



Case study: Dehumanization and Demonization of Women: Misogynist Incel Speech and Violence in the United States and Canada

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About the author

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About this report

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Summary

Elliot Rodger gained notoriety through embarking on an act of terror targeting a sorority at the University of California, Santa Barbara, killing six people in May 2014. The act of mass violence brought attention to his manifesto and a video in which he describes the intention to seek retribution against all women because he felt entitled to and unjustly deprived of sexual intercourse. Rodger selected a target that symbolized to him the most sexually desirable and unattainable women. As secondary targets, he was enraged by and jealous of sexually successful men, and viewed non-white men as inferior. His manifesto and video have been cited by multiple mass killers since 2014 and influenced the development of the misogynist incel¹ movement.

Social and Historical Context

The first online community for “incels,” an abbreviation for “involuntarily celibate,” was founded in Toronto by a bisexual woman in the 1990s. Women and men participated in “Alana’s Involuntarily Celibacy Project,” a forum created with the intention of being a supportive space for individuals who wanted, but had not been able to find, sexual and romantic partners.² The term her community coined, “incels,” was later coopted by men who denied that women could be involuntarily celibate and developed a misogynist ideology around their resentment over thwarted sexual entitlement.

Over the past half-century, advances for women’s rights brought about by feminist movements in the United States and Canada have posed a significant threat to male dominance. Substantial strides for women’s rights in the 1970s, though still far short of full gender equity, were followed by a vehement backlash against these tangible yet marginal changes.³ While many forms of gender-based violence existed prior to the 21st century, from domestic abuse to sexual violence to serial killings, the first act of ideological mass violence explicitly documented as driven primarily by misogyny or antifeminism took place in 1989. A man who claimed to be “fighting feminism” killed 14 women engineers at Montreal’s École Polytechnique (Canada’s most fatal act of mass violence until 2020).⁴

As women continued to make political and cultural gains, threatening the status quo of male supremacy, new movements and ideologies arose centered around antifeminism and male entitlement. Books published in the early 1990s advanced ideologies of “men’s rights” and “equity feminism,” which presented men as the true victims of sexism and discrimination.⁵ The

¹ I use the term “misogynist incel,” as one would use the term “racist skinhead,” to separate the direction that the bulk of the organized movement has gone in from the original meaning of the term, which some people, including men and women, may still subscribe to.

² Baker, Peter. 2016. “The Woman Who Accidentally Started the Incel Movement.” *Elle*. <https://www.elle.com/culture/news/a34512/woman-who-started-incel-movement/>

³ Faludi, Susan. (1991). *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*. New York: Anchor Books.

⁴ DiBranco, Alex. 2019. “The First Anti-Feminist Massacre.” Political Research Associates. <https://www.politicalresearch.org/2019/12/06/first-anti-feminist-massacre>

⁵ *The Myth of Male Power* and *Who Stole Feminism* are key texts in this vein.

“seduction” industry was growing, selling seminars and media that promised to teach men “game” and how to “pick up” women, a phrase leading to the term “pick up artists” (PUAs).⁶

The expansion of internet access, online forums, and social media as avenues for communication and community-building helped male supremacist ideologies spread and grow into the 21st century. Individuals created websites and blogs, building up profiles as pickup artist and men’s rights commenters in the late 2000s to early 2010s. Communities formed on Reddit, a social media platform founded in 2005, where “subreddit” forums can be created on any topic. In 2008, the subreddits r/seduction, a forum for seduction and pickup artist strategies, and r/mensrights were founded. In 2010, r/foreveralone, a community similarly oriented to the original Toronto-based incel forum to support people unable to find desired romantic and sexual partners, was launched. In 2012, the subreddit r/TheRedPill was founded anonymously by a Republican state politician who saw the seduction and men’s rights forums as too moderate.⁷ 4chan, an anonymous online “bulletin board,” was founded in 2003, though it remained a fringe platform until the 2010s. Its anonymity and lack of moderation on its general discussion boards (such as /b/, for random content, /pol/, for politics/“politically incorrect” content, and 4chan/r9k/, for short anecdotes) made it an attractive space for misogyny, racism, and antisemitism.

Pickup artist teaching are founded in male sexual entitlement, objectification of women, and dismissiveness toward consent, beliefs that encourage physical and sexual violence. In 2009, a 48-year-old white man, George Sodini, opened fire at an aerobics class full of women in Collier Township, Pennsylvania, killing three.⁸ The perpetrator had been a follower of seduction industry advice, including attending a seminar in person led by a prominent dating guru. He complained in an online journal of being rejected by “30 million women,” giving this as his reason for the planned attack.⁹ His journal entries attracted attention from pickup artists and other misogynists; a prominent PUA blogger sympathized and presented him as evidence that men should learn game to prevent turning to killing. Others applauded the attack, including one commenter who wrote, “Finally a mass murderer writes a relatively coherent manifesto. Could be better, but at least it is implied that feminism is to blame and he is taking a last stand. I had been waiting for this (almost thinking I had to do it myself) and I am impressed. Kudos.”¹⁰ Online PUA forums and paid instructors teach men to use sexual coercion and force under the guise of “seduction” or “game.” In 2013, two PUA instructors and their student raped a San Diego woman as part of their “bootcamp” training; they were discovered and arrested after the survivor found the student’s online “field report” detailing the assault on a PUA forum.¹¹

⁶ Almog, Ran and Danny Kaplan. 2015. “The Nerd and His Discontent: The Seduction Community and the Logic of the Game as a Geeky Solution to the Challenges of Young Masculinity.” *Men and Masculinities* 20(1): 1-22.

⁷ Bacarisse, Bonnie. 2017. “The Republican Lawmaker Who Secretly Created Reddit’s Women-Hating Red Pill.” *The Daily Beast*. <https://www.thedailybeast.com/the-republican-lawmaker-who-secretly-created-reddits-women-hating-red-pill>

⁸ 2009. “Four dead in fitness center shooting.” *Pittsburg Post-Gazette*.

⁹ 2009. “George Sodini’s Blog: Full Text By Alleged Gym Shooter.” *ABC News*. <https://abcnews.go.com/US/story?id=8258001&page=1>

¹⁰ Heartiste. 2009. “Game Can Save Lives.” *Chateau Heartiste*.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20111117072022/https://heartiste.wordpress.com/2009/08/05/game-can-save-lives/>

¹¹ Zadrozney, Brandy. 2017. “The Pickup Artist Rape Ring.” <https://www.thedailybeast.com/pickup-artists-preyed-on-drunk-women-brought-them-home-and-raped-them>

While the original forum for incels and r/ForeverAlone were not formed from a misogynist perspective, community members came from a variety of perspectives, including men shaped by the male entitlement and hostility toward women endemic in society. Self-identified incel men came into contact online with the sexual entitlement and objectification of the PUA community and with other misogynist forums such as on 4chan. Some men who lacked sexual relationships referred to themselves as “betas,” in contrast to “alpha” men they perceive as attracting all women. In 2013, a post on 4chan/r9k/ fantasized a “beta uprising,” reportedly the first time this phrase was used. The poster envisioned a violent overthrow in which “*betas applauded and realized that if 20% of the men get all of the women, then they outnumber [alphas] 4 to 1. After one week all women were enslaved by the beta uprising and distributed equally among the male population.*”¹²

Some incel men reported attempting PUA techniques, though many did not achieve the sexual experience they expected to achieve. Men dissatisfied with their lack of results vented on the forum PUAHate.com, where they attacked not only the seduction industry, but also women for rejecting them. Men who never took part in the PUA industry were drawn to and joined the vitriol against women—including the perpetrator, Elliot Rodger, of the first attack connected to the incel community, who killed six people in Santa Barbara on May 23rd, 2014.¹³ He intended to massacre sorority women at the University of California, Santa Barbara, but failed to gain entrance to the sorority house and instead shot and killed passersby, after stabbing his housemates to death. Rodger wrote in an autobiographical manifesto that his activity on PUAHate “confirmed many of the theories I had about how wicked and degenerate women really are” and “how bleak and cruel the world is due to the evilness of women.”¹⁴ Reports indicate that he also participated online in r/ForeverAlone, r/TheRedPill, a bodybuilding forum (these often overlap with PUA ideology), and 4chan.¹⁵

By the date of the 2014 attack, misogynist online forums had grown substantially, particularly on Reddit. The r/seduction forum had grown to more than 170,000 subscribers, one of the largest misogynist forums online at the time.¹⁶ The forum r/mensrights was at 90,000.¹⁷ The forums frequented by Rodger, r/TheRedPill and r/ForeverAlone, were above 50,000 and 30,000, respectively.¹⁸ As a platform, Reddit as whole had a reputation for sexism, permitting most content under the argument of “free speech.”¹⁹ However, Reddit’s platform carried some restrictions in 2014 via terms of use, such as on incitements to violence, while online forums

¹² Bust Magazine. “‘Beta Males’ Want to Kill Women Because They Can’t Get Laid.” *Bust Magazine*.

<https://bust.com/feminism/15551-beta-males-want-to-kill-women-because-they-can-t-get-laid.html>

¹³ Potok, Mark. 2014. “War on Women.” Southern Poverty Law Center. <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2014/war-women>; Glasstetter, Josh. 2014. “Shooting Suspect Elliot Rodger’s Misogynistic Posts Point to Motive.” Southern Poverty Law Center. <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2014/05/23/shooting-suspect-elliott-rodgers-misogynistic-posts-point-motive>

¹⁴ Rodger, Elliot. 2014. *My Twisted World*. p. 117-118.

¹⁵ Nagle, Angela. 2016. “The New Man of 4chan.” *The Baffler*. <https://thebaffler.com/salvos/new-man-4chan-nagle>

¹⁶ <https://web.archive.org/web/20140522111810/http://www.reddit.com/r/seduction/>

¹⁷ <https://web.archive.org/web/20140521075411/http://www.reddit.com/r/MensRights/>

¹⁸ <https://web.archive.org/web/20140521124626/reddit.com/r/theredpill;>

<https://web.archive.org/web/20140518144050/reddit.com/r/foreveralone>

¹⁹ Zuckerman, Esther. 2012. “Why Is Reddit So Anti-Women?: An Epic Reddit Thread Counts the Ways.” *The Atlantic*. theatlantic.com/culture/archive/2012/07/why-reddit-so-anti-women-epic-reddit-thread-counts-ways/325357/

housed on their own websites are not subject to social media company restrictions. They are often smaller but also tend toward more extreme content, such as PUAHate.com, which listed about 18,000 members before the attack.²⁰ Numbers are not available for the growth of 4chan.²¹

Unlike other mobilizations like the “men’s rights” movement, the incel community at the time lacked a clear ideological statement and would not yet be described as a movement – it had only a poorly defined anger toward women and a sense of sexual unfairness among many men. The Santa Barbara killings brought attention to Rodger’s 137-page autobiographical manifesto and his videos describing his views on women and humanity, speech that was incorporated into a developing misogynist incel ideology.

