

The “Manosphere”

An overview of extreme misogyny online

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT?

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

**Microsoft makes no statement as to the accuracy of the contents of this document. The contents herein are a product of ISD and are provided for informational purposes only.*



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

FAQ

How are these briefing notes produced?

They are informed by both literature review and digital research using **publicly accessible** websites, social media pages, channels and forums. This briefing note was published in October 2020 and is based on research conducted in September 2020.

What topics do they cover?

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

Additional questions?

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



Misogyny Online: the “Manosphere”

The “manosphere” is an umbrella term that refers to a number of interconnected misogynistic communities. It encompasses multiple types and severities of misogyny – from broader male supremacist discourse to men’s rights activism (MRA) and “involuntary celibates” (Incels). Marked on the map are affiliated, high-profile instances of violence.

Isla Vista, USA (2014) – Elliot Rodger injures fourteen and kills seven, including himself. Rodger self-identified as an incel and [claimed a desire to enact revenge on women, as well as promoting other related anti-women narratives](#), in a series of YouTube videos and a “manifesto” he left behind.

Toronto, CA (2018) – After allegedly applauding Rodger on Facebook and posting that [the “Incel rebellion” had begun](#), Alek Minassian kills ten and injures a further sixteen by driving a van through a busy business district of Toronto.

San Bernardino, USA (2020) – A men’s rights advocate who was allegedly [a very visible member of the online MRA community](#) is linked to two murders, one of which targeted a female judge but ended in the death of her son.

Toronto, CA (2020) – A seventeen-year-old male fatally stabs one and injures two at a massage parlor in Toronto. This was the first case of incel-affiliated violence in Canada to be [treated as an act of terrorism](#).

BACKGROUND

What is it?

Simply put, the “manosphere” encompasses a range of misogynistic communities that vary from anti-feminism to more explicit, violent rhetoric towards women. **This document explores the more extreme and divisive proponents of these online communities.**

Tie-in with Extremism:

Research by the [Southern Poverty Law Center](#) (SPLC) shows significant cross-pollination between the “manosphere” and right-wing extremism. While affiliates of one may not explicitly identify as the other, there have been instances of graphic misogynistic content on right-wing extremist sites and references to right-wing extremist ideology in Incel forums. One prominent example of the former is The Daily Stormer and its founder, Andrew Anglin. The Daily Stormer is a neo-Nazi, antisemitic site that also features dehumanizing discourse towards women and prides itself on being “the most censored publication in history”. This symbiosis of rhetoric is evident in quotes from Anglin’s articles that read “women are the Jews of gender” and that “women use their bodies like Jews use their Jew gold – as a manipulation tool to get what they want”. Here, Anglin employs antisemitic tropes to denigrate women, as Incels and other affiliates of the “manosphere” do. The site is riddled with instances of such rhetoric.



RELATED NARRATIVES

INCELS – who are they and what do they believe?

Short for “involuntary celibates”, incel communities believe they are entitled to sex. Because they haven’t had sex recently or at all, they feel a bitterness or hatred towards women (most self-identified incels are men) and their own station in life. Incel forums are therefore rife with misogyny that ranges in severity from broader generalizations of women to pro-rape discourse. While incel forums vary in terms of severity, the danger of the ideology is evident in the acts of Elliot Rodger and Alek Minassian, both of whom identified as incels. Rodger also left behind a graphic manifesto, in which he spoke of the need for concentration camps to exterminate women, with the exception of a select few that are kept for reproductive purposes. Rodger and Minassian are glorified by many users of incel forums. Some refer to Rodger as Saint Elliot or Supreme Gentleman Elliot Rodger and call for more men to replicate his actions.

CHARACTERIZATIONS

The following names are used to characterize and generalize men and women into different “types”.

- Alphas, Betas and Omegas – Alphas are men that are considered sexually “successful” and traditionally handsome, and are generally characterized as confident, assertive and dominant. Betas are normally ‘normies’ who can achieve sex but will never be able to prevent Stacy from sleeping with Chad.
- Chads, Stacys, Beckys – Similarly to Alphas, Chads are considered the opposite of incels in that they are “successful” with women and “conventionally handsome”. Incels may refer to Chads in a mocking sense or with admiration.
- Stacys are the female equivalent to Chads, but generally referred to more negatively than Chads are. Stacys are often characterized as beautiful, hyperfeminine but “dumb” and promiscuous. Incels believe Stacys will only go for Chads or “Alphas”. Beckys are considered less attractive than Stacys, but still unattainable for incels.

