

THE FIRST INCEL? THE LEGACY OF MARC LÉPINE

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Abstract

Scholars of political violence and terrorism are now analyzing violence perpetrated by extremists, who identify as involuntary celibates (incels), as a form of terrorism—although this remains a matter of contention. The two most notable instances of incel violence were Elliot Rodger’s 2014 Isla Vista attack and Alek Minassian’s 2018 vehicle ramming attack in Toronto—both of whom claimed their acts were retribution for women’s (romantic or sexual) rejection. This article argues that scholars have likely overlooked comparable cases of misogynistic terrorism that occurred prior to the invention of the term ‘incel.’ While some newer research acknowledges incel-like attacks occurred before 2014, there has not been a detailed case study of the first incel attack, which occurred in 1989.

In December 2021, the Manhattan District Attorney’s (DA) office issued a ground-breaking report *Incels: Inside the World of Involuntary Celibates* (Woodward et al., 2021), substantiating the assertion that incels predate 2014, when the term was used to describe Rodger. On page 17 of the mostly infographic report, the DA’s chronology lists Marc Lépine as the *first* incel attacker (see Appendix) but then provides no additional biographical information about Lépine in the rest of the report. The report also jumps from 1989 to 2014, thus, neglecting other comparable lone actor attacks which might have also been inspired by misogynistic ideology (e.g., cases like George Sodini who carried out a mass casualty attack at a Pittsburgh LA Fitness in August 2009).

This article addresses the lacuna in the literature on incels that gives passing credit to Marc Lépine as the original incel ‘saint’ or martyr for the cause, but then fails to provide any details on how the addition of a pre-social media figure (like

Lépine or Sodini) alters our understanding of incel-motivated radicalization or terrorism: Marc Lépine was a mass casualty shooter who killed 14 women (and himself) at École Polytechnique in 1989. In his suicide note, he stated that his motivations were political, but that he was targeting “feminists” who “have always ruined my life” (Langman, 2014, para. 2). By firmly situating Lépine within the growing literature on incel violence, we derive interesting observations that complement and challenge some of the existing literature, particularly as they pertain to the role of the Internet, the radicalizing effects of social media, the mitigating factors of mental health, and long-term effect of trauma—offering a nuanced intersectional understanding of motivations.

Keywords: Incel, terrorism, misogyny, extremism, trauma, abuse

Veuillez noter que si je me suicide aujourd’hui 89/12/06 ce n’est pas pour des raisons économiques (car j’ai attendu d’avoir épuisé tous mes moyens financiers refusant même de l’emploi) mais bien pour des raisons politiques. Car j’ai décidé d’envoyer Ad Patres les féministes qui m’ont toujours gaché la vie. Depuis 7 ans que la vie ne m’apporte plus de joie et étant totalement blasé, j’ai décidé de mettre des bâtons dans les roues à ces viragos.

[Would you note that if I commit suicide today December 6, 1989, it is not for economic reasons (for I have waited until I exhausted all my financial means, even refusing jobs) but for political reasons. Because I have decided to send the feminists, who have always ruined my life, to their Maker. For seven years life has brought me no joy and being totally blasé, I have decided to put an end to those viragos.]¹ (Langman, 2014, para. 12)

Introduction

On December 6, 1989, twenty-five-year-old Marc Lépine (born Gamil Gharbi) moved through the campus of École Polytechnique at the Université de Montréal. Armed with a hunting knife and a Ruger Mini-14 rifle, he entered classroom #230.4 where he commanded the men and women to separate, “girls on the left and the guys on the right” (Sourour, 1991, p. 7). He dismissed the men who exited the room, and once only the women remained, announced, “I am fighting feminism” (Sourour, 1991, p. 7). He then opened fire shooting from left to right, killing six of the nine women before moving on to other locations in the school. After a 20-minute rampage, Lépine had shot 27 people and killed 14, all of whom were women. He turned the gun on himself and mumbled “Oh shit” before pulling trigger (Sourour, 1991, p. 10). This mass casualty attack would come to

¹ *Viragos* is a term to describe domineering and bad-tempered women.

be known as the *Montreal Massacre*, the deadliest mass shooting in Canadian history until April 2020 when Gabriel Wortman in Nova Scotia perpetrated 16 attacks over a thirteen-hour killing spree (Newton & Yan, 2020).

Though the tragedy occurred over thirty years ago, discourse surrounding the attack and its influence has evolved (Pellerin, 2019). While ‘incel’ (involuntary celibate) is a relatively new term, based on the properties of the attack, his targets, and Lépine’s rationale, this article suggests that if Lépine’s attack occurred today, there would be no doubt that it would be framed as incel terrorism. Political violence and terrorism scholars have only recently explored this phenomenon—a subject in which gender studies and criminology researchers have long taken interest; in studies of political violence, the topic has generated a handful of articles that explore the phenomenon (Hoffman et al., 2020; Woodward et al., 2021). Most of the research on incels begins with the 2014 Isla Vista killings perpetrated by twenty-two-year-old Elliot Rodger—referred to as the first incel attack. However, the recently released Manhattan District Attorney’s briefing on the subject begins its chronology of incel attacks with Marc Lépine (p.17), despite the fact that the term did not exist in 1989. Moreover, after listing Lépine as the first incel, the chronology jumps 25 years from 1989 to 2014 with Rodger’s Isla Vista attack, skipping Sodini and other potentially relevant instances of misogynist violence. The briefing, however, provides no further details about Lépine. This article provides a detailed case study into the *Montreal Massacre*, a unique opportunity to review the declassified Montreal coroner’s report, and the media narratives about Lépine in French and English.

Incels: Background and History of Weaponized Misogyny

The term incel is associated with Elliot Rodger, who in 2014, executed a multi-pronged attack comprised stabbings, a drive by shooting, and a vehicle ramming which resulted in six killed and 14 injured (BBC News, 2018). In the 130+ page manifesto, Rodger justified his attack because he was a “kissless virgin” as the “sole reason why” (Rodger, 2014, p. 68).

My orchestration of the Day of Retribution is my attempt to do everything, in my power, to destroy everything I cannot have. All 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. (Rodger, 2014, p. 137)

In addition to a manifesto, Rodger uploaded several explicit YouTube videos, in which he presented and rationalized his worldview. These videos and his manifesto offered researchers a treasure trove of insight about his hatred of women, people of color, and anyone who was sexually active (as he was not) to justify his killing spree (Rodger, 2014). However, this corpus of firsthand material catapulted Rodger to ‘sainthood’ within the incel community, and eventually inspired others to follow suit.