Speech Act 1: Post by Elliot Rodger on PUAHate.com

Date not reported; posted at some point before attack on May 23rd, 2014.

“If we can’t solve our problems, we must DESTROY our problems,” Rodger wrote. “One day incels will realize their true strength and numbers, and will overthrow this oppressive feminist system. / Start envisioning a world where WOMEN FEAR YOU.”²²

Speech Act 2: Video “Elliot Rodger’s Retribution”

Transcript from the Los Angeles Times of Youtube video uploaded May 23rd, 2014.²³

“Hi, Elliot Rodger here. Well, this is my last video. It all has to come to this. Tomorrow is the day of retribution, the day I will have my revenge against humanity, against all of you.

“For the last eight years of my life, since I hit puberty, I’ve been forced to endure an existence of loneliness, rejection and unfulfilled desires, all because girls have never been attracted to me. Girls gave their affection and sex and love to other men, never to me.

“I’m 22 years old and still a virgin, never even kissed a girl. And through college, 2 1/2 years, more than that actually, I’m still a virgin. It has been very torturous.

“College is the time when everyone experiences those things such as sex and fun and pleasure. In those years I’ve had to rot in loneliness, it’s not fair.

²⁰ <https://web.archive.org/web/20140519070609/http://puahate.com:80/index.php>

²¹ Dewey, Caitlin. 2014. “Absolutely everything you need to know to understand 4chan, the Internet’s own bogeyman.” <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2014/09/25/absolutely-everything-you-need-to-know-to-understand-4chan-the-internets-own-bogeyman/>; Peterson, Kierren. 2015. “A short history of /r9k/ — the 4chan message board some believe may be connected to the Oregon shooting.” *The World*. <https://www.pri.org/stories/2015-10-02/short-history-r9k-4chan-message-board-some-believe-may-be-connected-oregon>

²² Glasstetter, Josh. 2014. “Shooting Suspect Elliot Rodger’s Misogynistic Posts Point to Motive.” Southern Poverty Law Center. <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2014/05/23/shooting-suspect-elliott-rodgers-misogynistic-posts-point-motive>

²³ Garvey, Megan. 2014. “Transcript of the disturbing video ‘Elliot Rodger’s Retribution.’” *Los Angeles Times*. <https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-transcript-ucsb-shootings-video-20140524-story.html>

“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 gentleman. I will punish all of you for it. [laughs]

“On the day of retribution, I am going to enter the hottest sorority house at UCSB and I will slaughter every single spoiled, stuck-up, blond slut I see inside there. All those girls I’ve desired so much. They have all rejected me and looked down on me as an inferior man if I ever made a sexual advance toward them, while they throw themselves at these obnoxious brutes.

“I take great pleasure in slaughtering all of you. You will finally see that I am, in truth, the superior one, the true alpha male. [laughs] Yes, after I have annihilated every single girl in the sorority house, I’ll take to the streets of Isla Vista and slay every single person I see there. All those popular kids who live such lives of hedonistic pleasure while I’ve had to rot in loneliness all these years. They all look down upon me every time I tried to join them, they’ve all treated me like a mouse.

“Well, now I will be a god compared to you, you will all be animals, you are animals and I will slaughter you like animals. I’ll be a god exacting my retribution on all those who deserve it and you do deserve it just for the crime of living a better life than me.

“The popular kids, you never accepted me and now you will all pay for it. Girls, all I ever wanted was to love you, be loved by you. I wanted a girlfriend. I wanted sex, love, affection, adoration.

“You think I’m unworthy of you. That’s I crime I can never get over. If I can’t have you girls, I will destroy you. [laughs] You denied me a happy life and in turn I will deny all of you life, it’s only fair. I hate all of you.

“Humanity is a disgusting, wretched, depraved species. If I had it in my power I would stop at nothing to reduce every single one of you to mountains of skulls and rivers of blood and rightfully so. You deserve to be annihilated and I will give that to you. You never showed me any mercy so I will show you none. [laughs]

“You forced me to suffer all my life, now I will make you all suffer. I waited a long time for this. I’ll give you exactly what you deserve, all of you. All you girls who rejected me, looked down upon me, you know, treated me like scum while you gave yourselves to other men. And 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. I can’t wait to give you exactly what you deserve, annihilation.”

Speech Act 3: “My Twisted World” autobiographical manifesto

Excerpts from the 137-page document made public May 23rd, 2014.

“All of my suffering on this world has been at the hands of humanity, particularly women. It has made me realize just how brutal and twisted humanity is as a species. All I ever wanted was to fit

in and live a happy life amongst humanity, but I was cast out and rejected, forced to endure an existence of loneliness and insignificance, all because the females of the human species were incapable of seeing the value in me.” (p. 1, Introduction)

“How could an inferior, ugly black boy be able to get a white girl and not me? I am beautiful, and I am half white myself. I am descended from British aristocracy. He is descended from slaves. I deserve it more. [...] They would give themselves to this filthy scum, but they reject ME? The injustice! (p. 84)

“I particularly hated Angel because of his ugly pig-face. How could such an ugly animal have had sexual experiences with girls, and yet I haven’t? What was wrong with this world?” (p. 91)

“To see another male be successful with females is torture for males like us who have no success with females. I was so angry that I told James of all of the acts of revenge I wanted to exact on those popular boys. I told him my desire to flay them alive, to strip the skins off their flesh and make them scream in agony as punishment for living a better life than me. James became deeply disturbed by my anger. [...] He was a weakling.” (p. 91)

“On one of these nights, I crossed paths with a boy who was walking with two pretty girls. I got so envious that I cursed at them, and then I followed them for a few minutes. They just laughed at me, and one of the girls kissed the boy on the lips. I’m assuming she was his girlfriend. That was one of the worst experiences of torture from girls that I’ve had to endure, and it will be a scar in my memory forever, to remind me that girls think I’m unworthy compared to other boys.” (p. 91)

“I named it the Day of Retribution. It would be a day in which I exact my ultimate retribution and revenge on all of the hedonistic scum who enjoyed lives of pleasure that they don’t deserve. If I can’t have it, I will destroy it. I will destroy all women because I can never have them. I will make them all suffer for rejecting me. I will arm myself with deadly weapons and wage a war against all women and the men they are attracted to. And I will slaughter them like the animals they are. If they won’t accept me among them, then they are my enemies. They showed me no mercy, and in turn I will show them no mercy. The prospect will be so sweet, and justice will ultimately be served.” (p. 101)

“I concluded that women are flawed. There is something mentally wrong with the way their brains are wired, as if they haven’t evolved from animal-like thinking. They are incapable of reason or thinking rationally. They are like animals, completely controlled by their primal, depraved emotions and impulses. That is why they are attracted to barbaric, wild, beast-like men. They are beasts themselves. Beasts should not be able to have any rights in a civilized society. If their wickedness is not contained, the whole of humanity will be held back from advancement to a more civilized state. Women should not have the right to choose who to mate with. That choice should be made for them by civilized men of intelligence. [...] I am one of the few people on this world who has the intelligence to see this. I am like a god, and my purpose is to exact ultimate Retribution on all of the impurities I see in the world.” (p. 117)

“It was the day that I decided to go out in Isla Vista in an attempt to lose my virginity before I turned 22. That was the only thing that could have saved me. I was giving the female gender one last chance to provide me with the pleasures I deserved from them.” (p. 121)

“I came across this Asian guy who was talking to a white girl. The sight of that filled me with rage. I always felt as if white girls thought less of me because I was half-Asian, but then I see this white girl at the party talking to a full-blooded Asian. I never had that kind of attention from a white girl! And white girls are the only girls I’m attracted to, especially the blondes. *How could an ugly Asian attract the attention of a white girl, while a beautiful Eurasian like myself never had any attention from them?* I thought with rage.” (p. 121)

“The boisterous, wild frat boys get all of the beautiful girls, and everyone is looking for a fight, like the vicious animals they are. He said it was a truth I had to accept, advising me to move out of there. I couldn’t accept this truth, because it was unjust. I couldn’t let such evil exist, and I will not run away from it by moving out of there. I will either thrive there, or destroy the place utterly. Since I failed to thrive there, I had no choice but to plan my Retribution.” (p. 125)

“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. In doing so, they took many years of my life away. I cannot kill every single female on earth, but I can deliver a devastating blow that will shake all of them to the core of their wicked hearts. I will attack the very girls who represent everything I hate in the female gender: The hottest sorority of UCSB. After doing a lot of extensive research within the last year, I found out that the sorority with the most beautiful girls is Alpha Phi Sorority. I know exactly where their house is, and I’ve sat outside it in my car to stalk them many times. Alpha Phi sorority is full of hot, beautiful blonde girls; the kind of girls I’ve always desired but was never able to have because they all look down on me. They are all spoiled, heartless, wicked bitches. They think they are superior to me, and if I ever tried to ask one on a date, they would reject me cruelly.” (p. 132)

“Every single time I’ve seen a guy walk around with his beautiful girlfriend, I’ve always wanted to kill them both in the most painful way possible. They deserve it. They must be punished. The males deserve to be punished for living a better and more pleasurable life than me, and the females deserve to be punished for giving that pleasurable life to those males instead of me. On the Day of Retribution, I will finally be able to punish them ALL. (p. 135)

“I am more than human. I am superior to them all. I am Elliot Rodger... Magnificent, glorious, supreme, eminent... Divine! I am the closest thing there is to a living god. Humanity is a disgusting, depraved, and evil species. It is my purpose to punish them all. I will purify the world of everything that is wrong with it. On the Day of Retribution, I will truly be a powerful god, punishing everyone I deem to be impure and depraved.” (p. 135)

“The ultimate evil behind sexuality is the human female. They are the main instigators of sex. They control which men get it and which men don’t. Women are flawed creatures, and my mistreatment at their hands has made me realize this sad truth. There is something very twisted

and wrong with the way their brains are wired. They think like beasts, and in truth, they are beasts. Women are incapable of having morals or thinking rationally. They are completely controlled by their depraved emotions and vile sexual impulses. Because of this, the men who do get to experience the pleasures of sex and the privilege of breeding are the men who women are sexually attracted to... the stupid, degenerate, obnoxious men. I have observed this all my life. The most beautiful of women choose to mate with the most brutal of men, instead of magnificent gentlemen like myself.

“Women should not have the right to choose who to mate and breed with. That decision should be made for them by rational men of intelligence. If women continue to have rights, they will only hinder the advancement of the human race by breeding with degenerate men and creating stupid, degenerate offspring. This will cause humanity to become even more depraved with each generation. Women have more power in human society than they deserve, all because of sex. There is no creature more evil and depraved than the human female.

