



EVOLUTION OF INCELS: ONGOING SECURITY IMPLICATIONS OF INCEL IDEOLOGY

Date: November 23, 2022

Disclaimer: This briefing note contains the encapsulation of views presented by the speaker and does not exclusively represent the views of the Canadian Association for Security and Intelligence Studies.

KEY EVENTS

On November 23, 2022, Naama Kates, the writer, creator, and producer of the *Incel* podcast, presented *Evolution of Incels: Ongoing Security Implications of Incel Ideology*. The presentation was followed by a question-and-answer period with questions from the audience and CASIS Vancouver executives. The key points discussed were the definition, demographics, and rhetoric of the incel community, prominent attacks attributed to incels, and common misconceptions regarding the community and the impacts on future engagement.

NATURE OF DISCUSSION

Presentation

Ms. Kates provided a definition of the incel community as well as a brief overview of its history and progression, followed by a dissection of the rhetoric espoused by members. She discussed the significant attacks associated with incels, highlighting the common misconceptions regarding the influence and progression of inceldom as a movement. She closed with her thoughts on the potential security threat posed by incels, as well as prescriptive measures for law enforcement.

Question & Answer Period

In the question-and-answer period, Ms. Kates engaged the idea of an emergence of a misandrist ideology as a counternarrative to the misogyny espoused by incels, the presence of neurodivergence in the incel community, and the potential need for a securitised relationship between law enforcement and the incel community.

BACKGROUND

Presentation

Ms. Kates began her presentation by defining an “incel” as an individual who is involuntarily celibate, or desiring sexual and intimate relationships but perceiving themselves as incapable of establishing them. She stated that this is an entirely self-identified and online community that emerged in the mid-2000s, and has solidified its presence in the last five years. She explained that the identity is much more than a simple lack of intimate and sexual relations, but rather a fatalistic and defeatist understanding of the social hierarchy. For this reason, Ms. Kates suggests that the use of the term “community” over “movement” is apt, owing to the fact that the individuals do not pursue a specific cultural or political goal, and do not desire to change the social contract despite a deep resentment towards it.

Ms. Kates proceeded to outline the demographics of the community, stating that research shows a predominantly young, male, and caucasian population, though there is an increased presence of diverse age, gender, and racial profiles in recent years. Ms. Kates stated that there is no definitive employment profile within the incel community with roughly one-third employed, one-third in education, and one-third not in education, employment, or training (NEET).

Ms. Kates emphasised the significant presence of neurodivergent individuals in the community, stating that research shows a 75% rate of anxiety and/or depression, and 27% rate of attempted self-harm or suicidal ideation present among incels. Ms. Kates stated that the prevalence of individuals either diagnosed or believed themselves to be on the autism spectrum, at 19% and 20% respectively. She stated that approximately 50% of these individuals had pursued mental health treatment, but close to 90% reported it to be ineffective. Though a portion of the latter statistic could be attributed to self-defeatist attitudes present in the individuals, it points to a lack of understanding in the mental health community regarding treatment of incels. Ms. Kates noted that of her over 100 interviews, 80% identified on the autistic spectrum, suggesting an overlap with community grievances such as difficulty reading social cues and developing intimate and platonic relationships.

Ms. Kates then discussed the incel ideology, dubbed the “Black Pill,” suggesting that the term was also inaccurate in that there is no coherent ideological pursuit or prescriptive action. Ms. Kates explained the “Black Pill” as highly misogynistic and frequently violent rhetoric that suggests a genetic determinism

through which a social hierarchy is constructed. The primary targets of incelism are feminism and modernity, though these are often not deeply held oppositions. Ms. Kates suggests that, as vile as the rhetoric espoused on incel forums is, it is primarily meant as “shitposting” – or a misguided attempt at online humour. She suggested that the glorification of violent attackers that sometimes occurs through these posts should be viewed as attention-seeking behaviour rather than an indication of future violent action.

