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Far Right

Incel Terrorism

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On Thursday 12th August 2021, a man we will not name shot and killed five people in Plymouth, including a child. The Daily Mail is reporting that he was a body builder radicalised by the misogynistic incel movement from the US. He also killed himself in the course of the attack.

In YouTube videos the man complained of being too 'fat and ugly' to have access to sex, and compared himself with the sci-fi killer robot the Terminator. The incel (an abbreviation of 'involuntary celibate') movement is an umbrella for various men who believe that they have a right to sex from the women they consider attractive. They develop a pessimistic philosophy about the contemporary world to explain why they are deprived of this alleged right.

Incels are a subset of the broader misogynistic manosphere that also includes MRAs (men's rights activists), MGTOWs (Men Going Their Own Way), PUAs (pickup artists), and some extremist fathers' rights groups. They have sometimes been linked more generally to the far right, including to racist and violent neo-Nazi organisations. Their worldview is heavily dependent on ideas associated with biological determinism and evolutionary psychology. Although he does not describe himself as an incel or as supportive of the movement, the pseudo-intellectual self-help charlatan Jordan Peterson is a major point of reference for incels.

Becoming an incel is sometimes referred to internally as taking the red pill. This is a reference to the Wachowski sisters' film *The Matrix* in which characters wake from an illusory computer simulated world via taking a red pill. Ironically, given the manosphere's deep hatred of trans people, the film has later been revealed as an allegory for transgender transition experiences. The red pill is a reference to estrogen pills as part of hormone replacement therapy. Incels also developed the idea of the black pill, which refers to awakening to a state of complete futility, in which the incel renounces all hope of finding a sexual partner. In reality, almost all incels regard themselves as black-pilled.

The terms red pill and black pill have also been taken up by the far-right, alt-right and even, sometimes, by some on the reactionary left as denoting a growing awareness of supposed reactionary truths about society. The incel lexicon is as vast as it is influential. They draw on the pseudo-scientific idea of human female hypergamy (that is, the incorrect notion that women use their sexuality primarily to increase their social status if given the freedom to do so, such that lower status men are then barred from finding a partner in a sexually liberal society).

Incels dehumanise women frequently in their language. Women are sometimes described as 'femoids' or 'foids' or even worse, with language that associates women with the alleged attractiveness of their genitals. Some transphobic groups have taken to using the incel-derived word 'moid' to refer to trans women. Sexually active women are called either 'stacys' or 'beckys' depending on their alleged attractiveness, while sexually active men are called 'chads' or 'normies' depending on their attractiveness. There are also different types of incel: 'volcels' are voluntarily celibate; 'fakecels' and 'truecels' are fake or real incels respectively. And various racist terms are used to describe incels from different ethnic backgrounds.

This is not the first time that this ideology has been involved in such an act of mass violence. The machete attack against a Toronto spa on 24 February 2020; the 2014 Isla Vista murders, the 2009 Collier Township shooting and the 2007 Virginia Tech shooting were all linked to incel ideas. The unique mixture of hate and nihilism makes this movement especially dangerous when it comes to inspiring such acts of violence, and the media's choice to name the perpetrators helps online incel groups to find in these attacks further inspiration for fresh violence. Attackers become martyrs and saints in the strange online anonymous boards and online chat groups that seek to radicalise

more young men dissatisfied with their lives.

The ultimate root of incel violence must be understood socially and theoretically. In her book *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny*, Kate Manne wrote that:

'[A]t the most general level of description, misogyny should be understood as the "law enforcement" branch of a patriarchal order, which has the overall function of policing and enforcing its governing ideology.'

Incels emerge not at random, but from a society where social reproduction is dependent on women's unpaid labour, and therefore on a patriarchy that constantly reinforces in its ideology violent ideas about women's 'natural' social role.

Manne understands misogyny, then, as an 'inherently political phenomenon' that is 'dependent on there being norms and expectations of a patriarchal nature.' Politicians, the media and other figures of the establishment will rightly condemn this butchery, but they will perpetuate the rhetorical and political systems that reinforce incel ideas. Even some incels will condemn violence, but we should understand that their ideas have an internal logic and that logic ends in horrific explosions of violence.

