improve their dating “game” (many Incels believe women are hypergamous - see page 6), and “jihadmaxxing”, where Incels are encouraged to become Jihadists in order to achieve intimate relations with a woman.
- **-fuel:** generally used to refer to suicide. If something is considered “suifuel” or “ropefuel”, it is deemed to contribute to or cause suicidal thoughts or behavior.
- **ER (sometimes “go ER”, “hERo”):** in Incel forums, the acronym “ER” may refer to Elliot Rodger, who killed seven (including himself) in 2014 in an attack he deemed was retribution for his unhappiness, which he blamed largely on women. While many Incels disavow Rodger and condemn the 2014 act of violence, others idolize him as a “hERo”, “Saint Elliot”, or “the supreme gentleman”, the latter of which is a nod to his manifesto, in which he refers to himself as such.
- **Just be white (JBW):** used to reflect the belief that women will primarily choose white men over non-white men.
- **Lay down and rot (LDAR):** generally used by “blackpilled” Incels (see page 8), and refers to the belief that there is no hope for a better life, so Incels might as well let themselves rot in their bedrooms.
- **Looksmatch:** when someone is another’s looksmatch, it means they are equal or matched in terms of appearance.
- **Sexual market value (SMV):** this term is used as a metric to measure an individual’s “sexual desirability”. “Stacys”, for example, are considered to have a higher SMV than “Beckys”. **In Incel communities, one’s SMV is the primary measure of their worth.**
- **Gynocentrism:** dominated by feminist interests. While this is perhaps more common amongst other communities in the “manosphere”, some Incels may believe society is gynocentric and that female privilege is reality, whereas male privilege is considered a feminist fabrication and propaganda tool.

See also Dr. Tim Squirrelrell’s [“A-Z Incel Dictionary”](#), and Moonshot CVE’s [“Incels: a Guide to Symbols and Terminology”](#).

“Pilling”

Similarly to REMVE groups, Incels use “pilling” language to categorize different worldviews. These metaphorical pills are inspired by the film *The Matrix*, in which the protagonist is offered a blue pill or a red pill, the latter of which will show him how the world really is. In this vein, Incels may refer to being “redpilled” as recognizing and embracing their worldview. Importantly, given the popularity of the film that inspired this terminology, “pilling” language needs to be understood in the broader context of how it is used.

- The Red Pill:** The red pill is essentially an acceptance of the worldviews put forth by whatever individual or group is using the term. In the context of the “manosphere”, therefore, the red pill is recognizing among others that feminism is harmful to men, that men are the victims of a gynocentric world, and, especially amongst Incels (particularly in more extreme subcommunities), that men are entitled to sex and that women should therefore be sexually available to them. Importantly, the red pill is used not only to denote abidance by these narratives, but also as a call to action to further disseminate them. Some Incel forums and other “manosphere” websites now feature videos or threads about “how to redpill” others, especially women. Similarly, some sites directly call to their visitors to “take the red pill”, where the red pill is offered as an explanation for and solution to all the woes and ills of men, whether that’s unhappiness in marriage, unemployment or self-esteem. Finally, individuals that consider themselves “redpilled” may refer to those that aren’t as “normies” or as “bluepilled”, usually derogatorily.
- The Blue Pill:** The blue pill sits opposite the red pill. If you are bluepilled, you are considered to be ignorant of how the world really is. In other words, you don’t abide by the worldview put forth by those that consider themselves redpilled.
- The Black Pill:** The black pill is not as common across all components of the “manosphere” as the red pill is. Most notably, it is used by Incels to refer to hopelessness – that there is no way out of being an Incel. While both redpilled and blackpilled Incels are unhappy with being “involuntarily celibate”, those that identify as redpilled generally feel there are ways out of that status, while those that identify as blackpilled believe [“that their situation is permanent and inescapable”](#). Dissimilar to other communities in the “manosphere” (e.g., “pick-up artists”), Incel forums are therefore often rife with imagery and mentions of suicide, of “LDAR” (lie down and rot) or of “going ER”, in which ER refers to Elliot Rodger of the Isla Vista killings.
- The Pink Pill:** As [noted by the Anti-Defamation League \(ADL\)](#), “while many Incels argue that women by definition cannot be Incels, since there will always be Incels willing to sleep with women, femcels (female Incels) do make up a small subset of Incel culture”. The pink pill is used by female Incels essentially the same way the black pill is used by male Incels – it is the belief that nothing will change their situation and they will never be considered desirable by men.
- The Rape Pill:** the rape pill is used exclusively amongst a subset of the Incel community (“rapecels”) that believe male-female sexual relations should always be decided by the man and that therefore female consent is not necessary. This subset forms a small minority of the wider Incel ecosystem.

Further Reading

The following resources helped inform the contents of this document, and are recommended as further reading.

- "[Incels: A Guide to Symbols and Terminology](#)" by Moonshot CVE.
- Tim Squirrel's Definitive Guide to Incels:
 - Part One - [Incelocalypse](#)
 - Part Two - [The A-Z Incel Dictionary](#)
 - Part Three - [The History of Incel](#)
 - Part Four - [Why Can't Everyone be Blackpilled?](#)
 - Part Five - [Why are Incels Becoming More Extreme?](#)
- "[Misogynist Incels and Male Supremacism - Overview and Recommendations for Addressing the Threat of Male Supremacist Violence](#)" by Megan Kelly, Alex DiBranco, Dr. Julia R. Decook for New America.
- "[Adding Fuel to the Fire: How Digital Media Has Transformed Inceldom](#)" by Victoria Munoz for Ethics and Society.
- "[Inceldom 101 & How You Can Help](#)" by Joyous Njoku for Risk Intervention & Safety Education.
- "[Incels: America's Newest Domestic Terrorism Threat](#)" by Bruce Hoffman and Jacob Ware for Lawfare Blog.
- "[Inside Incels' Lookmaxxing Obsession: Penis Stretching, Skull Implants and Rage](#)" by Jesselyn Cook for Huffington Post.
- "[Incels Categorize Women by Personal Style and Attractiveness](#)" by Rebecca Jennings for VOX.
- "[Is the 'incel' ideology a terror threat? That's the wrong question to ask](#)" by Milo Comerford and Jakob Guhl for the New Statesman.
- "[The Psychological Profile of Incels](#)" by William Costello.



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