DEHUMANIZATION OF WOMEN:

One of the dangers of incels is their rhetoric about and attitude towards women.

- Femoids or FHOs
Short for “female humanoids” or “female humanoid organism”, these terms are intended to dehumanize and belittle women not only as lesser than men, but as less than human.
- AWALT
“All women are like that”, again used to generalize and stereotype.
- Hypergamy
Taken from animal biology and inaccurately applied to women, hypergamy is the concept of “mating upwards”. Some incels believe women are hypergamous and therefore will always seek relationships with men of higher status than themselves, or than the men they are currently with.
- Branch or vine-swinging
Tying in with hypergamy is the generalization of women as “branch-swinging” or “vine-swinging”, which essentially accuses women of always seeking “better” men and “swinging” from one relationship to the next for opportunistic reasons.

MEN'S RIGHTS ACTIVISM AND PICK-UP ARTISTS

It is difficult to draw a clear-cut line between incels, Men's Rights Activists (MRA) and Pick-Up Artists (PUA). They all draw on the same underlying belief in male victimhood – specifically that women and feminism are at fault for the “lowly” status at which modern men find themselves. Incels, MRA and PUA communities may also borrow each other's language and aspects of each other's ideologies. That said, there are a few areas in which these movements diverge.

Pick-Up Artists (PUA) compare to incel communities in that they feel men are owed sex and that women therefore need to be “sexually available” at all times. PUA was popularised by Neil Strauss' ‘The Game’, and in contrast to the online-only incels has a significant in-person component in the form of seminars and training. As their name suggests, PUA communities focus on teaching their members how to manipulate women into sex. Arguably the most visible name within these communities is “Roosh V”, founder of the now defunct Return of Kings website. The site is full of misogynistic discourse that claims a woman's place is in the household and promotes a very toxic manifestation of masculinity. Derogatory, homophobic terms like “soy boy” and “faggot” are commonplace across the site, for example, while women and feminism are blamed for what is perceived to be an increasing intolerance towards men. The site also contains articles that mock rape and sexual consent, claiming for example that all girls have a rape story because it is how they compete with one another. Roosh V's own site takes this further by proposing rape be legalized on private property, in which he writes “Let's make rape legal. Less women will be raped because they won't voluntarily drug themselves with booze and follow a strange man into a bedroom...”

Men's Rights Activist (MRA) discourse is perhaps the most different from incels in that adherents do not define themselves by the status of their sex life or intimate relations with women. MRA rhetoric focuses much less on sex, instead criticizing gender equality, women's rights, and women's status in society more broadly. Specifically, MRA communities believe men are disadvantaged by feminism. Some take this further and believe women's suffrage, women's right to education and to a life in the public sphere rather than just domestic sphere have all contributed to a declining status and power of men in society, and should therefore be reversed. In contrast to both Incel and PUA discourse, MRA movements generally make a more concerted effort to “formalize” their discourse by framing it within academic terms, thus adding a false sense of legitimacy to their claims. For example, A Voice for Men, one of the most visible MRA websites, claims its mission statement is to “provide education and encouragement to men and boys: to lift them above the din of misandry, to reject the unhealthy demands of gynocentrism in all its forms...”. While this seems harmless, the site is full of misogynistic content. In an audio recording on the site, for example, the site's founder states that “p**** is the only real empowerment women will ever know”, that women rely on men for “accomplishment”, of which he lists creating technology, curing disease and more, and that the only influence women have over this is “p****”, effectively belittling women down to sexual objects.



Gynocentrism:

Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines “gynocentric” as “dominated by or emphasizing feminine interests or a feminine point of view”. MRA movements argue that society is gynocentric and therefore favors women over men. Female privilege is therefore seen as reality, whereas male privilege is seen as myth and a lie espoused by mainstream media and by feminists.

MRAs argue that gynocentrism is prevalent across all aspects of life, particularly in courts of law, which they accuse of favoring women especially in divorce or rape cases. Many MRA affiliates believe modern marriage is also gynocentric, in that it is burdensome on men financially and emotionally. That said, not all MRA affiliates are opposed to marriage so long as the husband-wife dynamic is ideologically appropriate. There are a number of articles on MRA sites on how to choose an appropriate wife, for example, and how to address and handle your marriage after you’ve been redpilled (see below).