A search on any incel discussion forum includes multiple references to Elliot Rodger, and many posters express their desire to *go ER* (code for Elliot Rodger), meaning that they want to execute an attack against women or engage in what they have called *days of retribution*. In October 2015, Chris Harper-Mercer, inspired by Rodger, shot 10 people and turned the gun on himself at the Umpqua Community College in Oregon. He also blamed his lack of romantic or physical relationships and virginity for the attack. Like Rodger, he left a manifesto in which he stated,

And here I am, 26, with no friends, no job, no girlfriend, and a virgin. I long ago realized that society likes to deny people like me these things. People, who are elite, people who stand with the gods.... [like] Elliot Rodger, Vester Flanagan, the Columbine kids, Adam Lanza and Seung Cho. Just like me those people were denied everything they deserved, everything they wanted. Though we may have been born bad, society left us no recourse, no way to be good. (Anderson, 2015)

Harper-Mercer’s manifesto encouraged others who shared his worldview to follow in his footsteps: “My advice to others like me is to buy a gun and start killing people.... Don’t be afraid to give into your darkest impulses” (Harper-Mercer, n.d., para. 3). Like Rodger’s manifesto (and Sodini’s suicide note), Harper-Mercer vented his racist views, particularly against “the black man”, whom he described as “the most vile [sic] creature on the planet” (Harper-Mercer, n.d., para. 7). He claimed to serve a demonic hierarchy and predicted he would reincarnate as a demon capable of killing again and again after his death. Despite these claims, his manifesto included an appended Frequently Asked Questions section, asserting that just because he was in “communion [sic] with the Dark Forces doesn’t mean I’m crazy” (Harper-Mercer, n.d., question 3).

In 2018, Alek Minassian rented a Ryder van and plowed through pedestrians on Yonge Street in Toronto, killing 10 and injuring 16. Before his vehicle ramming attack, Minassian posted a kind of ‘call to duty’ on social media:

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! (Feldman, 2018, para. 2)

Unlike previous incel attackers, Minassian did not leave a manifesto or a note. However, he shared a common antipathy of women with Rodger, Harper-Mercer, and Lépine:

One of Minassian's stated motivations for the attack is retribution against society for years of rejection by women. He has told psychiatrists as well as the police that he became entangled with the so-called 'incel movement' online where men discuss their hatred of women. (The Canadian Press, 2020, para. 19)

In most of the literature on incels, Marc Lépine is omitted from analyses. While he might be mentioned in passing, Rodger and Minassian remain at the forefront of the academic discourse on the subject. This is partly the function of the extent of media coverage but also because incel, as a category of political violence, did not exist when Lépine committed his mass casualty attack in 1989. This might be construed as a glaring omission, particularly since the 2021 Manhattan DA's office lists Lépine as the first incel in their chronology (Woodward et al. 2021, p. 17) and the Moonshot report in the previous year, found that Marc Lépine was the *second most discussed* [emphasis added] figure on incel forums—second only to Rodger. Lépine was referred to as the “original incel killer” or has been conferred revered status “sainthood” on the Incel forums (Moonshot, n.d., p. 9). Despite his status in the community, this case rarely receives little more than a passing mention; this article provides the reader with an in-depth examination of Lépine's case, his life, his motivations, and the extent to which his actions fit a paradigm of incel terrorism. The limitations of having omitted Lépine relate to the field's emphasis on self-description, designations, or ‘identity’ of the perpetrator, as opposed to examining the nature of the violence (notable exceptions include Hoffman et al. (2020), who refer to Lépine as an ‘ex post facto incel’). Baele et al. (2019) acknowledge Lépine's influence in their network representation of the “three saints” of Inceldom and recognize his status within the framework of “saints”, in that they are, “incels who ‘fight back’ and ‘risk their lives for the cause’” (Baele et al., 2019, p. 1670). Baele et al. (2019) and Woodward et al. (2021) likewise include Lépine in their chronology.

Since most analyses of incels begin in 2014, the subject and the phenomenon of weaponized misogyny is treated as a relatively recent phenomenon. As a field,

we have traced the roots of incelism to Internet forums and chat rooms (such as Reddit, 4chan, 8chan, etc.) as an extension of Gamergate; the term ‘incel’ was adopted by some individuals who used it as an identity marker, or as the justification to carry out ideologically motivated attacks. By focusing on actions and not labels or self-description, this article suggests Marc Lépine was the first incel.

In his suicide note, Lépine blamed feminists and “viragos” for “ruining his life” and for depriving him of “joy” (Langman, 2014, para. 2). Focusing on the nature of the attack, motivations, the content of the ideology and not necessarily on the self-description, is the argument made about the definitions of terrorism, apropos the aphorism, ‘one man’s freedom fighter is another man’s terrorist.’ Moreover, anachronistic analyses in the study of terrorism are not unique. David Rapoport (1984), in his seminal research on terrorism in the ancient world, lists the Ismaili Assassins, Indian Thugs, and Jewish Zealots as manifestations of political violence and framed this political violence as an early form of terrorism—despite the fact that the word terrorism emerged after the French revolution—hundreds of years later.

This article demonstrates the extent to which Marc Lépine fits the paradigm for an incel. Lépine’s case has been overlooked because of when it occurred, but not his underlying motivations. Although terrorism studies have examined historical cases prior to the emergence of term terrorism, which emerged only after the French Revolution (Bloom, 2005; Rapoport, 1984); specifically, there are some potential limitations to analyzing a single case. The article presents Lépine with a comparative eye to show the areas of convergence with other cases. Further, as Woodward et al. (2021) show, Lépine is remarkable as the *original* incel. Hoffman et al. (2020) list individuals like Lépine and Sodoni (who shot and killed three women at an LA Fitness in Scott Township in Pennsylvania in 2009) having been “immortalized in incel lore” and might be “retroactively inducted” into “ex post facto Inceldom” (Hoffman, et. al, 2020, p. 572). That said, if moving forward, terrorism analyses include Lépine and Sodoni, we may need to temper our arguments about the social ecology in which weaponized misogyny flourishes. Thus, the extent to which social media played a vital role might be less central if we include these older cases like Lépine and Sodoni.

The case of Lépine provides insights that complement and challenge the existing incel literature, including, the role of Internet, issues of mental health, a history of psychological trauma and abuse, and the potential overlapping intersectionality of motives—to include professional and personal rejection,

approval-seeking behavior, replacement theory, and victim blaming (blaming women for men's violent acts).

Self-assigned designations like 'incel' have become a kind of identity marker. By situating Lépine within the literature on misogynistic violence and incels, this article seeks to illustrate his relevance to the movement. To this end, the article reviews the literature on incels, presents a detailed exploration of Marc Lépine, and concludes that the threat posed by toxic masculinity and incels has been largely misunderstood—because of selection bias and an over emphasis on a narrow tranche on violent incels (Moskalenko et. al, 2022), versus the vast majority of incels who are dangerous mostly to themselves (S. Cohen, personal communication, November 20, 2021).

Incels, Toxic Masculinity, and Misogynistic Terrorism

The origins of the Incel movement date to a website in 1997, called *Alana's Involuntary Celibacy Project*. Shortened to InvCel, and later Incel, she claimed the word referred “to ...anybody of any gender who was lonely, had never had sex, or who hadn't had a relationship in a long time. But we can't call it that anymore” (Taylor, 2018, para. 11). Alana's Involuntary Celibacy Project—an online community of socially awkward youth—“was [originally] a welcoming place, one where men who didn't know how to talk to women could ask the community's female members for advice (and vice versa) (Beauchamp, 2019, para. 3). Incels did not initially perceive themselves as victims, and Alana described the original site as a supportive place for people—men and women alike—to discuss their loneliness as well as their experiences (or inexperience) with dating and intimacy. While there are still sites and forums that seek gender inclusivity, most have moved towards a male-exclusive domain, including those in which female users are banned on sight.