“Women are like a plague. They don’t deserve to have any rights. Their wickedness must be contained in order prevent future generations from falling to degeneracy. Women are vicious, evil, barbaric animals, and they need to be treated as such.” (p. 136)

“The first strike against women will be to quarantine all of them in concentration camps. At these camps, the vast majority of the female population will be deliberately starved to death. That would be an efficient and fitting way to kill them all off. I would take great pleasure and satisfaction in condemning every single woman on earth to starve to death. I would have an enormous tower built just for myself, where I can oversee the entire concentration camp and gleefully watch them all die. If I can’t have them, no one will, I’d imagine thinking to myself as I oversee this. Women represent everything that is unfair with this world, and in order to make the world a fair place, they must all be eradicated. A few women would be spared, however, for the sake of reproduction. These women would be kept and bred in secret labs. There, they will be artificially inseminated with sperm samples in order to produce offspring. Their depraved nature will slowly be bred out of them in time.

“Future generations of men would be oblivious to these remaining women’s existence, and that is for the best. If a man grows up without knowing of the existence of women, there will be no desire for sex. Sexuality will completely cease to exist. Love will cease to exist. There will no longer be any imprint of such concepts in the human psyche. It is the only way to purify the world.

“In such a pure world, the man’s mind can develop to greater heights than ever before. Future generations will live their lives free of having to worry about the barbarity of sex and women, which will enable them to expand their intelligence and advance the human race to a state of perfect civilization.

“It is such a shameful pity that my ideal world cannot be created. I realized long ago that there is no way I could possibly rise to such a level of power in my lifetime, with the way the world is

now. Such a thing will never become a reality for me, but it did give me something to fantasize about as I burned with hatred towards all women for rejecting me throughout the years. This whole viewpoint and ideology of abolishing sex stems from being deprived of it all my life. If I cannot have it, I will do everything I can to DESTROY IT.

“My orchestration of the Day of Retribution is my attempt to do everything, in my power, to destroy everything I cannot have. All of those beautiful girls I’ve desired so much in my life, but can never have because they despise and loathe me, I will destroy. All of those popular people who live hedonistic lives of pleasure, I will destroy, because they never accepted me as one of them. I will kill them all and make them suffer, just as they have made me suffer. It is only fair.” (p. 136-137)

“All I ever wanted was to love women, and in turn to be loved by them back. Their behavior towards me has only earned my hatred, and rightfully so! I am the true victim in all of this. I am the good guy. Humanity struck at me first by condemning me to experience so much suffering. I didn’t ask for this. I didn’t want this. I didn’t start this war... I wasn’t the one who struck first... But I will finish it by striking back. I will punish everyone. And it will be beautiful. Finally, at long last, I can show the world my true worth.” (p. 137)

Analysis

“All of my suffering on this world has been at the hands of humanity, particularly women. It has made me realize just how brutal and twisted humanity is as a species,” Rodger writes at the beginning of his manifesto.²⁴ His speech demonstrates a belief in himself as a victim of injustice, framing his actions as justified “retribution” against wrongs committed. Rodger demonstrates reality reversal (or “accusations in a mirror,” one of the hallmarks of dangerous speech²⁵) with claims that he was not the one who started “the war.” He states in the final lines of his manifesto that women and humanity “struck first” by causing him suffering, because women did not provide him with pleasure.²⁶ “I am the true victim in all of this,” Rodger concludes.²⁷ His repeated references to himself in his manifesto as a “magnificent gentleman” and “superior gentleman,” and in his video as “the supreme gentleman,” underscore his self-image as the mistreated hero of the story.

Most pervasive in the rhetoric of these materials is another major hallmark of dangerous speech: dehumanization.²⁸ Three types of dehumanization appear in Rodger’s treatment of women: objectification, animalistic dehumanization, and demonization. Seemingly contradictory types of

²⁴ My Twisted World, p. 1.

²⁵ Dangerous Speech Project. 2020. “Dangerous Speech: A Practical Guide.” <https://dangerousspeech.org/guide/>

²⁶ My Twisted World, p. 137.

²⁷ My Twisted World, p. 137.

²⁸ Dangerous Speech Project. 2020. “Dangerous Speech: A Practical Guide.” <https://dangerousspeech.org/guide/>

dehumanization often coexist in dangerous speech.²⁹ (The other major category of dehumanization, mechanistic dehumanization, is largely absent.) To a lesser extent, dehumanization of men occurs in the manifesto and video.

Sexualized objectification of women permeates the manifesto of over 100 pages. Rodger repeatedly refers to “blondes—“beautiful blonde,” “hot blonde,” “pretty blonde”—as the focus of his sexual interest and fantasizing. He views them as the type of woman that he deserves. These blondes are interchangeable with one another, and any woman stands in for the entire gender. According to a study on objectification by psychologists Edward Orehek and Casey G. Weaverling, “Sexual objectification reduces women to their appearance, body, or individual body parts, and these parts are separated from their mind and/or are thought to represent their entire self. This leads to a perception of women as interchangeable with others possessing the same physical characteristics and therefore as nonunique.”³⁰ Rodger selects the target of his attack based on the association with white, blonde attractiveness: he intends to kill women at the “hottest sorority of UCSB,” which he writes “is full of hot, beautiful blonde girls; the kind of girls I’ve always desired but was never able to have because they all look down on me.”³¹

Researchers have honed in on instrumentality as the “essential feature of objectification.”³² Objectified people are reduced to “things,” to possessions to be owned, to a “means to goals.”³³ They are denied subjectively, their thoughts and feelings ignored. In Rodger’s perception, women’s purpose is the provision of sexual pleasure, and they are not performing this function for him. He relates a decision to go out and attempt to have sexual intercourse before going forward with his attack, framing this as “giving the female gender one last chance to provide me with the pleasures I deserved from them.”³⁴ The phrasing of expectation that “the female gender” should “provide” sexual pleasure strongly evokes objectification and instrumentality. He views women with extreme hostility for not fulfilling this purpose for him, especially when he perceives them as fulfilling this purpose for other men.

When the rhetoric indicates awareness of women as having minds, they are approached via a synthesis of animalistic dehumanization and demonization, along with a continued emphasis on instrumentality. For instance, in the Epilogue, which deviates from the autobiographical style and contains some of the most virulent and ideological rhetoric, Rodger writes, “Women are vicious, evil, barbaric animals, and they need to be treated as such.”³⁵ Animalistic dehumanization views the subject as motivated by a limited set of primary emotions, particularly fear and desire, incapable of complex secondary emotions and making cognitive (rational)

²⁹ Giner-Sorolla, Roger, Bernhard Leidner, and Emanuele Castano. 2012. “Dehumanization, Demonization, and Morality Shifting.” Published in *Extremism and the Psychology of Uncertainty*, edited by Michael A. Hogg and Danielle L. Blaylock, Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

³⁰ Orehek, Edward and Casey G. Weaverling. 2017. “On the Nature of Objectification: Implications of Considering People as Means to Goals.” *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 12(5): p. 720.

³¹ *My Twisted World*, p. 132.

³² Orehek and Weaverling, 2017: p. 720.

³³ Orehek and Weaverling, 2017: p. 720.

³⁴ *My Twisted World*, p. 121.

³⁵ *My Twisted World*, p. 136.

choices.³⁶ It brings up feelings of “contempt and disgust.”³⁷ He writes in the Epilogue that women “think like beasts, and in truth, they are beasts. Women are incapable of having morals or thinking rationally.”³⁸ As beasts, he believes, they should not have rights or be allowed to make their own sexual and reproductive choices. Rodger argues that “rational men of intelligence” (as he considers himself) should choose who women “mate and breed with.”³⁹ The focus on breeding treats women as both instrumental and animals.

Animalistic dehumanization and demonization are found to tie strongly into motivations for mass violence. Portraying a group as animals or insects commonly appears in support for genocide, inspiring “the need to crush and get rid of an emotionally aversive element.”⁴⁰ Demonization paints a group as “malefactors, deserving punishment and death.”⁴¹ It creates moral justification to act against a group perceived as inherently evil. Through his distorted vision, Rodger views a girl kissing her partner on the street in front of him as “one of the worst experiences of torture from girls” committed against him.⁴² Responses that might seem disproportionately harsh to the perceived wrong are justified through demonization because the perpetrators are evil and irredeemable. Rodger concludes that the world is so flawed due to women, that “in order to make the world a fair place, they must all be eradicated.” He advocates imprisoning women in “concentration camps” to be “deliberately starved to death,” keeping a few survivors in labs “for the sake of reproduction,” where the “depraved nature will slowly be bred out of them in time.”⁴³

Rodger refers to this imagined future as his “ultimate and perfect ideology of how a fair and pure world would work.”⁴⁴ Threat to group purity is another hallmark of dangerous speech.⁴⁵ While not as pervasive a narrative as dehumanization, Rodger does repeat the concept of seeking a “pure world,” referring to this as how he believed the world to be as a young child. He pledges to “purify the world of everything that is wrong with it” through his planned attack, “the Day of Retribution,” acting as a “truly powerful god, punishing everyone I deem to be impure and depraved.”⁴⁶ In Rodger’s ideal world, this purification would free “man’s mind [to] develop to greater heights than ever before” without the “barbarity of sex and women.”⁴⁷ Thus, while purity is typically associated with racial and ethnic purity, this rhetoric demonstrates the potential for men to be imagined as a pure group that is tainted through women’s influence.

³⁶ Haslam, Nick. 2010. “Dehumanization: An Integrative Review.” *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 10(3): 252-264.

³⁷ Giner-Sorolla, Roger, Bernhard Leidner, and Emanuele Castano. 2012. “Dehumanization, Demonization, and Morality Shifting.” Published in *Extremism and the Psychology of Uncertainty*, edited by Michael A. Hogg and Danielle L. Blaylock, Blackwell Publishing Ltd, p. 169.

³⁸ My Twisted World, p. 136.

³⁹ My Twisted World, p. 136.

⁴⁰ Giner-Sorolla, Roger, Bernhard Leidner, and Emanuele Castano. 2012. “Dehumanization, Demonization, and Morality Shifting.” Published in *Extremism and the Psychology of Uncertainty*, edited by Michael A. Hogg and Danielle L. Blaylock, Blackwell Publishing Ltd, p. 169.

⁴¹ Giner Sorolla, et al, 2012, p. 169.

⁴² My Twisted World, p. 91.

⁴³ My Twisted World, p. 136.

⁴⁴ My Twisted World, p. 136.

⁴⁵ Dangerous Speech Project. 2020. “Dangerous Speech: A Practical Guide.” <https://dangerousspeech.org/guide/>

⁴⁶ My Twisted World, p. 135.

⁴⁷ My Twisted World, p. 137.