Similarly to incels, MRA movements purport the idea that women are by nature **hypergamous** – they will always marry or mate “upwards”, with a man of higher status than themselves or the one they are currently with. MRAs argue that this is because of the gynocentric environment and society in which women have been raised.

THE “MANOSPHERE” AND ONLINE PILLS

Online forums, chat rooms and websites affiliated with Incels, PUAs and MRAs are riddled with references to differently colored pills, each of which refers to a different level of exposure to and/or acceptance of what these groups deem to be reality. These metaphorical pills are inspired by *The Matrix*, in which the protagonist is offered a blue pill or a red pill, the latter of which will show him how the world really is. In this vein, affiliates of these different online communities refer to being “redpilled” as recognizing and embracing their worldview – their understanding of the world. “Pilling” language is also seen in right-wing extremist groups, further nodding to the overlap that exists between these ideologies.

Importantly, however, given the popularity of the film that inspired this terminology, if an individual uses such language it does not necessarily mean they associate with the extremist movements that employ it. This language therefore needs to be understood in the broader context of how it is used and in what regard.

The Red Pill:

The red pill is essentially an acceptance of the worldviews put forth by whatever individual or group that is using the term. In the context of the ‘manosphere’, therefore, the red pill is recognizing among others that feminism is harmful to men, that men are the victims of a gynocentric world, and, especially amongst incels and PUAs, that men are entitled to sex and that women should therefore be sexually available to them.

Importantly, the red pill is used not only to denote abidance by these narratives, but also as a call to action to further disseminate them. Many Incel forums and MRA websites now feature videos or threads about “how to redpill” others, especially women. Similarly, some sites directly call to its visitors to “take the redpill”, where the red pill is offered as an explanation for and solution to all the woes and ills of men, whether that’s unhappiness in marriage, unemployment, or low self-esteem. Finally, individuals that consider themselves “redpilled” may refer to those that aren’t as “normies” or as “bluepilled”, often derogatorily.

The Blue Pill:

The blue pill sits opposite to the red pill. If you are bluepilled, you are considered to be ignorant of how the world really is. In other words, you don’t abide by the worldview put forth by those that consider themselves redpilled.

The Black Pill:

The black pill is not as common across all components of the “manosphere” as the red pill is. Most notably, it is used by Incels to refer to hopelessness—that there is no way out of being an Incel. While both redpilled and blackpilled Incels are unhappy with being “involuntarily celibate”, those that identify as redpilled generally feel there are ways out of that status, while those that identify as blackpilled believe “that their situation is permanent and inescapable” ([Anti-Defamation League, ADL](#)).

Dissimilar to MRAs and PUAs, Incel forums are therefore often riddled with imagery and mentions of suicide, of LDAR (“lie down and rot”) or of “going ER”, in which ER refers to Elliot Rodger of the Isla Vista killings.

Other pill “types” (less commonly referred to):

Rape Pill:

The rape pill is used exclusively amongst a subset of the Incel community (“rapecels”) that believe male-female sexual relations should always be decided by the man and that therefore female consent is not necessary.

Pink Pill:

As noted by the [ADL](#), “While many Incels argue that women by definition cannot be incels, since there will always be incels willing to sleep with women, femcels (female Incels) do make up a small subset of incel culture”. The pink pill is used by female incels essentially the same way the black pill is used by male incels – it is the belief that nothing will change their situation and they will never be considered desirable by men.



AFFILIATED FIGURES AND SITES

Incels	Eliot Rodger	Eliot Rodger was responsible for killing seven and injuring fourteen in Isla Vista, California. He left behind YouTube videos and a graphic manifesto that explicitly promotes violence towards and systematic extermination of women. In some Incel forums, he is referred to as a martyr and hero (or “hERo”, with the emphasis placed on his two initials to make it clear it is Elliot Rodger that is being referred to).
	Alek Minassian	Alek Minassian killed ten and injured sixteen in a van-ramming attack in Toronto. His social media post connected him with Incel communities – prior to the attack, he published a Facebook post that claimed the “Incel rebellion had begun” and that praised “Supreme Gentleman Elliot Rodger”.
	Incel Forums	Incels.is (formerly Incels.me until it was suspended by the .me domain registry) is a prominent existing incel forum. The threads range in severity of content – while some take a milder approach to discussing sexual relations with women, others are explicitly misogynistic with calls to actions like “We need another ER” or “Go ER”, referring to Elliot Rodger (see above). While most incel subreddits have been banned, there remain some spaces on Reddit where incel rhetoric can be found.
PUAS	RooshV	RooshV, screen name for Daryush Valizadeh, is the founder of the Return of Kings website. He has promoted violent misogynist ideas and has even argued for the legalization of rape on private property. He is also affiliated with the alt-right and has been praised by alt-right figures like Andrew Anglin of the Daily Stormer for the misogyny he puts forward. RooshV also has his own website – rooshv.com. For more, see here .
	Return of Kings	The site (now defunct) contained misogynistic discourse that claims a woman’s place is in the household and that promotes a very toxic manifestation of masculinity. Derogatory, homophobic terms like “soy boy” and “faggot” are commonplace across the site, for example, while women and feminism are blamed for what they perceive to be an increasing intolerance towards men. The site also contains articles that mock rape and sexual consent, claiming among others that all girls have a rape story because it is how they compete with one another.