The turning point occurred in 2014 with Gamergate, in which a concerted harassment campaign threatened female video game designers with rape and death threats; Gamergate revealed the dark underbelly of toxic masculinity that lay beneath the surface of the gaming community. Gamergate was the “precursor to the fomentation of incel or modern men's-rights movements, which are defined by their deep resentment of women” and incels have emerged as a reaction to this mixture of toxic masculinity and the increasing power of women's rights (Owen, 2019, para. 12). Incels have constructed a distinctive pseudoscientific ideology of sex replete with its own lexicon, most notably with

the concept of pill jargon—from blue, to red, to black.² As Ging (2019) explains, the pills pay homage to the Matrix movie franchise whereby taking the “blue pill” allows one to continue “living a life of delusion.” Taking the “red pill,” however, allows one to become “enlightened to life’s ugly truths” and in the case of incels, “awaken men to feminism’s misandry and brainwashing” (Ging, 2019, p. 640). Ultimately, the red pill allows one to look beyond the dominant propaganda to fundamentally reject women’s modern sexual emancipation and her ability to pursue only the most attractive and successful men (‘Chads’) (Swearingen, 2020).³

This is where the ‘blackpill’ philosophy touts itself as a ‘scientific,’ biological explanation as to why incels are denied sex or relationships: They were born ugly (or so they believe). ‘Blackpill’ adherents insist only physically attractive people can have romantic relationships, and said attractiveness is a function of birth. Brzuszkiewicz (2020) elaborates further on the ‘blackpill’ philosophy highlighting a supplemental dimension that fosters a sense of hopelessness. Brzuszkiewicz cites Dr. Lukas Castle (a pseudonym for a ‘self-proclaimed incel scholar’) that, the ‘blackpill’ represents a road to the abyss and leads individuals to believe things will never get better: “Some locks just do not have a key” (Brzuszkiewicz, 2020; Castle 2019, p. 15).

While both ‘redpill’ and ‘blackpill’ philosophies may incite violence, the latter adds a suicidal element and a justification for violence—conferring an added element of danger (both for self-harm and harm to others). It is crucial to emphasize that incels are not a homogenous group; not all incels believe in the blackpill ideology, and not all incels are violently misogynistic—some may just be lonely and not misogynistic. Despite the variety of the incel community, there are common features across the community. Brzuszkiewicz proposes three pillars of incel ideology by analyzing the narratives and vocabulary used on incel forums and platforms. These pillars center on: “1) incels’ self-perception and identity, 2)

² There are also “fringe” pills, including the “rape pill,” which Brzuszkiewicz describes as those believing all sex is coerced because women do not have the ability to make rational decisions. Additionally, there is a “purple pill,” which is a “moderate” pill. It is important to highlight that “pill” jargon is not unique to incels as the metaphor is used throughout the Manosphere with various MRA organizations and also within the far-right communities, and among QAnon conspiracy theorists. Additionally, Elon Musk (the controversial founder of Tesla) tweeted “Take the Red Pill” to his 34 million followers in May of 2020 to which Ivanka Trump responded “Taken”.

³ Being “redpillied” in the Manosphere means waking up to what is seen as the truth of male-female relations, a key part of which is the idea that women are attracted to the highest-status men they can find. The “blackpill” derives from the belief that a man’s sexual success is entirely determined by biological traits: his jawline, cheekbones, or facial symmetry. The result, in their view, is that modern Western society is defined by a kind of sexual class system.

their view of gender relations and misogyny, 3) their belief in the uselessness of being kind to women” (Brzuszkiewicz, 2020, p. 5). The third category is the most problematic as it has the highest radicalizing power, illustrating the perceived ‘pointlessness’ of it all (Brzuszkiewicz, 2020); this distorted view of the world has inspired incel attacks like Elliot Rodger’s and inspired other lone actors to follow suit.

One of the original members of the incel community, a user named ReformedIncel, gave numerous media interviews, and penned a brief history of the movement from its evolution on Internet forums and web sites. ReformedIncel insists that many incels oppose praising misogynistic killers, like Marc Lépine and George Sodini or Elliot Rodger (Squirrel, n.d.); in an interview with Zack Beauchamp, ReformedIncel claimed that Elliot Rodger “devastated the original incel community” (Beauchamp, 2019, para. 47). Beauchamp further contended that Rodger redefined the concept of Inceldom as a proxy for identity, as well as a justification for his actions, which “helped reshape the ideas that the community would come to stand for, pushing its angriest and most nihilistic impulses to the fore” (Beauchamp, 2019, para. 49). Subsequently, many incels branched out to alternative forums and websites, such as Reddit (including now banned subreddits *r/theredpill*, *r/braincels*, and *r/incels*), 4chan, as well as independent forums expressly for incels (*incel.me*, *incels.co*, and *blackpill.club*, to name a few).

Terrorism studies explore the incel phenomenon, although only a handful would be considered rigorous and methodologically sound (Moskalenko et al., 2022); seminal pieces include Hoffman et al. (2020), Beale et al. (2019), and Cottee (2020), each of which highlight the central role played by the Internet and the “Manosphere.” As Jones et al. (2020) explain, the “Manosphere” is the “digital manifestation of the contemporary Men’s Rights Movement (MRM)” and the virtual home to separate related groups, including Men’s Rights Activists (MRA), Men Going their Own Way (MGTOW), and incels (Jones, et al., 2020, p. 1904). While this article is focused on the latter, each group rejects feminism, a variety of legal and social issues, and focuses on the perceived decline of their rights at the expense of increased women’s rights (Nicholas & Agius, 2018).

The incel community actually occupies a small tranche of the Internet, but they exist across several platforms and applications. The Manosphere is tricky—it can be both complex and convoluted. Many of these forums are built around memes, gifs, lore, and inside jokes that become ‘meta’ as they are reposted. As Cottee explains, the incel worldview is “rooted in a kind of incel lore—a stock of

inherited clichés, wisdoms, and cautionary tales—about the natural order of things” (Cottee, 2020, p. 98). Outsiders or newcomers may be confused, and it is difficult to follow what individuals think amidst the cluster of ‘shitposting’ and trolling behaviors (Moonshot, n.d.). As Hoffman et al. (2020) explain, it is precisely this type of trolling that creates feedback loops in which posts are intended to foster a sequence of responses that ultimately mask the seriousness of the original post about beliefs and intentions. This same modus operandi of gifs and memes giving rise to extremist groups like the Boogaloo and far right-wing organizations (e.g., Proud boys) have been observed.