Demonization carries particular risks in creating not only a justification but a moral imperative to act, fueling a “crusade” mentality to stir followers to wage a costly campaign against those who are “malignant and incapable of reform.”⁴⁸ A post from Rodger on PUAHate.com sometime prior to his attack suggests an attempt to inspire support for such a crusade. “If we can’t solve our problems, we must DESTROY our problems,” Rodger wrote. “One day incels will realize their true strength and numbers, and will overthrow this oppressive feminist system.” Rodger dismisses a friend of his, who is not angered over his own lack of sexual relationships and will not condone violent action, as a “weakling.” Violence becomes as means of proving “worth.”⁴⁹

Through demonization, the actions of one are taken as representative of the group.⁵⁰ Rodger repeatedly refers to “all” women as rejecting him and therefore deserving of punishment. In discussing the sorority women selected as his target, he claims that “those girls” had “all rejected” him.⁵¹ Yet he did not target the selected sorority based on a negative interaction with its members, as might be expected based on his outrage at female rejection. Instead, he conducted “extensive research,” in his words, to ascertain which sorority has “the most beautiful girls,” the type he desired most.⁵² His thinking reflects objectification and demonization.

While women are Roger’s primary focus to a lesser extent, his animalistic dehumanization extends to other men, those he perceives as sexually successful with women. He asserts multiple times that he deserves what they have more. Rodger calls both men and women animals; his video states, “you are animals and I will slaughter you like animals.”⁵³ Despite being half-Asian himself, Rodger expresses heightened rage when he sees Black, Latino, or “full-blooded” Asian men with white women, claiming, “I deserve it more,” as a “descendant of British aristocracy.”⁵⁴ Along with his obsession with blonde white women, this indicates white supremacist beliefs. Rodger criticizes men of color as “inferior” and “ugly,” and refers repeatedly to his sexually active Latino housemate as an “animal” and a “pig.”⁵⁵

Rodger’s sense of superiority appears alongside his languages of animalistic dehumanization. He denounces “popular kids” as “hedonistic,” attributing to them only a pleasure-seeking motive, an animalistic base emotion; he settles on causing fear, another primary emotion, as the only method to make the “brutes” understand their wrongdoing and his superiority.⁵⁶ He repeatedly refers to himself as being unfairly treated or made to feel like a “mouse,” and intends to strike back against this feeling of dehumanization by those inferior to him by proving through violence he is the “alpha man,” even referring to himself as a “god” in contrast to the rest of humanity.⁵⁷ Rodger’s act of mass violence is conceived as a way to prove his superiority, his “true worth,” the final words of his manifesto.⁵⁸

⁴⁸ Giner Sorolla, et al, 2012, p. 169.

⁴⁹ My Twisted World, p. 91.

⁵⁰ Giner Sorolla, et al, 2012, p. 171.

⁵¹ Retribution video.

⁵² My Twisted World, p. 132.

⁵³ Retribution video.

⁵⁴ My Twisted World, p. 121; p. 84.

⁵⁵ My Twisted World, p. 90.

⁵⁶ Retribution video.

⁵⁷ Retribution video.

⁵⁸ My Twisted World, p. 137.

Speaker

Elliot Rodger was a 22-year-old man who perpetrated a mass killing targeting a sorority in Santa Barbara, CA, in 2014. Rodger had participated in forums where misogynist incels congregated, and while he did not mention incels by name in his manifesto or videos, he had posted on PUAHate.com encouraging incels to take action, and the wording of the post seems to indicate his self-identification with them. As an individual, before his attack, Rodger had no particular influence or authority; he was an on-and-off student whose parents continued to pay for his apartment, car, and other expenses. His post on PUAHate.com (Speech Act 1) encouraging incels to rise up carried no particular weight as a speaker, and he had not built a high profile for himself. Most of his videos and online posts preceded the attack, to the concern of his family but little broader attention.⁵⁹ However, his final “retribution” video (Speech Act 2) and manifesto (Speech Act 3) released gained notoriety due to the infamy that the attack garnered.

Following his attack, coverage by media outlets spread Rodger’s speech, acting as a second speaker. Rodger’s YouTube video was removed by the platform following his attack (threats of violence violate the company’s guidelines). However, the video was rebroadcast, in whole or in part, by major media outlets, including *ABC News*, *NBC News*, *CBS News*, *TIME*, and *The New York Times*.⁶⁰ Some of these broadcasts appeared on YouTube. *The Los Angeles Times*, CNN, and *The Washington Post* printed full transcripts of the video.⁶¹ *The New York Times* published the manifesto in full on its website.⁶² While these outlets did not intend to promote Rodger’s beliefs and ideology, they acted as second speakers in giving his words far greater reach than his own sphere of contacts provided; *ABC News*’ broadcast of his video has over one million views.

Many leaders of misogynist groups and forums chose to ignore or distance themselves from the attack at the time. A prominent exception was Daryush Valizadeh, or “Roosh V.,” an influential pickup artist, used the attack to claim that the massacre could have been prevented if Rodger learned “game.” He asserts that progressive organizations and others for opposing PUA lessons “must accept responsibility for these seven deaths,” although pickup artist ideology advances the objectification and dehumanization that motivated Rodger.⁶³ Valizadeh’s writings include

⁵⁹ Kang, Jay Caspian. 2014. “The Online Life of Elliot Rodger.” *New Yorker*.

<https://www.newyorker.com/tech/annals-of-technology/the-online-life-of-elliott-rodger>

⁶⁰ Mayer, Andre. 2014. “Elliot Rodger killings show difficulty of policing YouTube.” *CBC*.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/elliott-rodger-killings-show-difficulty-of-policing-youtube-1.2654778>.

<https://www.nytimes.com/video/us/100000002900707/youtube-video-retribution.html>;

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QJc234jkJ2w&list=LLDZFt5IMmizyc11F55W-wLQ&index=3241>;

<https://time.com/114210/elliott-rodger-ucsb-youtube-video/>; <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/isla-vista-rampage/california-shooting-suspect-elliott-rodgers-life-rage-resentment-n113996>;

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/thwarted-in-his-plan-california-gunman-improvised/>

⁶¹ <https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-transcript-ucsb-shootings-video-20140524-story.html>

⁶² <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/05/25/us/shooting-document.html>

⁶³ Valizadeh, Roosh. 2014. “No One Would Have Died If PUAHate Killer Elliot Rodger Had Learned Game.”

Return of Kings. <https://www.returnofkings.com/36135/no-one-would-have-died-if-pua-hate-killer-elliott-rodger-learned-game>

descriptions of his actions that amount to sexual assault, and he has opposed the current U.S. definitions of and laws on rape.⁶⁴

Most online misogynist forums do not appear to have acted as significant amplifiers immediately following the attack. PUAHate.com shut down, assumedly to avoid the attention the Santa Barbara attack brought to the forum, limiting the audience, and was replaced by SlutHate.com a few days after the attack.⁶⁵ 4chan appears to have been the most substantial online forum amplifier, though available data from that time is limited. While the reaction following the attack was mixed, some posters shared Rodger's manifesto and supported his ideology, and indicated that he used language influenced by 4chan.⁶⁶ The perpetrator of a mass shooting that took place in October 2015 at Umpqua Community College has been described as active on 4chan, and used his own brief manifesto to call attention to Rodger and praise his manifesto.⁶⁷

Over time, the misogynist incel movement has coalesced following, and influenced by, Rodger's attack, where second speakers continue to reproduce his words, more actively than in the immediate aftermath of the attack. The incels.co forum,⁶⁸ founded three years ago in late 2017, has been another venue where posts elevate Rodger and his ideology positively. Misogynist incels share his rhetoric on 4chan, incels.co, and other misogynist forums every year on the anniversary of his attack, continuing to put his ideas into circulation.⁶⁹

Rodger's speech has had more impact in the past three years in terms of an increase in incel violence than in the first three years following his attack. The perpetrator of the 2018 Toronto van attack that killed 10 people, Alek Minassian, credited Rodger and 4chan as influencing his beliefs, in a social media post published for public view before his attack.⁷⁰ Once again, the 2018 perpetrator used the platform of a mass killing to bring attention to Rodger, and identified as part of an "Incel Rebellion."⁷¹ At the time, this was Canada's second most-fatal attack, after the 1989 Montreal antifeminist massacre, bringing more significant attention to the act of violence. These second speakers using mass killings to raise their own platform and bring attention to Rodger are also part of a tradition in mass shooters identified by the Dangerous Speech Project intentionally linking themselves to past perpetrators and "framing their actions as being part of an emerging supremacist movement of which they are leaders."⁷² Cathy Buerger writes, "we should also view

⁶⁴ Crockett, Emily. 2016. "Did Roosh V really organize "pro-rape rallies"? No, but here's why people are protesting him.." *Vox*. <https://www.vox.com/2016/2/6/10926872/roosh-pro-rape-rallies>

⁶⁵ SlutHate.com later changed its name to redpilltalk.com, and then went defunct in late 2019.

⁶⁶ 4chan/pol/ data accessed through 4cat research database.

⁶⁷ Christopher Harper-Mercer manifesto.

⁶⁸ This site moved domains and was known as incels.is and incels.me before its current name, incels.co.

⁶⁹ Branson-Potts, Hailey and Richard Winton. 2018. "How Elliot Rodger went from misfit mass murderer to 'saint' for group of misogynists — and suspected Toronto killer." *Los Angeles Times*.

<https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-elliott-rodger-incel-20180426-story.html>

⁷⁰ DiBranco, Alex. 2018. "The Incel Rebellion." Political Research Associates.

<http://feature.politicalresearch.org/the-incel-rebellion>

⁷¹ DiBranco, Alex. 2018. "The Incel Rebellion." Political Research Associates.

<http://feature.politicalresearch.org/the-incel-rebellion>

⁷² Buerger, Cathy. 2019. "When Shootings Become Dangerous Speech." Dangerous Speech Project.

<https://dangerousspeech.org/when-shootings-become-dangerous-speech/>

their actions and writings as the performances of aspirational dangerous speakers” that “continue to reverberate, amplified on social media, potentially reaching new audiences.”⁷³

Medium

Speech Act 1: A post published on the PUAHate.com forum, a forum used by men dissatisfied with the pickup artist industry, or simply drawn to the vitriol against women due to their own grievances over a lack of desired sexual experience with women. The forum reported 18,000 members before the Santa Barbara attack, but people can also read posts on the forum without signing up as a member.⁷⁴ The forum was closed and relaunched as SlutHate.com after Rodger’s attack, a move likely intended to avoid the spotlight his attack put on the community, so this and all other posts on the forum were deleted along with the website.

Speech Act 2: Before his attack, Rodger uploaded the “Day of Retribution” video to YouTube and made it publicly available, apparently hoping for wide viewership after his attack. His original video posting was soon removed by YouTube for threatening violence. However, the full video was republished on the New York Times website,⁷⁵ broadcast by television networks, and reuploaded to YouTube by other users.⁷⁶ A transcript of the video has been published in media outlets including the *Los Angeles Times*, CNN, and *The Washington Post*.⁷⁷ As discussed in the “Speaker” section, these rebroadcasts gave the video far greater reach.