MRAs	Paul Elam	Paul Elam is the founder of A Voice for Men, one of the most visible MRA sites today. Characteristic of the MRA movement, Elam believes society is gynocentric and that women are hypergamous. He is also known for espousing more “extreme” believes, saying, for example, that the tool women have at their disposal is “p****”.
	A Voice for Men	A Voice for Men is one of the most visible MRA sites today. The mission statement of the site is to “provide education and encouragement to men and boys: to lift them above the din of misandry, to reject the unhealthy demands of gynocentrism in all its forms...”.
Other	Men Are Better Than Women	A very explicit site founded and run by Dick Masterson (presumably a pseudonym) that, as the title suggests, claims men are superior to women in every way possible. The site also claims that women can only be great if they “shut up” and listen to men, and that gender equality efforts means women are trying to be more like men, thus proving that men are better than women.
	WikiMANNia	A Wiki dedicated to “men’s advocacy”. The subpages are anti-feminist, with many containing explicitly misogynistic language. See, for example, their page titled “Woman”, which speaks derogatorily of and generalizes women. There are German, Spanish, Italian and Russian versions of the site available.
	Matt Forney	Matt Forney used to write under the pseudonym of Ferdinand Barduma on In Mala Fide, a now defunct site. He now writes on his own site, mattforney.com, where he has posted articles that are against female education and that claim women are intellectually inferior to men. He has also posted explicitly homophobic and xenophobic content and has allegedly said things like “women should be terrorized by their men; it’s the only thing that makes them behave better than chimps” (SPLC).



FURTHER READING

- [Male Supremacy](#) - by the [SPLC](#)
A useful resource that describes various manifestations of extreme misogyny online, as well as providing quotes by leading affiliates of misogynist movements that demonstrate the harm and severity of the narratives they espouse.
- [Five Guides to Incels](#) - by [Dr. Tim Squirrel](#)
A series of useful and in-depth resources about Incel communities:
 - [Part One](#) – Incelocalypse
 - [Part Two](#) – the A-Z Incel dictionary
 - [Part Three](#) – the history of the Incel
 - [Part Four](#) – why can't everyone be blackpilled?
 - [Part Five](#) – why are Incels becoming more extreme?
- [The Intersection of Misogyny and White Supremacy](#) - by ADL
The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) explores the intersection and overlap between misogynistic communities online and white supremacy in a concise and useful summary that makes clear the harms posed by both.
- [The Extremist Medicine Cabinet: A Guide to Online “Pills”](#) - by ADL
Here, the ADL goes through the various types of pills that are referred to across misogynist and right-wing extremist communities online.
- [Men Who Hate Women](#) - by Laura Bates
In this book, Bates summarizes her experiences with embedding herself in online misogynistic communities, in turn exposing the severity of the content and narratives put forward by these communities. She covers Incels, MGTOW (“Men Go Their Own Way” – a separatist movement of men that seek to end all formal and informal ties with women), PUAs and MRAs.
- [Inside the Men’s Rights Movement](#) - by Mother Jones
A deep-dive and historical look into prominent MRA figures Warren Farrell and Paul Elam.

ISD | Powering solutions
to extremism, hate
and disinformation

Copyright © ISD (2022).

Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) is a company limited by guarantee, registered office address PO Box 75769, London, SW1P 9ER. ISD is registered in England with company registration number 06581421 and registered charity number 1141069. All Rights Reserved. Any copying, reproduction or exploitation of the whole or any part of this document or attachments without prior written approval from ISD is prohibited.