Incels argue that there is a hierarchy of ‘Chads’ and ‘Stacys’ (attractive men and women) located at the apex of society. ‘Normies’ represent average looking people, usually the most populous group, and unattractive incels are situated at the bottom of this social hierarchy. There are a variety of parallel (even racist) monikers to designate different races, cultures, or even mental (neuro divergent) abilities. At the core of incel ideology, or ‘world view,’ is the belief that incels are unable to form sexual relationships with women, notably because of some genetic deficiencies (i.e., physical appearance, height, weight, and cognitive abilities), their lack of social skills or status⁴, and women’s hypersexual selectivity. Many incels believe that there is ‘hypergamy’ in which women ‘sexually select’ only the most attractive mates and participate in marrying up (Moonshot, n.d.). This is reflected in their ‘80/20 rule’ in which incels believe 80% of women pursue the top 20% of men (Cottee, 2020). Before the advancement of women’s rights in the 20th century, incels believed that women were more likely to settle for the remaining 80% of men because of women’s need for financial and physical security (Moonshot, n.d.).

Incels correlate the (in)ability to attract women to the evolution of women’s rights; this connection is hotly debated on incel forums and blamed for incels’ feelings of victimhood. In the extreme view, incels believe that they are entitled to women and sex; this leads to resentment and the dehumanization of women, some of which has resulted in violent attacks. Historically, incel attacks were not considered terrorist attacks, notwithstanding the Canadian case. Definitions of terrorism are famously contested, although the field has achieved some basic consensus that at its core; when an individual or group of individuals use violence or the threat of violence directed against civilians for the purpose of disseminating a message, this usually constitutes terrorism. In their report for

⁴ Some incels recognize that women might select non-Chad men if they are exceptionally high status or wealthy, they point to Mark Zuckerberg or Bill Gates as examples of comparable men overcoming physical deficiencies.

New America, Kelly et al., (2021) argue that while not all attacks committed by incels are terrorism, those perpetrated with “clear ideological motivations and goals” (p. 24), like Rodger’s and Minassian’s do, given their use of violence to use fear and terror to convince those in power to address their perceived lived injustice, and inspire collective rebellion with their example.

Definitions matter—the New America report differentiates between ‘misogynist incels’, or those who adhere to extremist and fringe beliefs, in contrast to incels, who are not actively misogynist. The debate about what is and is not terrorism continues to permeate the study of terrorism, and it is especially salient when looking at incel motivated violence, and more recently, at weaponized conspiracies like QAnon (Bloom & Moskalenko, 2021). In her 2018 *New York Times* article, Jessica Valenti urges us to move away from calling these men ‘lone wolves’ and instead call it what it is: misogynist terrorism. We tend to see sexism as natural and thus “misogynist tendencies of mass shooters become afterthoughts rather than predictable and stark warnings” (Valenti, 2018, para. 13).

To substantiate this view, Caron Gentry interrogates ‘misogynistic terrorism’ — emphasizing that violence against women is not something that happens only in the home. Approaching the topic from critical and intersectional lenses, Gentry argues that (counter) terrorism studies suffers from several biases including embedded racial, cultural, and gendered assumptions; and the idea of ‘misogynistic terrorism’ has been noticeably absent from the terrorism literature (Gentry, 2020). Furthermore, researchers and practitioners likely embed biases in their research agendas, which is reflected when defining terrorism, recognizing disparities in media coverage of events, measuring sentencing outcomes, and the broader policy implications. Gentry differentiates varieties of misogynistic violence, not only within the home, but also mass-casualty attacks as constituting terrorism—given the political and ideological nature of perpetrator motivations (Gentry, 2020).

Furthermore, Michael Jentsen included male supremacy as an ideological subcategory in the 2018 codebook for the Profiles of Individuals Radicalized in the United States (PIRUS) dataset from the University of Maryland’s START center (National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, 2018). Within the scope of the ideology, researchers support the idea that in some cases, incel violence targeting women is terrorism if perpetrated because of their misogynist ideology.

Mental Illness, Trauma, and Incel Violence

Many scholars have urged caution about equating lone actors, including violent incels, with problems of mental illness. There appears to be a mental-health component to the incel phenomenon as the incel forums discuss mental health, depression, suicide, and other forms of self-harm. Further, many incels report suffering from mental illnesses, highlighted by the fact that there are sub-categories for these incels (i.e., mentalcel, autiscel, spergcel etc.). Romano argues that the incel community is, “rife with depression, a nihilistic communal celebration of low self-esteem, and a widespread resistance to seeking therapy and getting treatment for mental illness” (Romano, 2018, para. 5). As Borrell (2020) cites on one user poll on incels.co, roughly 25% of users claims to have autism, and two-thirds of the respondents reported having considered committing suicide. Hoffman et al. (2020) found that nearly 70% of users were depressed and over 25% were on the autism spectrum.

Jasko et al. (2017) examined the ‘quest for significance’ radicalization model to explore how and why people become engaged in political violence. Among the hypotheses, they explored the role of previous trauma or abuse (in childhood or adulthood) and found that over 48% (of 1,500 ideological extremists) experienced trauma, and over 35% of their sample had experienced child abuse (Jasko, et al., 2017). While not specifically related to incels, this research sheds light on the effect of abuse and trauma as a precondition making one more vulnerable to extremism. Multiple scholars have examined the role of childhood trauma in both radicalization of thought and/or violent criminal behavior; the relationship between abuse, trauma, and violent criminal behavior has been one that is widely studied within the disciplines of psychology and criminology. It is beyond the scope of this article to recap the field in its entirety, but it is relevant in the case of Marc Lépine, who was physically abused by his father (which is explored in greater detail below). Despite debate about the extent of the effects of potential causal mechanisms, there seems to be a consensus that there are linkages between childhood trauma, psychological development, and criminal behavior. Of course, not all children who experience trauma or abuse will go on to commit a crime, let alone a violent one, and the degree of trauma and abuse likely has an impact on the types of crimes; nonetheless, there have been hundreds of studies conducted to explore this relationship (Widom, 2017). A few relevant ones include studies by Lewis et al. (1979 & 1989) that found violent children were more likely to have either experienced or witnessed extreme physical abuse and that a history of abuse and family violence was a “predictor of adult violent crime” (Lewis et al., 1989, p. 431).

Some scholars, including Cicchetti et al. (2012) and Jaffee et al. (2004), explored the relationship between maltreatment and physical abuse and the development of anti-social behaviors in children. Other scholars have found a relationship between severe child abuse and higher levels of aggression and violent crime, particularly when there are instances of child abandonment as well (Wert, 2017).