Speech Act 3: Rodger emailed his manifesto to acquaintances, including someone he knew from a body building forum who sent it to a media outlet, his family, and his therapist.⁷⁸ The manifesto was published in full on the *New York Times* website, and a Los Angeles Times webpage published extensive excerpts.⁷⁹ Copies were also uploaded, mostly by media, via the open source platform Document Cloud.⁸⁰ Had media not repeatedly shared his manifesto in full, it’s unclear what the reach would have been, given that Rodger did not post the document anywhere publicly, nor did he even send it directly to media outlets himself.

Audience

The “retribution” video mostly uses the second person, referring to his intended victims and the objects of his hatred. Rodger addresses women directly, promising to punish them for not being attracted to him and choosing other men. He also addresses the “popular kids” directly, pledging to kill them as well for not accepting him, and comparing them to animals to “slaughter.” He

⁷³ Buerger, Cathy. 2019. “When Shootings Become Dangerous Speech.” Dangerous Speech Project. <https://dangerousspeech.org/when-shootings-become-dangerous-speech/>

⁷⁴ <https://web.archive.org/web/20140519070609/http://puahate.com:80/index.php>

⁷⁵ <https://www.nytimes.com/video/us/100000002900707/youtube-video-retribution.html>

⁷⁶ https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=retribution+elliott+rodger

⁷⁷ <https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-transcript-ucsb-shootings-video-20140524-story.html>

<https://www.cnn.com/2014/05/24/us/elliott-rodger-video-transcript/index.html>

https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/transcript-of-video-manifesto-by-suspected-uc-santa-barbara-shooter/2014/05/24/04da4618-e381-11e3-9743-bb9b59cde7b9_story.html

⁷⁸ <https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-isla-vista-document-20140524-story.html>

⁷⁹ <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/05/25/us/shooting-document.html>;

<https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-isla-vista-document-20140524-story.html>

⁸⁰ <https://www.documentcloud.org/public/search/elliott%20rodger>

says that if he had the power, he would annihilate all of humanity, “every single one of you. Posted by him on YouTube, the way the video is addressed suggests his intention to reach his desired victims. His manifesto also explains that “I cannot kill every single female on earth, but I can deliver a devastating blow that will shake all of them to the core of their wicked hearts,” indicating that he intends for women to understand this act of terrorism as threatening them.⁸¹ He selects a symbolic target, a sorority, described as a stand-in for all the women he would like to kill but cannot. His repeated references to aiming to engender fear, suggests his desire for the speech to reach women, primarily, and the rest of “humanity” he loathes, secondarily. By committing an act of mass violence, Rodger brought attention to the public speech he left behind.

The manifesto, in contrast, refers to his desired targets in the third person. It was not posted publicly anywhere by Rodger himself. He emailed his manifesto to acquaintances, including people he met through online forums where he posted misogynist content, and to his family and his therapist.⁸² Rodger had previously sent a link to a misogynist online forum that resonated with him to his family, hoping that they would understand the appeal. It appears that Rodger sought to reach people in his own personal network with the autobiographical manifesto, people whom he wanted to sympathize with him, possibly acquaintances he thought might share his desire for violent action. An acquaintance from a bodybuilding forum who received the manifesto sent it to a media outlet, and the manifesto spread through publication by media and uploading to a public document share site. It appears framed more toward potential supporters than targets, and it is not clear whether Rodger anticipated the manifesto in particular spreading publicly to a wide general audience through the mainstream media.

Nonetheless, Rodger’s previous posting on PUAHate.com, calling on incels to rise up and destroy their problems, suggests that he hoped his ideology would reach men like him, angered at not having the sexual relationships with women they desired, who were already active in online male supremacist forums founded on a belief in male sexual entitlement. The terms “incel” and “beta” were already in circulation as self-descriptors for men lacking their desired sexual experiences.⁸³ However, misogynist incels lacked an ideological foundation, a gap the manifesto stepped into. Framing individual grievances as injustice, as Rodger did, is a significant step toward organizing people into a movement, and as discussed in the prior “Speaker” section, his manifesto has been significant to later misogynist incels, including perpetrators of violence.⁸⁴

Supportive Responses

In the immediate aftermath of the event, users on 4chan had mixed responses, with some posters sharing Rodger’s manifesto and calling him a hero, but the support on misogynist online forums has grown over time. They may even lament that Rodger failed to gain access to the sorority and

⁸¹ *My Twisted World*, p. 132.

⁸² Winton, Richard, Rosanna Xia, Rong-Gong Lin II. 214. “Isla Vista shooting: Read Elliot Rodger’s graphic, elaborate attack plan.” *Los Angeles Times*.

<https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-isla-vista-document-20140524-story.html>

⁸³ Bust Magazine. “ ‘Beta Males’ Want to Kill Women Because They Can’t Get Laid.” *Bust Magazine*.

<https://bust.com/feminism/15551-beta-males-want-to-kill-women-because-they-can-t-get-laid.html>

⁸⁴ Luker, Kristin. 1985. *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

thereby kill more women.⁸⁵ A subreddit, r/elliottrodgerfans, was created soon following the attack, but banned by Reddit for violating their content policy prohibiting violent content. (With such policy restrictions, Reddit forums have generally not been a primary location for promoting Rodger’s attack and ideology.) The sites where such responses occur have included the PUAHate.com successor SlutHate.com (replaced by RedPillTalk.com before shutting down in late 2019), 4chan, incels.co, and r/trucelcs and r/incels, both since banned by Reddit. The forum r/incels, active from 2016 to 2017 and growing to 40,000 members, referred to “Saint Elliot” and praised his attack until getting banned by Reddit.⁸⁶ The site that currently goes by the name incels.co was launched following the banning, at present the major online community dedicated to misogynist incel men, though 4chan also remains a popular gathering spot.⁸⁷

Within six months of the Santa Barbara attack, the replacement for PUAHate.com was already arguing similar entitlement to women’s bodies and defending incel mass violence as a means to influence society. A thread, “Why are so many of you against incel shooting sprees?” was posted in November 2014 on SlutHate.com, six months after Rodger’s attack. The poster denounced sympathizers who believe that “a school full of sluts and frat stars getting slain by an incel is a bad thing,” arguing that such mass bloodshed is “the only way that sluts and alphas will realize and accept that there are serious consequences for allowing so many males to live their lives in misery.”⁸⁸ Despite the accusation in the thread’s title, most of the responses indicated support or sympathy for incel men’s violence. One poster pointed out, “Only a handful of posters if any have denounced these shootings. These things are going to continue happening until people wake the fuck up and realize the huge problem that inceldom is causing for males worldwide.” Another response argued that every person deserves to have basic needs met like food, shelter, and, “if you are a male, sexual access to attractive females as that is considered a basic need for men as well.” The post continued by stating that “alpha males who don’t share their women” and “attractive sluts who reject ugly and sensitive guys” deserve to die.⁸⁹

Forums frequented by misogynist incel men have developed various linguistic means developed to reference Rodger positively. His initials, “E.R.,” are used in the context of “going ER” or encouraging others to “go ER.” (This replaced and became more popular than the term “going Sodini,” which had been coined after the 2009 Collier Township fitness class attack.⁹⁰) For instance, a post on r/trucelcs in July 2016, a small misogynist incel forum that has since been banned by Reddit: “If incels go ER they should target feminists. Gender studies class would be a good location to go ER.”⁹¹ Typing hERo or hERoic (and sometimes other words) with the “ER” capitalized is another version of the reference glorifying the attack via his initials. This reference has been embedded in discussing other mass killers, demonstrating how Rodger operates as a

⁸⁵ Bust Magazine. “ ‘Beta Males’ Want to Kill Women Because They Can’t Get Laid.” *Bust Magazine*.

<https://bust.com/feminism/15551-beta-males-want-to-kill-women-because-they-can-t-get-laid.html>

⁸⁶ <https://www.change.org/p/reddit-com-shut-down-the-subreddit-r-incels>

⁸⁷ Formerly incels.me and incels.is.

⁸⁸ <https://web.archive.org/web/20150226223226/http://sluthate.com/viewtopic.php?f=2&t=41005>

⁸⁹ <https://web.archive.org/web/20150226223226/http://sluthate.com/viewtopic.php?f=2&t=41005>

The same comment was also posted on a thread on bodybuilding.com by an active poster:

<https://forum.bodybuilding.com/showthread.php?t=169326283&page=15>

⁹⁰ DiBranco, Alex. 2018. “ ‘The Incel Rebellion.’” Political Research Associates.

<http://feature.politicalresearch.org/the-incel-rebellion>

⁹¹ <https://archive.is/lBuMI#selection-1999.0-1999.101>

symbol or standard for comparison, such as a post on Ted Kaczynski, “Notable autistic celibate hERo, today 78 years old!”⁹² Misogynist incels have referred to Rodger as a “patron saint,” and name “Saint Elliot” is also used, with May 23rd, the date of his attack, labeled “St. Elliot’s Day,” and posters celebrating the attack’s anniversary. “Supreme Gentleman,” as Rodger referred to himself in his video, is another popular reference.⁹³

The Umpqua Community College shooter referred to Rodger in his brief manifesto as “a god,” echoing his own self-descriptions.⁹⁴ A 4chan/r9k/ post lauding the Umpqua and Santa Barbara attacks stated, “/r9k/ needs a new martyr alongside our hallowed Elliot.”⁹⁵

Support for Rodger appears in other online venues, including ones that seem unrelated to promoting misogynist ideology. Photos of Rodger appear as online avatars on various forums, even gaming platforms like Steam.^{96 97} Small pages have been formed on Facebook glorifying him.⁹⁸ An online video game was created where players could kill sorority women as Rodger.

As the misogynist incel community has grown and developed since the 2014 attack, it has developed its dangerous speech a new language of dehumanizing terms. Objectifying terms common to misogynist incel forums to reduce women to their sexually instrumental body parts include “roastie,” derived from the misogynist claim that the vagina of a sexually active woman looks like roast beef, or simply “hole.” While objectification remains a hallmark of misogynist incel speech, there is a new emphasis on mechanistic dehumanization, which denies subjects “qualities such as warmth, independent thought, and emotion.”⁹⁹ The terms “femoid” or “foid,” abbreviations for “female humanoid,” and other variations, have become common on misogynist incel forums over the past few years. The mechanistic dehumanization presents women as “robots, who carry out their programmed mission, heartlessly but efficiently.”¹⁰⁰ While Rodger did refer to women as “heartless,” a rhetoric of mechanistic dehumanization was not developed in his manifesto. As with objectification, fungibility is an aspect of mechanistic dehumanization, any woman seen as interchangeable with another. They are characterized by “indifference, a lack of empathy.”¹⁰¹ While an animal may need to be put down, “mechanistic dehumanization sanitizes violence against the target by emptying it completely of emotionality: we are ... pulling

⁹² <https://web.archive.org/web/20201108022718/https://incels.co/threads/happy-birthday-theodore-j-kaczynski.207162/>

⁹³ <http://archive.vn/jFv0V#selection-639.1-641.95>; <https://jezebel.com/saint-elliott-rodger-and-the-incels-who-canonize-him-1825567815>

⁹⁴ Christopher Harper-Mercer manifesto.