The other side of this is the internet. Social media algorithms reward clicks. The more clicks a video or post attracts, the more attention will be directed to it in the future. A sensational video, with a sensational title and opening and cover image, attracts clicks. YouTube (like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram) are reactionary platforms. They operate an internal attention economy that depends on controversial, sensational, contrarian content.

While none of those criteria necessarily mean that this content must be reactionary, it is biased in favour of the reactionary. Worse, such media elevates individuals over fans as petty bourgeois (small business owning) micro celebrities. It gives micro celebrities a stake in a capitalistic platform, and therefore in capitalism, even if precariously. This is an inherently reactionary social strata, whose material interests are neither with workers nor the bourgeoisie, who are atomised even from one another by intense competition, who dream of being bourgeois and fear being workers. The mainstay of fascism and hate movements.

Writing *System Crash* alongside Neil Faulkner, Phil Hearse, Nina Fortune, and Simon Hannah, I helped to advance the concept of the internet's 'fast-fixity' to partially explain how it gives rise to reactionary and fascist movements. This notion clarifies a feature of how the internet is experienced by users, which causes it to be alienating and disorientating especially to those who spend long periods of time dwelling only in online spaces.

"The internet has its own temporality too, which is both fast-moving (giddyingly frictionless) and, counterintuitively, a perfect time capsule (preserving all it touches). The strangeness of such a fast fixity adds to an impression that 'virtual' cyberspace is immaterial, less real than the world. Everything is throwaway, but online-time's detritus proves timelessly recoverable."

Because the internet is experienced as both fast and timeless, it creates the impression for users that they are operating in a different reality. This experience of unreality compounds pre-existing atomisation (the alienation we experience from each other) when we interact with others online. The fastness creates a sense of a world without consequences (minimising empathy), while the fixity returns to haunt us with our online past selves (making us all victims of ourselves). The internet is a place of constant anxiety, where the stakes are lowered to bring out our worst selves, then raised again when we are attacked, condemned and ostracised by others with whom we have only the most tenuous relationships. The mix of despair and self-pity obvious in the incel movement is the form of consciousness that emerges organically from being online.

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How can any of this be changed? The socialist left desperately needs to further theorise the internet as a site of intense ideological struggle with the capacity to spill into acts of violence. The internet was a cornerstone for the political strategies of Donald Trump, Jeremy Corbyn and Boris Johnson, but of these only the outright reactionaries were able to deploy online tools with any success. Johnson and Trump most closely followed the strategies of one-time libertarian presidential hopeful Ron Paul, who pioneered the politicisation of the internet and helped coalesce many of the subcultures that would become the base of the manosphere and alt-right. Trump and Johnson did not aim to further cultivate these online spheres, but their reactionary interventions both served to embolden such groups.

Thursday's attack, as much as Paul, Trump, and Johnson's electoral campaigns (and Corbyn's electoral failure) all point to the same base reality: the internet has fundamentally changed how reactionary and progressive forces vie for power, and this process is far from bloodless. That is, the internet is not a sideshow, it is inspiring far right terrorism directed at the oppressed and (as we see in the example of Anders Behring Breivik) the left itself.

But this is a weird space, full of obscenity and trolls. The consolidated left has become comfortable only aiming to interpret those parts of society that are clear and rational. Arguments over the workings of the economy, over the nature of dead revolutions and the state of our organisations are important, but they can also be safe distractions from looking at our contemporary monsters in the face. Incels are no joke, they are a violent expression of our age, our technology and our historical impasse.

We live at a weird moment of history, where a moribund capitalism faces no clear revolutionary rival, and has even perversely created a technological apparatus to augment its own despair. Incel despair must be answered by revolutionary optimism, violent misogyny (and all forms of hate) with social solidarity, and reactionaries with the self-defence of the exploited and the oppressed. But while these old strategies of revolution, solidarity and self-defence must be retained, a new diagnosis is needed. It was needed yesterday.

Source: [Anti Capitalist Resistance](#)

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