More recently, Koehler (2020) considers the idea of toxic stress, including a variety of childhood traumatic events, such as parental separation or divorce, witnessing or experiencing physical or emotional abuse, domestic violence, or extreme poverty; these experiences can be leveraged by extremist groups, and even exacerbated in extremist environments. Koehler (2020) argues under these circumstances, individuals are trapped and

Kept in mental flux and uncertainty between emotional states such as anger, hatred, fear, anxiety or frustration on the one side and positive, quasi-therapeutic feelings such as belonging, happiness, joy, empowerment provided through commitment to the group on the other.
(p. 464)

This is a possible explanation in virtual spaces—where incels communicate and commiserate with like-minded individuals about their past (in)experiences, trauma, or mental health difficulties. Elliot Rodger discussed his mental health in his manifesto, and the police reports detailed a history of suicidal ideation, as well as a history of anti-depressants such as Xanax and Prozac starting at the age of fifteen (Brugger, 2015). Alek Minassian was placed in special needs classes in school, and in 2020, his attorney argued that he was on Autism Spectrum (Mandel, 2020). This is a problematic assertion and a slippery slope because as scholars have found, those with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) are no more violent than people without autism (Im, 2016).

As Corner et al. (2016) argue, the debate surrounding mental health and lone actors is both “inconsistent” and “occasionally frustrating” (Corner et al., 2016, p. 560). Gill et al. (2014) found that lone actors with and without mental illness were equally likely to plan and execute attacks. Gill and Corner (2013) found that lone actors were more likely than terrorist group-members to suffer from mental illness. Gill et al. (2014) analyzed 119 cases involving lone-actors and found that less than one third had a history of mental illness. While many were “socially isolated,” they were engaged with a “wider pressure group, social movement, or terrorist organization” (Gill et al., 2014, p. 431). In their work on autism and school shootings, Allely et al. (2017) found that 6 out of 75 mass shooting events were perpetrated by (neuro divergent) individuals on the Autism Spectrum. They

ultimately argue that while people with ASD may carry out violent acts, it is *not* the result of their ASD.

It is important to emphasize that mental health issues by themselves do not cause an individual to carry out a mass shooting. Most individuals with mental health issues are nonviolent. Rather, mental health issues may exacerbate other problems that are present in the individual's life which makes it more difficult for them to deal with issues such as family problems, problems in work or school, or personal crises. (Allely et al., 2017, p. 51)

There may be some correlation between mental illness and incel violence, but it is critical to not rationalize these acts as a function of mental illness. As Kelly et al. (2021) argue “mental health services are not designed to treat ideology, because misogyny, supremacism, and other harmful ideologies are not mental health issues” (p. 27). They argue further that not having relationships with women does not constitute actual trauma—by treating it as a trauma, we wrongly conflate misogynist incels with victims (Kelly et al., 2021). However, it is increasingly important to realize that these forums can get dark quickly when intense self-loathing, coupled with the black pill ‘nothing matters’ philosophy, results in a desire to carry out a violent act, either against themselves or others (S. Cohen, personal communication, November 20, 2021).

Incel Extremism and Sainthood

Baele et al. (2019), argue that the incel ideology has “clear traits of an extremist worldview whereby violence is not only seen as acceptable, but also as the only possible way to solve the crisis endpoint in which society is supposedly stuck” (p. 1672). As with any group, incels are not homogenous, and most are not violent. Hoffman et al. (2020) acknowledge that attacks perpetrated by men who identify as incels are statistically low with only “fifty victims” (Hoffman et al., 2020, p. 569). Further, preliminary research by Shuki Cohen indicates that the vast majority of incels are most dangerous to themselves (suicide or self-harm), and only a small portion will become violent towards others (S. Cohen, personal communication, November 20, 2021). Cohen can demonstrate possible intersectionality of various motivations as one observes the overlap between members of the incel community and the extreme far right. The idea of compounded intersectionality (such as incel jihadists or even incel-single issue) is also worth considering that incels move from ideology to ideology while maintaining their identity as involuntary celibates.

A quick search of Marc Lépine on incel forums yields numerous threads lauding his attack or claiming him as one of their own—often referring to Lépine as the ‘first true incel.’ Alternatively, he is called *Saint Lépine*, and *a true hERo* (The ‘ER’ is capitalized as a nod to Elliot Rodger); violent incels celebrate Lépine’s attack and urge others to emulate him. One user on incels.co explained why he admired Elliot Rodger, adding that the more he learns about Lépine, the more he thinks about *roping* (committing suicide) rather than *going ER* (Wide_Eyed_Optimism, 2019). This user found Rodger’s actions brave and special because he chose to kill others knowing that he would very likely die as well. One commentator replied that “I think highly of Marc Lépine [Sic] instead of Elliot Rodger. Considering Elliott mogs [dominates] Marc and Marc only killed females instead of fellowcels” (Wide_Eyed_Optimism, 2019, comment 3). Another commentator attempted to incite the user by saying: “Don’t rope, if you’re gonna [sic] go out, do it in style” (Wide_Eyed_Optimism, 2019, comment 22).

The idea of ‘sainthood’ within the incel community is one that celebrates those who carry out attacks for the incel-cause. These ‘martyrs’ and ‘saints’ are lauded and depicted with halos in memes and GIFs in social media posts. Many incels celebrate May 23rd as *Saint Elliot’s Day* calling it his day of retribution. Following Minassian’s vehicle ramming attack, incels elevated him to sainthood as well. One commented, “I hope this guy wrote a manifesto because he could be our next new saint” (Collins & Zadrozny, 2018, para. 8). Baele et al.’s analysis offers meaningful insight that sainthood glorifies acts of violence and celebrates the perpetrators on the incel forums. ‘Saint’ Elliot Rodger, the “Supreme Gentleman” is followed in admiration by Marc Lépine (Baele, et. al., 2019).

Marc Lépine: The Original Incel?

Unlike most contemporary incels who provided insight into their motivations—such as uploading YouTube videos or leaving written manifestos—we have fairly limited information about Lépine since the attack occurred before there was an Internet or social media. Much of what exists is in the form of secondary sources such as accounts by his acquaintances, Lépine’s mother’s memoir, the Montreal coroner’s report, media interviews conducted thirty years ago, and the two-page suicide note he hastily scribbled before the attack. Combined, they provide a preliminary profile of Marc Lépine that fits within the established parameters of a ‘lone actor’ school shooter but who also possessed a profound hatred of women and especially feminists.

Marc Lépine was born in October 1964 to an Algerian father, Rachid Liass Gharbi, and a Canadian mother, Monique Lépine. Originally named Gamil Gharbi, at eighteen, he changed his name to Marc, and took his mother's surname. His friends believed this was a clear indication of his hatred towards his father and a rejection of his Algerian (and Muslim) roots. One of Marc's childhood friends, Erik Cossette, recounted that Marc would express frustration when people commented on his name or his father's nationality—he would explain that he was Canadian and born in Montreal, and refuse to discuss it further (Lépine & Gagne, 2008, p. 130).