⁹⁵ Nagle, Angela. 2016. “The New Man of 4chan.” *The Baffler*. <https://thebaffler.com/salvos/new-man-4chan-nagle>

⁹⁶ <https://bust.com/feminism/15551-beta-males-want-to-kill-women-because-they-can-t-get-laid.html>

⁹⁷ <https://www.revealnews.org/blog/hate-report-gaming-app-has-173-groups-that-glorify-school-shooters/>

⁹⁸ <https://www.revealnews.org/blog/the-hate-report-facebook-pages-glorified-incel-killer-and-chaos-at-neo-nazi-rally/>

⁹⁹ 2019. “Decoding Dehumanization: Policy Brief for Policymakers and Practitioners.” *Beyond Conflict*. p. 4.

¹⁰⁰ Giner-Sorolla, Roger, Bernhard Leidner, and Emanuele Castano. 2012. “Dehumanization, Demonization, and Morality Shifting.” Published in *Extremism and the Psychology of Uncertainty*, edited by Michael A. Hogg and Danielle L. Blaylock, Blackwell Publishing Ltd. p. 168.

¹⁰¹ Haslam, Nick. 2010. “Dehumanization: An Integrative Review.” *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 10(3): p. 262.

the plug of an inanimate object. In fact, sometimes denying the other group the ability to feel any emotion may motivate excusing one's own collective abuses against them."¹⁰²

The anniversary of the Santa Barbara attack continues to be celebrated annually by posters on both incels.co and 4chan, with many of the posts quoting his words directly, and often weaving the newer terminology to dehumanize women into these positive comments.¹⁰³ On the most recent anniversary in 2020, posts on 4chan and incels.co memorialized his passing, referring to him as a hero and a saint.

On incels.co, a 2020 anniversary thread, "The truth about Elliot Rodger," stated, "I'm feel like him the half Black half White version Elliot Rodger. I listened to his entire manifesto on YouTube." A response stated, "One foid could've changed everything but no," referencing Rodger's claim that one girl going out with him could have prevented the attack, adding a newer term of mechanistic dehumanization. Another response wrote, "All Normies and especially foids have advanced psychopathy. They are insane unfeeling beasts."¹⁰⁴ ("Normies" is a disparaging term popularized on 4chan for people seen as conforming to society.) A post on the 4chan/pol/ board titled, "Happy 6th Saint Elliot's Day," read, "It's 6 years ago that this man passed away. Elliot Rodger will be remembered as a hero, and a martyr and a victim of the society. He stood up for himself against the rotten corrupted normalfag society and roastie menace."¹⁰⁵ He's one of us. He will always be a legend and a supreme gentleman. All women are whores."

Many of the users who posted about Rodger on incels.co used photos of him as their avatars; a user who has posted nearly 7000 times admonished anyone who failed to recognize the anniversary by making him their avatar, and predicted, "Elliot Rodger will be known for 100s of years."¹⁰⁶ Another anniversary poster on 4chan/pol/ wrote, "May the incel revolution strike fear in the hearts of normies worldwide. Let the holy words of the Supreme Gentleman™ inspire many more people like it did with Alek Minassian [the 2018 Toronto van attacker]." A reply included photos of the six Santa Barbara victims, writing that they "were rightfully exterminated by the Supreme Gentleman." A "St. Elliot's Day" post on 4chan/r9k/ refers to Rodger as "The supreme gentleman and hero we need but don't deserve." One incels.co anniversary thread is dedicated to tribute videos, created by supporters to glorify Rodger and his attack, often using photos of him or clips of his own videos.¹⁰⁷

Opposition/Counterspeech

Men's rights forums rejected associations with the perpetrator immediately after the attack; some posters brought up the attack to point out that Rodger killed more men than women and claim it was unrelated to misogyny, ignoring that the intention was to massacre sorority women.

¹⁰² Giner-Sorolla, Roger, Bernhard Leidner, and Emanuele Castano. 2012. "Dehumanization, Demonization, and Morality Shifting." Published in *Extremism and the Psychology of Uncertainty*, edited by Michael A. Hogg and Danielle L. Blaylock, Blackwell Publishing Ltd. p. 168.

¹⁰³ <https://web.archive.org/web/20201108022926/https://incels.co/threads/good-quote-by-er.207569/>

¹⁰⁴ <https://web.archive.org/web/20201108023221/https://incels.co/threads/the-truth-about-elliott-rodger.207439/>

¹⁰⁵ "Normie" and other versions of terms referring to "normal" people are popular on 4chan as derogatory terms.

¹⁰⁶ <https://web.archive.org/web/20201108023416/https://incels.co/threads/only-fakecel-narcissists-dont-change-their-avatar-to-elliott-rodger.207528/>

¹⁰⁷ <https://web.archive.org/web/20200906032941/https://incels.co/threads/er-tribute-videos.207503/>

As expected, feminist women spoke out against the Santa Barbara attack. Feminist author Jessica Valenti wrote an article for *The Guardian* addressing Rodger's attack as evidence that "misogyny kills" and called attention to a cultural problem in seeing misogyny as "inevitable."¹⁰⁸ Journalist Lindsay Beyerstein, writing for the progressive outlet *In These Times*, denounced Rodger's attack as misogynist terrorism,¹⁰⁹ and Amanda Marcotte, another prominent feminist writer, denounced the ideologies of male entitlement that underlaid his attack.¹¹⁰ A hashtag, #YesAllWomen, sprang up on Twitter following the attack in which women expressed the myriad ways they face sexism, harassment, and the threat of violence from men on a regular basis.¹¹¹ *Think Progress* reported #YesAllWomen reached a peak of 51,000 tweets per hour.¹¹² The Southern Poverty Law Center reported on Rodger and the dangers of misogynist rhetoric.¹¹³

Alongside the #YesAllWomen hashtag, men tweeted #NotAllMen, responding defensively to attempts to call attention to the pervasiveness of misogyny. They distanced themselves from the attack without paying attention to and condemning the hatred and dehumanization of women motivating it.

As a result, commentaries by men directed toward other men pushed back against both Rodger's misogynist speech and the defensive responses. *Salon* executive editor Andrew O'Hehir's wrote a commentary entitled, "Hey Guys: Elliot Rodger is our problem."¹¹⁴ He calls attention to the culture of masculinity that led to the Santa Barbara attack, and critiques men's refusal to acknowledge their complicity in this culture and join in countering it. Phil Plait, a science blogger for *Slate*, devoted one of his "Bad Astronomy" blog posts to supporting #YesAllWomen and criticizing men for distracting from the topic and not listening to women. Neil Gaiman, the famous science fiction and fantasy author, tweeted support of #YesAllWomen, quickly accruing 7,500 likes.¹¹⁵ Chuck Wendig, a science fiction, fantasy, and thriller author and comic writer, wrote similarly on his popular writing and pop culture blog *TerribleMinds*.¹¹⁶ Most of these writers are involved in areas traditionally associated with "nerdy" men—science fiction, comics,

¹⁰⁸ Valenti, Jessica. 2014. "Elliot Rodger's California shooting spree: further proof that misogyny kills." *The Guardian*. theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/may/24/elliott-rodgers-california-shooting-mental-health-misogyny

¹⁰⁹ Beyerstein, Lindsay. 2014. "Elliot Rodger's War on Women." *In These Times*. https://inthesetimes.com/duly-noted/entry/16748/elliott_rodgers_war_on_women

¹¹⁰ Marcotte, Amanda. 2014. "How 'Pick-Up Artist' Philosophy and Its More Misogynist Backlash Shaped Mind of Alleged Killer Elliot Rodger." *American Prospect*. <https://prospect.org/culture/pick-up-artist-philosophy-misogynist-backlash-shaped-mind-alleged-killer-elliott-rodger/>

¹¹¹ Valenti, Jessica. 2014. "#YesAllWomen reveals the constant barrage of sexism that women face." *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/may/28/yesallwomen-barage-sexism-elliott-rodger>

¹¹² Leber, Rebecca. 2014. "Feminists' Inspiring Online Response To A Misogynist Mass Murderer." <https://thinkprogress.org/feminists-inspiring-online-response-to-a-misogynist-mass-murderer-92fa628b674/>

¹¹³ Potok, Mark. 2014. "War on Women." Southern Poverty Law Center. <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2014/war-women>; Glasstetter, Josh. 2014. "Shooting Suspect Elliot Rodger's Misogynistic Posts Point to Motive." Southern Poverty Law Center. <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2014/05/23/shooting-suspect-elliott-rodgers-misogynistic-posts-point-motive>

¹¹⁴ O'Hehir, Andrew. 2014. "Hey, guys: Elliot Rodger is our problem." *Salon*. https://www.salon.com/2014/05/31/elliott_rodger_a_turning_point_for_men/

¹¹⁵ Plait, Phil. 2014. "#YesAllWomen." *Slate*. <https://slate.com/technology/2014/05/not-all-men-how-discussing-womens-issues-gets-derailed.html>

¹¹⁶ TerribleMinds. 2014. "Not All Men, But Still Too Many Men." *TerribleMinds* <http://terribleminds.com/ramble/2014/05/25/not-all-men-but-still-too-many-men/>

science—rather than being known for writing about gender or discrimination. These men can reach a different audience than feminist women writers, potentially accessing men who might lean toward misogynist and sexually entitled beliefs.