Ms. Kates argued that the links to the incel community are more tenuous than portrayed in the media with regards to high-profile attacks attributed to the movement. She highlighted the attacks perpetrated by Elliot Rodger, Alek Minassian, and others as key to the threat narrative surrounding the incel community, and noted that the association of these individuals with incelism is often exaggerated. Though each attacker engaged with the incel community online, the majority did not show strong support for the Black Pill, but rather shared similar grievances. Ms. Kates argued that there is a stronger correlation between the attackers and other mass murder events, such as the Columbine shooting, and that this should be explored further when attempting to understand the attacks.

Ms. Kates then outlined several misconceptions regarding the incel community, such as the presence of brainwashing, propensity for violence, beliefs regarding entitlement, and the portrayal of incelism as a movement. She suggested that despite the unhealthy, vile, and violent nature of the rhetoric on incel forums, it is present only online and, though misguided, intended as humorous. There is no online to offline coordination in the community and there is no pursuit of a revolutionary agenda – the community is ultimately defeatist and exists primarily as a network for socially isolated individuals.

In closing, Ms. Kates stated that a securitised relationship with the incel community is not advisable as it is currently centralised and easy to monitor. The forums have been proven to simply migrate when shut down in the past, and the present state is conducive to continued cooperation with law enforcement. She reiterated that the threat posed by the incel community is greatly exaggerated by the media. Ms. Kates states that the incel community is not progressing towards a coordinated and violent movement, arguing that misogyny has always had significant overlap in the ideology of socially isolated and violent individuals. It is Ms. Kates’ contention that a more fruitful avenue of inquiry would be the search for the societal mechanism responsible for the increase of mass murder events. Ms. Kates believes that positive avenues of inclusion for the incel community should be pursued – through the arts, for example – stating that the

high engagement and positive feedback regarding her podcast suggests a desire from the community to engage when given the opportunity.

Question & Answer Period

To begin the question-and-answer period, Ms. Kates discussed the potential emergence of a misandrist movement as a response to the violent misogyny espoused on incel forums, stating that she has not encountered research as of yet though it could prove worthy of exploration. She stated that hatreds tend to feed into one another, and that social media exacerbates the spread of conflictual narratives.

Ms. Kates discussed the presence of individuals on the autism spectrum within the incel community, stating that the relationship between the two communities is met with mixed reaction. While some individuals embrace the observed overlap, others in the respective communities feel it is inaccurate to suggest a correlation. She noted that many individuals she has spoken to have great insight into the positives and negatives of the condition.

Ms. Kates suggested that the incel community doesn't require the same level of surveillance in comparison to extremist movements. She reiterated that the forums are entirely public facing and operate in cooperation with law enforcement at the moment, thus not requiring extensive Countering Violence Extremism (CVE) operations.

KEY POINTS OF DISCUSSION

Presentation

- An “incel” is an individual who perceives themselves as involuntarily celibate. The identity is self-assigned and represents a defeatist understanding of a social hierarchy.
- Incels should be described as a “community” rather than a “movement,” given that the individuals operate entirely online, do not pursue a cultural or political goal, and do not desire to change the social contract.
- The incel ideology is characterised by misogynistic and violent rhetoric, though there is little evidence to suggest any online to offline coordination of action. Rather the rhetoric takes the form of a vile and misguided attempt at online humour and attention-seeking.

- There is a substantial portion of neurodivergent individuals within the incel community, with high percentages of anxiety, depression, and autism present.
- A securitised relationship with the incel community is not advisable. At present, it operates in a public-facing and cooperative manner with law enforcement and antagonising the network would most likely lead to decentralisation and increased narratives of persecution.

Question & Answer Period

- At the moment, there is no misandrist counter to the misogyny espoused by the incel community, though this could be a fruitful area for exploration.
- Despite a high presence of individuals on the autism spectrum within the incel community, there are mixed reactions to the association of the two communities. There are potential insights to be gleaned from an understanding of shared grievances between the two communities.
- There is not the same need for CVE operations regarding the incel community versus extremist movements, given the public-facing and cooperative nature of the members with law enforcement.



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