At the age of seven, his parents divorced, and court documents reveal that Rachid Gharbi violently abused Monique and their two children, Marc and Nadia—often beating them until they bled. Monique described the abuse:

Once, he slammed my son's face so hard the marks were there for a week. But mostly it was psychological. He was forbidding me to pick up my child; in his mentality, if a baby was crying, you shouldn't console him. He was very cold, I don't think that he was a father, to tell you the truth. I would never have left the kids with him alone; I didn't trust him. He said himself, very loud, that kids before the age of six were like little dogs you had to train. (Fillion, 2008, answer 5)

In her autobiography, Monique described that her husband forbade her from showing their son affection—“the longer his cries went unanswered, the more my baby withdrew into silence” (Lépine & Gagne, 2008, p. 52). As Marc matured, he grew to fear his father, but also other men, which his mother deemed “excessive.” She once found him hiding in the back of his closet “violently trembling” because a strange man had entered the house to do repairs. Marc said that he was afraid of getting hit (Lépine & Gagne, 2008, p. 56). After they divorced, Monique struggled financially as Rachid was mostly absent from his children's lives and refused to pay child support. Monique had to hire multiple surrogate families to take care of her children on weekdays as she was too busy working to make ends meet. At the age of twelve, Marc reunited with his mother full time. According to Monique, the family sought mental health counselling, but the doctors were more concerned with Nadia who had a more difficult time adjusting to the divorce than Marc. As a result, it does not appear that Marc received any diagnoses or mental health treatment as a child.

Marc's relationship with his sister Nadia was strained. Marc's childhood friend, Jean, explained that Nadia behaved cruelly towards her brother, taunting him when he was 15 when she caught him kissing a neighborhood girl.

Gamil was so humiliated he broke up with the girl [on the spot] rather than put up with his sister's taunts. He hated Nadia for the way she treated him: calling him every name imaginable, saying he had no balls, even hinting he was gay.... Gamil couldn't stand his sister and avoided her like the plague. If she had been attacked in front of him, I don't think he would have lifted a finger to help her. (Lépine & Gagne, 2008, p. 155)

Monique writes that once when Marc was a teenager, he dug a grave in the backyard and placed a photograph of Nadia on the tombstone. She also recalls the time where Nadia accused Marc of murdering the family cat—she said she didn't believe it at the time, but later said "I think it was possible that he did" (Fillion, 2008, answer 22).

There is an existing body of research that links childhood trauma and abuse to later activities in life. Marc's early childhood experiences, experiencing and witnessing physical and emotional abuse, would qualify as what Koehler defined as 'toxic stress' and likely continued to affect him throughout the rest of his life. However, as Langman argued, while it might be tempting to view Lépine as traumatized, it is impossible to ascertain the extent of his trauma (Langman, 2010, p. 2). The experience of family violence is a common warning sign for perpetrators of violence but is by no means causal or apparent in all cases (incel or not). For example, Brenton Tarrant, the Australian man who perpetrated the Christchurch Mosque attack, was abused by his mother's partner after his parents divorced (Fitzsimmons, 2020). While Elliot Rodger's parents separated and later divorced, there was no indication of familial abuse in his manifesto, though he recounted his stepmother forcing him to drink a "foul tasting soup" as punishment (Rodger, 2014, p. 16).

Like abuse, mental illness is often cited as a possible pre-attack indicator for violence; however, we know that trauma and mental illness is neither necessary nor sufficient to explain any mass casualty attack or act of terrorism. In the province's autopsy report and subsequent psychological evaluation, doctors suggested Lépine's homicidal/suicidal strategy was typical to individuals with personality disorders. While there was no way to diagnose Lépine post-mortem as suffering from a psychiatric illness, the medical examiner's psychiatrist suggested:

In the case of individuals who use the multiple homicide/suicide strategy, this expert says, we find extreme narcissistic vulnerability, manifested in the level of expectations and demands placed on themselves, through fantasies of success and powerfulness, or through a desire and need for

recognition by others, through extreme sensitivity to rejection and failure, through intolerance to depressing emotions that experience as such only badly or to a slight extent. We also frequently find retreat into a violent and sometimes grandiose imaginary life that is an attempt to compensate for a fundamental feeling of powerlessness and incompetence. In the psychiatrist's opinion, this description of the aggressive and grandiose imaginary life found in such subjects is applicable to Marc Lépine. (Sourour, 1991, p. 15)

We know from Lépine's suicide note that he attempted and failed to join the Canadian Armed Forces and was rejected due a possible anti-social personality disorder (Langman 2014). Like school shooters, Lépine was obsessed with the military, and would visit an army surplus store to peruse weapons. His friend Jean recalled that Marc was a good shot and could shoot pigeons out of the sky (Wallace, 1989). His roommate and neighbors confirmed that he was fascinated with military history, violent films, and first-person shooter video games all of which likely spurred Lépine's desire to enlist. Rejection did not end with the military, and it would resurface when Lépine was denied admission not once, but twice to L'École Polytechnique. Reportedly obsessed with computers and described as being exceptionally gifted with technology, Marc's second rejection was a major blow to his self-esteem and derailed his career.

As a result of these consecutive rejections, Lépine became more vocal about his contempt for women, specifically blaming feminists for taking men's jobs and taking his spot at L'École Polytechnique (Elgin & Hester, 1999). In his suicide note, Lépine included a hit-list of notable feminists that he planned to eliminate, although the list was only made public after the attack. While it might be anachronistic for a note written in 1989, some of his comments were also decidedly transphobic and sounded like something you would hear on Fox News: "Ainsi c'est une vérité de la palice que si les Jeux olympiques enlevaient la distinction Homme/ Femme, il n'y aurait de Femmes que dans les compétitions gracieuses" (Langman, 2014, para. 5).

One question that emerges from this material is whether Lépine hated all women, or just those whom he viewed as feminists and his competition. Langman (2010) argued that

[Lépine] had reasons to be angry at specific women in his life, [however] none of them were feminists. He felt rage towards his sister, but didn't attack her. He may have been angry at his mother, but appears to have cared for her. He may have been angry at women who rejected him, but

did not seek revenge against them. Instead, he focused his rage on feminists and blamed them for ruining his life. (Langman, 2010, p. 4)

Langman suggest that Lépine's violence was not directed at women writ large, but specifically those women in security (police officers and soldiers), and female engineers. Each of these were roles that Lépine had "pursued and failed to achieve...He committed murder at the school that rejected him and where women were succeeding in the career he had aspired to" (Langman, 2010, p. 4).

Two elements of Langman's argument are worth revisiting. First, the idea that Lépine felt he was being rejected or replaced is key to his rationale. Rejection and replacement are expressed as sentiments consistent across a variety of mass casualty acts—particularly rejection from the military. Alek Minassian was dishonorably discharged from the Canadian Armed Forces after a couple of weeks of basic training. Likewise, Brian Isaack Clyde, the 2019 Dallas Courthouse Shooter, an "active participant in the incel subculture" (Simkins, 2019, para. 4) was a former soldier who had left the military after he "struggled with training and tests in preparation for possible deployment" (Branham & Jaramillo, 2019, para. 3). The media reinforces the idea that rejection is a motivation for violent acts—especially after the Columbine tragedy (where the media blamed bullying and social isolation), and scholars have connected rejection to aggressive behaviors more generally (Leary, 2003). In existing studies of incels, rejection takes center stage as a motivation, notably if rejection results from failed attempts at romance.