Arthur Chu's popular article for *The Daily Beast*, "Your Princess Is in Another Castle, Nerds, and Misogyny," is the most well-known article of men speaking to "nerdy" men to follow the Santa Barbara attack. Chu, an Asian-American man, had recently rose to fame through an 11-game *Jeopardy* winning streak that ended in March 2014. He used that public profile to write on nerd culture, racism, and misogyny. In this article, Chu calls out "fellow male nerds" for denying the existence of "rape culture" and viewing themselves as victims. As what a "nerd celebrity," his writing aims to speak to and convince men similar to himself, who might be lured by the self-righteous belief in their own sexual entitlement. "We are not the lovable nerdy protagonist who's lovable because he's the protagonist. We're not guaranteed to get laid by the hot chick of our dreams as long as we work hard enough at it. ... And when our clever ruses and schemes to 'get girls' fail, it's not because the girls are too stupid or too bitchy or too shallow to play by those unwritten rules we've absorbed," Chu writes. "It's because other people's bodies and other people's love are not something that can be taken nor even something that can be earned—they can be given freely, by choice, or not."¹¹⁷

Incidents of Violence or Discrimination Related to Topic

Within weeks of the Santa Barbara attack, a 23-year-old man posted online comments asserting that "I am the next Elliot Rodger." He also wrote, "I live in Seattle and go to UW [University of Washington], that's all I'll give you. I'll make sure I kill only women." Law enforcement arrested him before any attack. At the time of his online threats, UW sororities had recently received threatening phone calls referencing the Santa Barbara attack and found chalk outlines outside their houses. It's unclear whether these threats were related or another perpetrator.¹¹⁸

There have been at least five acts of mass violence since 2014 in which perpetrators have referenced Rodger and/or some aspect of his manifesto:

1. Christopher Harper-Mercer perpetrated a mass shooting at Umpqua Community College in southwestern Oregon in 2015. His six-page, 1600-word manifesto referenced Rodger four times, hailing him as "a god" and comparing his own short manifesto to Rodger's longer one. He identified his lack of sexual experience or a girlfriend as motivating his attack.¹¹⁹
2. In December 2017, a young man killed two students at Aztec High School in New Mexico. He used the names of mass killers, including Rodger, as online usernames, and had lauded the "supreme gentleman."¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Chu, Arthur. 2014. "Your Princess Is in Another Castle, Nerds and Misogyny." *The Daily Beast*. <https://www.thedailybeast.com/your-princess-is-in-another-castle-misogyny-entitlement-and-nerds-1?ref=scroll>

¹¹⁸ Kiro 7 Staff. 2014. "Police: Man Threatened to Kill Women at UW." *Kiro 7*. <https://www.kiro7.com/news/police-man-threatened-kill-woman-uw/81696809/>

¹¹⁹ Harper-Mercer, Christopher. 2015. Manifesto.

¹²⁰ Hankes, Keegan and Alex Amend. 2018. "The Alt-Right Is Killing People." Southern Poverty Law Center. <https://www.splcenter.org/20180205/alt-right-killing-people>

3. The Parkland shooter who killed 17 people in Florida had posted on a YouTube video about Rodger’s manifesto, “Elliot rodger will not be forgotten.”¹²¹

4. In April 2018, Alek Minassian used a van to kill 10 people and injure 16 in Toronto, predominantly harming women. Before the attack, he wrote on Facebook, “Private (Recruit) Minassian Infantry 00010, wishing to speak to Sgt 4chan please. C23249161. The Incel Rebellion has already begun! We will overthrow all the Chads and Stacys! All hail the Supreme Gentleman Elliot Rodger!”¹²² “Chads” and “Stacys” are terms popularized on 4chan and used by incels to denote for sexually attractive “alpha” men and sexually desirable women, objectified as attractive blonde women. In his police interview, Minassian claimed that he first went on 4chan on May 23, 2014, the date of the Santa Barbara attack, a “very significant day” because “Elliot Rodger decided to essentially commit an uprising – a beta uprising if you will.” Minassian refers to Rodger as the “founding forefather” for incels, who “founded the entire movement.”¹²³

5. A forty-year-old man killed two women were killed in a shooting at a yoga studio in Tallahassee, FL in November 2018. He had compared his adolescent self to Rodger in a song that he composed, recorded, and posted online.¹²⁴

All of the known misogynist incel-related attacks through 2018 in the U.S. and Canada referenced Rodger directly, though since 2019, additional attacks have been connected to the misogynist incel community and ideology without information that perpetrators referenced him. These acts are included as related to Rodger speech even without the presence of direct references to him, given his formative influence on the ideology of and support for violence in the developing misogynist incel movement.

1. In 2019, a 22-year-old man attacked the Earle Cabell Federal Building in Dallas, Texas, who had posted memes on social media associated with incel and 4chan communities.¹²⁵

2. In February 2020, a man used a machete to kill a woman who worked at the Toronto Crown Spa erotic massage. He has been charged by Canadian authorities as incel extremist terrorism, the first such charge, though little information has been released as to the evidence for this connection.¹²⁶

¹²¹ Ansari, Talal et al. 2018. “The Florida School Shooter Posted Racist Messages Online, And Maybe Trained With A White Supremacist Group.” *BuzzfeedNews*. <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/talalansari/nikolas-cruz>

¹²² Bacon, John. 2018. “Incel: What it is and why Alek Minassian praised Elliot Rodger.” *USA Today*. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2018/04/25/incel-what-and-why-alek-minassian-praised-elliott-rodger/549577002/>

¹²³ Police interview of Alek Minassian. 2018.

¹²⁴ DiBranco, Alex. 2018. “Shooting in Tallahassee Illustrates Increasing Misogynist Violence.” Political Research Associates. <https://www.politicalresearch.org/2018/11/08/shooting-in-tallahassee-illustrates-increasing-misogynist-violence>

¹²⁵ Brumfield, Loyd. 2019. “Inspired by Dallas courthouse shooter, Air Force base circulates 'incel' warning signs.” *Dallas News*. dallasnews.com/news/2019/06/23/inspired-by-dallas-courthouse-shooter-air-force-base-circulates-incel-warning-signs/

¹²⁶ Bell, Stewart, Andrew Russell, and Catherine McDonald. 2014. “Deadly attack at Toronto erotic spa was incel terrorism, police allege.” *Global News*. <https://globalnews.ca/news/6910670/toronto-spa-terrorism-incel/>

3. In May 2020, at the Westgate shopping center in Arizona, a man shot three people while live-streaming video before being arrested. (None of the victims died.) He identified himself as an incel who had been rejected by women, seeking to target couples, to make them feel his pain.¹²⁷ Though Rodger was not mentioned, the targeting of couples is strongly reminiscent of multiple occasions related in his manifesto of being enraged by and harassing couples.

In addition, there have been arrests in 2020 for harassment or planned attacks in which perpetrators had referenced Rodger.

1. In April, a 33-year-old man in Los Angeles County was arrested for harassing and threatening women and teenage girls online since at least 2016. He had read Rodger's writing and posted sympathetically about him as a "victim" on Facebook multiple times from 2015 to 2019.¹²⁸

2. In June, a Virginia bomb-maker was arrested after injuring himself with his own explosives. Investigators found a letter imagining targeting "hot cheerleaders," with the statement, "I will not be afraid of the consequences no matter what I will be heroic I will make a statement like Elliott Rodgers did."¹²⁹

3. In September, the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force arrested a self-identified incel harassing and threatening a Long Island woman and her partner. In his harassing messages, he asserted that "it should be illegal for a woman to say no" to sex. He "identified with Elliot Rodger's ideology and manifesto."¹³⁰

General obstacles and opportunities for countering this speech

The initial obstacle to countering misogynist incel dehumanization has been the neglect of male supremacist ideology and violence as an area of focus, from watchdog groups to academia to law enforcement. Since 2018, this has begun to change, creating new opportunities for countering this dangerous speech. In 2018, male supremacy was recognized for the first time as an area of focus by prominent hate group watchdog the Southern Poverty Law Center. ADL, another prominent antidiscrimination watchdog, also published a report that year on the connection between misogyny and white supremacy. Both organizations have continued their expanded attention to male supremacy. Media coverage has also risen over this time period. Law

¹²⁷ Stern, Ray. 2020. "The Westgate Shooter Was an Incel Who Wanted Couples to Feel 'Pain.'" *Phoenix New Times*. <https://www.phoenixnewtimes.com/news/arizona-westgate-glendale-shooter-was-an-incel-who-targeted-couples-armando-hernandez-11471873>

¹²⁸ Blankstein, Andrew. 2020. "California man promoting 'incel ideology' charged with allegedly threatening teens." *NBC News*. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/california-man-promoting-incel-ideology-charged-allegedly-threatening-teens-n1189206>

¹²⁹ 2020. "Incels (involuntarily celibates)." ADL. <https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounders/incels-involuntary-celibates>

¹³⁰ Rawnsley, Adam and Seamus Hughes. 2020. "FBI's Terror Hunters Turn to a Different Threat: Incels." *The Daily Beast*. <https://www.thedailybeast.com/fbis-terror-hunters-turn-to-a-different-threat-incels?source=twitter&via=desktop>

enforcement in the U.S. and Canada and counterterrorism practitioners and scholars have also begun to pay more attention to the threat of incel violence.¹³¹

After the 2019 Dallas attack, the Air Force embarked on a briefing on the threat posed by incels.¹³² The January 2020 Texas Domestic Terrorism Threat Assessment identified incels as an “a growing domestic terrorism concern due to the ideological nature of recent Incel attacks internationally, nationwide, and in Texas.”¹³³ The Canadian government issued the first terrorism charges in an incel-connected case in May 2020.¹³⁴ Counterterrorism and countering violent extremism (CVE) organizations, including Moonshot CVE, the International Center for Counter Terrorism - The Hague, and Organization for the Prevention of Violence, all published reports on incels in 2020.¹³⁵ Incel violence has become a subject for studies of terrorism and/or violent extremism, with three articles on incel violence appearing in terrorism journals from 2019 to 2020, and in addition another article in a political science journal.¹³⁶

Unfortunately, much of the coverage and reports demonstrate a misunderstanding of the misogynist incel movement and ideology, posing an obstacle to effective opposition. For instance, recent *BBC* article on the Toronto van attacker’s trial stated that the term incel “refers to a now-banned group on the discussion site Reddit,” although the short-lived r/incels forum is far from the entirety of the movement.¹³⁷ There is a pervasive overemphasis on incel use of the memes for “Chad and Stacy,” at the expense of attention to the virulently dehumanizing terms used for women. Dehumanization of women is rarely mentioned. Analysis often centers mental health issues and “self-loathing” as the defining characteristics of the incel community, rather

¹³¹ Police1 Staff. 2018. “5 things to know about incels.” *Police1*. <https://www.police1.com/mass-casualty/articles/5-things-to-know-about-incels-EgvFu5aPXU7ui1It/>

¹³² Brumfield, Loyd. 2019. “Inspired by Dallas courthouse shooter, Air Force base circulates 'incel' warning signs.” *Dallas News*. dallasnews.com/news/2019/06/23/inspired-by-dallas-courthouse-shooter-air-force-base-circulates-incel-warning-signs/

¹³³ 2020. *Texas Domestic Terrorism Threat Assessment*. Texas Fusion Center, Intelligence & Counterterrorism Division, Texas Department of Public Safety. p. 3.

https://www.dps.texas.gov/director_staff/media_and_communications/2020/txTerrorThreatAssessment.pdf

¹³⁴ https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/entry/incel-terrorism-extremism-canada_ca_5ec82c10c5b69af8509ac9be

¹³⁵ 2020. “Incels: A Guide to Symbols and Terminology.” Moonshot CVE.

file:///Users/alexdi Branco/Downloads/Incels_-_A-Guide-to-Symbols-and-Terminology_Moonshot-CVE.pdf;

DiBranco, Alex. 2020. “Male Supremacist Terrorism as a Rising Threat.” International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague. <https://icct.nl/publication/male-supremacist-terrorism-as-a-rising-threat/>;

van der Veer, Renske. 2020. “Analysing personal accounts of perpetrators of incel violence: what do they want and who do they target?” International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague. <https://icct.nl/publication/analysing-personal-accounts-of-perpetrators-of-incel-violence-what-do-they-want-and-who-do-they-target/>;

Lewis, Jon and Jacob Ware. 2020. “Spring Provides Timely Reminder of Incel Violence—And Clarifies How to Respond.” International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague. <https://icct.nl/publication/spring-provides-timely-reminder-of-incel-violence/>.