Secondly, the question of whether Lépine hated all women or only feminists remains unanswered. Monique Lépine expressed shock at her son's anti-feminism because she "could've been considered a feminist, I had a good job. It could've been a reaction to that" (Fillion, 2008, answer 4). Apart from the episodes with his sister, Monique recounted one time where Marc grew angry with her. He grabbed her arm and "squeezed it so tightly his fingers dug into my flesh"—but once she told him to stop, he did, and appeared to be ashamed (Lépine & Gagne, 2008, p. 159-160). While Marc did not target his mother or sister, it does not reflect on his general attitude towards all women as Langman suggests. It might simply mean that he did not want to target his mother and sister since they were not the women with whom he was *most angry* [emphasis added]. However, the incident demonstrates Marc's propensity for violence and confirms some anecdotal observations about the connection between mass-casualty attacks and a previous history of violence against women—romantic partners, or female family members—as well as broader misogynistic views (Bosman et al., 2019).

Notwithstanding his general disdain, Lépine did have a few female friends, but he never had girlfriends—possibly because of his shyness. In her memoir, Monique described that

He [Marc] found it impossible to be romantic with women, choosing instead to hide behind a self-confident façade and rarely straying from his favourite topic of computers. This effectively prevented him from revealing any tender feelings, something he felt deeply uncomfortable with. (Lépine & Gagne, 2008, p. 32)

Apart from one, the instance where his sister caught him kissing a girl, there is no evidence that Lépine dated. Often described as shy and socially awkward, Marc found it difficult to form attachments with members of the opposite sex. He was also short tempered and quick to anger with little to no provocation. Marc's roommate Erik Cossette said he was unpredictable—at times he would “laugh like a little kid at the cartoons on the TV or fly into a rage when he was upset” (Lépine & Gagne, 2008, p. 130). Erik also explained that Marc expressed his disdain for women in articulating his beliefs that women should not work outside the home. Despite his antipathy, Marc “really wanted a girlfriend” and would behave like a “real gentleman” despite not knowing how to talk or behave around women (Lépine & Gagne, 2008, p. 130). According to the police chief, Jacques Duhesneau, “[Lépine] was always known to be gentle and courteous with women until the relationship didn't go his way.... He was known to go into his room and stop the conversation right there He didn't have any girlfriends” (Walsh, 1989, para.18).

Given his shyness and social awkwardness, Lépine found it difficult to socialize with the opposite sex. This is corroborated by his former lab partner, Sylvie Drouin, who visited Lépine's apartment when she needed help with her computer classes. After she admitted to Marc that wasn't interested in pursuing a romantic relationship, his demeanor towards her changed. He became unkind and withdrawn, and she became fearful. “Sometimes I was afraid of him because I didn't know how to act [around] him.... Sometimes he was very nice. Other times he was ‘shy and isolated’....” (CBC, 1989, 02:38). Sylvie recalled inviting Marc to a party at a local bar, but he refused on the grounds that he did not go to those types of places. Instead, he invited her to his place to watch films, which she declined since she did not like violent movies (Mellor, 2013, p. 44).

While working at the same hospital where his mother worked, Lépine met and befriended Dominique Leclair, the daughter of Louis-Marie Leclair, the hospital manager. Dominique described Lépine as shy, but neurotic—constantly dropping

things, and perpetually anxious. She recalled that L epine ate by himself and avoided making eye contact if he was eating with anyone else. He was apparently embarrassed about his appearance, having been mocked because of his acne. Police Records corroborate that L epine was of average build, around 150 lbs., and 5'10. His mother confirmed that Marc suffered from cystic acne (Sourour, 1991). At some point, L epine attempted to grow a beard in hopes of camouflaging his skin condition, but it only accentuated the problem further (Mellor, 2013, p. 39). One's height and physical appearance are the focus of endless incel discussions on their forums. In an infographic widely circulated and 'stickied' on the incels' wiki, height is broken down by inch by inch. At 5'10, the meme opines: "Working out will not help you. Either get rich or commit suicide. Remember even if you get rich and get a hot wife she will still cheat on you with a tall guy" (Incels wiki, n.d.).

Many incels subscribe to the concept of a 'Looks Theory' (Looks Maxxing), that argues attraction is based exclusively on physical appearance, in which facial features and physique, down to the distance ratio between various body parts and bone structure determine whether you're a '10' or a '3'. Within this ideology, race might also be considered a "big part of looks" (Jaki et al, 2019, p. 50). Jaki et al. (2019) suggest a "general consent that unattractive non-white men have a harder time than unattractive white men" which constitutes the "just be white theory" (p. 50). Racial subcategories of incels exist including Arabcel, Ricecel, Currycel, denoting one's race within the forums.

While L epine never blamed his appearance, his mixed-race origins, nor his lack of intimacy as a justification for the attack, he struggled with all of these, but ultimately blamed feminists. Because of them, L epine "had no joy" and described himself as "blas e" in his suicide note (Langman, 2014, para. 2). Since the attack occurred in 1989, L epine would not have been able to engage with an online community of like-minded individuals with whom he might have been able to commiserate as contemporary misogynists do. He did not appear to hold any specific ideological positions beyond a disdain for women. One survivor of the massacre, Nathalie Provost, compared his attack to contemporary incidents perpetrated by incels:

Marc L epine lived in a different world. He didn't live in a world of social media, he didn't live in a world where fundamentalist ideologies took up a lot of space, but he resembles them a lot. He found the world unjust, he wasn't able to make a place for himself in it, so he had the impression

there was no future for him, and he felt like screaming it loud and clear. (Scott, 2014, para. 38)

The case of the Montreal Massacre and Marc Lépine's actions share common features associated with contemporary incel violence. Lépine was motivated by a disdain if not full-blown hatred for women. He resembles proto typical incels in both his physical appearance and psychological demeanor—including an unappealing appearance and an inability to relate socially to women. Marc's friend Jean said, "I always tried to get Marc to get himself a girlfriend, to find out what girls were all about, but he had a lot of problems with that.... It's not that he wasn't interested" (AP News, 1989, para. 11).

Discussion

In situating Lépine as the original incel, this article acknowledges the difficulty of using the term 'incel' as a label when it cannot be confirmed that Lépine was in fact an incel. However, within chat rooms and forums, many self-designated incels claim Lépine as "one of their own"—based on his looks, his beliefs, and his actions. Policy-oriented publications (Moonshot and Manhattan DA's report) mention Lépine in their research but offer little to no details. Journalistic accounts are more likely to mention Lépine and Sodini. After over three decades, Lépine's victims grapple with what he did and why he did it, while some even suffer from survivor guilt. To a certain extent, attributing Lépine's actions as having been an incel might offer some additional clarity and context. Based on the behavior, targeting, and other factors, Lépine was an incel before the term existed. He could not attract girls and had a palpable disdain and disrespect for women. As Pellerin (2019) explains,

We didn't use that word at the time, but he was what we now call an incel. He couldn't get girls interested in him, and in his mind that was their fault, not his. He blamed feminism for his lack of romantic or sexual successes instead of making himself a more attractive prospect. (para. 6)

Feminist scholar, Jane Caputi helped popularize the term 'femicide,' acknowledging that it is easier to convince people that such crimes are "sexually, politically-driven crimes and a form of terrorism against women" (Ansari & Lange, 2018, para. 13). Before the Montreal murders in 1989, "to simply say the phrase misogyny-driven murder would have required a major explanation" (Ansari & Lange, 2018, para. 13).

Lépine is not unique in perpetrating acts of violence because he felt humiliated by the opposite sex—yet he serves as a source of inspiration for contemporary incel attackers like Elliot Rodger and Alex Minassian, in addition to an ever-growing list of violent incels. In February 2020, an unidentified (minor) seventeen-year-old male entered a massage parlor in Toronto and fatally stabbed 24-year-old Ashley Noell Arzaga and injured two massage therapists. Initially charged with first-degree murder, the charges were increased to include terrorism after evidence pointed to incel ideology. Authorities referred to this underage perpetrator as an Ideologically Motivated Violent Extremist (IMVE), and this case became the first indictment where an incel attack was treated as terrorism (Cecco, 2020). According to Bell et al. (2020), it is also the first time Canadian authorities applied counter-terrorism laws to an extremist who was not a Jihadi (Bell et al., 2020).

This case demonstrates the changing ways in which authorities and the security services handle incel and misogynist-motivated violence. In contrast to the 17-year-old perpetrator, a mere three years earlier, Minassian was charged with 10 counts of first-degree murder after he rammed his vehicle into a group of pedestrians, killing 10 and injuring 16. The case in Toronto acknowledges that some incels pose a continued threat—not just to themselves, but also to the broader community. It is a significant measure: labeling incel violence may be critical for combatting it, although this is controversial. The Canadian decision to consider incel an ideology and the case an act of terrorism is not without its challengers. Former Canadian Security and CSIS analyst, Phil Gurski, has raised objections that conflating incel violence and terrorism muddies the waters and that incel is not an ideology that would fit with the standard definition of terrorism (Gurski, 2020).

Ultimately, this article suggests that focusing on actions over identities (whether self-claimed, assumed or designated) is preferable to the trend of limiting cases based on how they might have been coded at the time. We should be able to correct the record as more information emerges and categories are not written in stone.

The case of Marc Lépine offers a compelling case study for questions and concepts related to ideologically motivated misogynistic terrorism. However, the discourse surrounding the Montreal Massacre remains problematic; many of the victims' families have complained the media's refusal to call the massacre what it was: an attack against feminism, and an attack against women and not just another school shooter.

There might be some distinction between whether the Montreal Massacre was an attack against women or just feminists. Anne Thériault, a Canadian journalist, insists Lépine was unambiguous in his suicide note that he was targeting feminists. Thériault equated Lépine and Minassian's crimes as both: "Violence against women asserting themselves as equal in public and private realms" (Thériault, 2020, para 5).

In 2019, Mayor Valérie Plante of Côtés-des-Neiges (NDG) borough and Mayor Sue Montgomery changed the sign commemorating the Montreal Massacre as a "tragic event" to a sign that called it an "anti-feminist attack." Mayor Plante explained her decision:

I have the feeling as mayor that I am doing something concretely to re-establish history... It gives me enormous comfort as a woman that finally, we recognize, we're calling it what it was — it was an attack. He wasn't just there to kill people — he was there to kill women. It was an anti-feminist act. (Hanes, 2019, para. 20).

It is also important to examine how the attack impacted the victims, their families, and the survivors of the massacre. Lépine's attack left 14 women dead, and traumatized countless others. The men who voluntarily left the classroom experienced survivor guilt, two of whom committed suicide and specified the massacre as their reason why; the male professors in classroom #230.4 similarly experienced trauma. Professor Yvon Bouchard explained that he cooperated at the time because he thought the group was being separated into different groups of hostages, as was the norm in hijackings or other hostage scenarios. Bouchard did not understand what was happening—until it was too late (Elkouri, 2019). Another professor, Adrian Cernea, experienced depression and persistent sadness. He could never stop asking, "why... did he kill my students... Why kill girls? Because they were brilliant? Why were they taken away the right to live? To have a family. To have children. Why?" (Elkouri, 2009, para. 8).

The incel community considers Lépine a martyr, and he is framed as a source of emulation even though he perpetrated the attack 32 years ago and 25 years before the term incel existed. His actions are lauded in the darkest corners of the Manosphere, and like Elliot Rodger decades later, he has been elevated to a form of 'sainthood' within this community. The threat of future misogynist incel violence is one that should be taken seriously—especially when attacks like Lépine's are celebrated. As Hoffman and Ware (2020) argue, the incel ideology is both "real and lethal" (para. 5), and the movement is one that can continue to grow given its online accessibility. While many sites have cracked down on posts

advocating violence, there has been a user shift from public forums towards semi-encrypted platforms, such as Telegram and Discord, making observation trickier. Further, as Dr. Colin Clarke explained, COVID-19 lockdowns throughout 2020 could lead to further growth as individuals, including children, are likely being exposed to far-right and incel extremism more frequently given increased time online. In addition to broadening terrorism researchers' analyses to include cases before the invention of the term 'incel,' it is equally true that further research is needed to identify the overlap between movements, including incels and the extreme far right, as well as the intersectionality of motivations (Clarke & Turner, 2020). But it is also accurate to argue that the majority of incels are more dangerous to themselves than to others. Recent research argues that we should exercise greater care not to brush with broad strokes involuntary celibates with violent actors and disaggregate these online communities without making gross generalizations.

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Appendix

Manhattan District Attorney's Chronological List of Incel Attacks

KEY INCEL ATTACKS



Note. Woodward, A., Wozniak, C., Vargas, C., Gironda, M., & Silverberg, R. (2021). *Incels: Inside the world of involuntary celibates*. Manhattan District Attorney's Office.

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Mia Bloom is the International Security Fellow at the New America and a professor at Georgia State University. Bloom conducts research in Europe, the Middle East, and South Asia and speaks eight languages. She is the author of six books and over 70 articles on violent extremism including *Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror* (Columbia 2005), *Living Together After Ethnic Killing* (Routledge 2007), *Bombshell: Women and Terror* (UPenn 2011), *Small Arms: Children and Terror* (Cornell 2019), and *Pastels and Pedophiles: Inside the Mind of QAnon* with Sophia Moskalenko (Stanford 2021). Her next book, *Veiled Threats: Women and Jihad* is expected in late 2022/23. Bloom is a former term member of the Council on Foreign Relations and has held appointments at Cornell, Harvard, Princeton, and McGill Universities. She serves on the Counter-Radicalization boards of the Anti-Defamation League, the UN Counter Terrorism Executive Directorate (UNCTED), Women Without Borders, and WASL - Women's Alliance and Security Leadership Network. Bloom has her PhD in political science from Columbia University, Masters in Arab Studies from Georgetown University, Bachelors in Russian, Islamic, and Middle Eastern Studies from McGill, and her Pre-Doctorate from Harvard's Center for International Studies and a Post-Doctorate from Princeton.



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