Hastings, Zoe, David Jones, and Laura Stolte. 2020. “Involuntarily Celibates: Background for Practitioners.” Organization for the Prevention of Violence. https://preventviolence.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Involuntary-Celibates-Background-for-Practitioners_webupdate.pdf

¹³⁶ Baele, Stephane J., Lewys Brace & Travis G. Coan (2019): “From ‘Incel’ to ‘Saint’: Analyzing the violent worldview behind the 2018 Toronto attack,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*; Hoffman, Bruce, Jacob Ware & Ezra Shapiro (2020): “Assessing the Threat of Incel Violence,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*; Cotte, Simon. 2020.

“Incel (E)motives: Resentment, Shame and Revenge. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*.

¹³⁷ 2020. “Toronto van attack: 'Incel' killer Minassian pleads not criminally responsible.” *BBC*.

bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-54895219

than dehumanization and ideologies of male supremacy and entitlement.¹³⁸ Recommendations that follow from this perspective focus on solutions related to mental health resources and therapy that fail to address the ideologies of male supremacism. This can also reinforce misogynist incel men's framework of reality reversal, perceiving themselves as victims, and beliefs that only men feel suffering, because women have not responded to loneliness with mass violence. Overcoming the general tendency toward what scholar Kate Manne has called "himpathy," the "excessive sympathy sometimes shown to perpetrators of sexual violence"—or perpetrators of violence based on sexual entitlement—is vital to improving research on and media coverage of misogynist incel violence and communities.¹³⁹

Nonetheless, the increased interest in this subject provides an opportunity, especially with counterterrorism and CVE organizations that are reaching out to scholars of male supremacism to inform their reports. An upcoming collaboration between New America Project and the Institute for Research on Male Supremacism (IRMS) counters many of prevalent misunderstandings.¹⁴⁰ And not all existing coverage falls prey to these issues. Among academic journal articles, a 2020 political science article "Confronting Incel: exploring possible policy responses to misogynistic violent extremism," demonstrates a stronger basis for approach.¹⁴¹

I advocate a transition to the use of the term "misogynist incel" to distinguish the state of not having desired sexual and romantic relationships from adhering to a male supremacist ideology and movement. Counterterrorism and CVE practitioners are not actually concerned with and responding to all "incels," a term advanced by a bisexual woman to describe her own status. They are responding to a (heterosexual) men-only movement based on misogynist sexual entitlement and dehumanization of women. Distinguishing this, recognizing the hallmarks of dangerous speech, and approaching this as male supremacist ideology can inform more effective responses. Deradicalization programs and counseling for domestic abuse perpetrators, which recognize standard therapy and mental health approaches are not designed to address harmful ideologies, offer a stronger basis for designing programs to address misogynist incel men.

The increasing attention to incel violence has also had the side effect of a rush to brand mass violence and terrorism as incel-related due to the presence of misogyny, overlooking that multiple ideologies of male supremacism exist and can motivate violence.¹⁴² This case study opens by contextualizing misogynist incel ideology within a milieu of male supremacist beliefs. Responses to counter misogynist incel speech would be best informed by a comprehensive approach aiming to counter various expressions of male supremacist dangerous speech.

¹³⁸ 2019. "Violent misogyny, mass murder and suicide: it's time to save incels from themselves." Moonshot CVE. <http://moonshotcve.com/save-incels-from-themselves/>

¹³⁹ Manne, Kate. 2018. "Brett Kavanaugh and America's 'Himpathy' Reckoning." *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/26/opinion/brett-kavanaugh-hearing-himpathy.html>

¹⁴⁰ The author is executive director of IRMS.

¹⁴¹ Tomkinson, Sian, Tael Harper, and Katie Atwell. 2020. "Confronting Incel: exploring possible policy responses to misogynistic violent extremism." *Australian Journal of Political Science*, Volume 55, Issue 2.

¹⁴² Jasser, Greta, Megan Kelly, and Ann-Kathrin Rothermel. 2020. "Male supremacism and the Hanau terrorist attack: between online misogyny and far-right violence." International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague. <https://icct.nl/publication/male-supremacism-and-the-hanau-terrorist-attack-between-online-misogyny-and-far-right-violence/>

Countering dangerous speech involves not only focusing on the fringes but also on mainstream dehumanization of women and apologists for men who perpetrate physical or sexual abuse. The dehumanization and instrumentality with which misogynist incel men perceive women is consistent with societal rape culture and male supremacy. Strategies that deal with those mainstream systems would thus have impact across the spectrum. A recent study of incel violence advocated “education of community workers, police, politicians and teachers to engage with misogyny’s threat to public security,” for example, on the harms of victim-blaming.¹⁴³ Other opportunities include evaluating how the English literary canon—books that are often required reading in middle and high schools—contributes to male sexual entitlement and objectifying views of women, and advancing more literature that presents women as characters showcasing their thoughts and humanity.¹⁴⁴ Comprehensive, consent-based sexuality education is another avenue for countering the growth of male sexual entitlement. Middle to high school education poses an especially significant opportunity for countering dangerous speech as young men accessing misogynist and racist online forums frequently begin around that time in their lives. Groups like the Southern Poverty Law Center and PERIL (Polarization and Extremism Research Innovation Lab) have been doing work on countering radicalization in young people.¹⁴⁵

Deplatforming is a controversial strategy for countering dangerous speech, due to concerns about creating fringe “echo chambers” that become increasingly extreme. Misogynist incel forums have been banned on Reddit and lost their domain hosts, but have generally been able to find a new host for their platform. However, by hosting a vast number of forums, Reddit facilitates online communities in finding larger audiences, as readers browse and search subreddits. The r/incels subreddit, reaching 40,000 subscribers at its banning, was the largest misogynist incel forum.¹⁴⁶ Keeping dangerous speech off mainstream sites like Reddit thereby has the potential to undermine recruitment and growth, while also indicating that such speech is not condoned.

For those who would speak out publicly against dangerous misogynist speech, the risk of online harassment and doxing (revealing private information such as individual’s addresses) poses an obstacle. Women are most likely to be targeted.¹⁴⁷ A well-known feminist author and cofounder of the blog *Feministing* left social media after one of the many rape threats she received was directed at her five-year-old daughter.¹⁴⁸ Feminist editors have suggested that widespread

¹⁴³ Tomkinson, Sian, Tael Harper, and Katie Attwell. 2020. “Confronting Incel: exploring possible policy responses to misogynistic violent extremism.” *Australian Journal of Political Science*, Volume 55, Issue 2.

¹⁴⁴ Spampinato, Erin. 2018. “How does the literary canon reinforce the logic of the incel.” *The Guardian*.

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/jun/04/incel-movement-literary-classics-behind-misogyny>

¹⁴⁵ 2020. “PERIL AND SPLC PUBLISH GUIDE TO HELP PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS UNDERSTAND RISKS OF ONLINE RADICALIZATION DURING TIMES OF UNREST.” Southern Poverty Law Center. <https://www.splcenter.org/presscenter/peril-and-splc-publish-guide-help-parents-and-caregivers-understand-risks-online>

¹⁴⁶ r/ForeverAlone is much larger but, as previously stated, rooted in the original meaning of incel and not included as a misogynist incel forum, especially in its current approach, which has explicitly barred misogynist incel speech.

¹⁴⁷ In fall 2019, the author of this case study spoke to *NPR* about researching misogynist incel ideology, leading to a piece by Andrew Anglin on his neo-Nazi website *The Daily Stormer*, in which he referred to himself as the “self-appointed spiritual successor to Elliot Rodger.” <https://www.malesupremacism.org/2019/10/03/neo-nazi-website-attacks-female-founder-of-institute-for-research-on-male-supremacism/>

¹⁴⁸ Weiss, Suzannah. 2016. “Why Jessica Valenti Left Social Media.” *Bustle*.

<https://www.bustle.com/articles/176041-the-disturbing-reason-jessica-valenti-left-social-media-is-all-too-common-this-kind-of>

mainstream media coverage helps make counterspeech less risky. When only a few women writing for feminist outlets are speaking out, they find that misogynists more heavily focus on them for harassment, a tactic that can successfully silence the existing opposition.¹⁴⁹

Research on misogynist speech, especially when conducted by women who are themselves the targets, can also take an emotional toll.¹⁵⁰ Funding for digital security services and trainings, resources for dealing with psychological strain, and communities where researchers can support one another can improve the ability and safety of researchers to do oppositional work. Opportunity for forming strategies for countering dangerous misogynist speech lies in listening to and supporting the feminist women scholars and journalists already doing substantial work on this subject, that have not received proportionate attention to their expertise.

This case study focuses on North America, as thus far perpetrators of violent attacks who directly referenced Rodger have been limited to the U.S. and Canada (with no apparent border felt by misogynist incel men between the two countries in terms of this movement and ideology). However, a geographically siloed approach can obstruct responses, given that this speech is transnational in nature as online forums are accessible across borders; language is the primary barrier to expansion beyond countries where most people speak English. A recent study undertaken by the Swedish Defense Research Institute on misogynist incel online communities found “the two most common nationalities across the forums were American and British, whereas Sweden had the largest presence on a per capita ratio.”¹⁵¹ In 2020, a bomb-maker connected to the incel movement was arrested in Britain prior to carrying out any attack.¹⁵² The reports on misogynist incels previously mentioned have stemmed from researchers in North America, Europe, and Australia, indicating the opportunity for international collaboration.

¹⁴⁹ Author interview with an editor at a prominent feminist magazine.

¹⁵⁰ Allam, Hannah. 2019. “‘It Gets To You.’ Extremism Researchers Confront The Unseen Toll Of Their Work.” *NPR*. <https://www.npr.org/2019/09/20/762430305/it-gets-to-you-extremism-researchers-confront-the-unseen-toll-of-their-work>

¹⁵¹ 2020. “Reader’s Digest – 13 March 2020.” Tech Against Terrorism.

<https://www.techagainstterrorism.org/2020/03/13/readers-digest-13-march-2020/>

¹⁵² Odling, George. 2020. “Britain’s first ‘Incel’ bomb maker: ‘Involuntary celibate’ who had no luck with women pleads guilty to possessing explosives and terrorist materials after saying he wanted to ‘massacre this place.’” *Daily Mail*. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8157661/Britains-Incel-bomb-maker-told-friend-wanted-massacre-place.html>