

A LOOK INTO THE INCEL MOVEMENT

A guide to tackling online cultures of misogyny for schools,
colleges and universities



School of
Sexuality
Education

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About this guide

This document explores the anti-feminist and violent Incel movement, and specifically why we should be treating Incel discourses as we would other digital extremism.

The document highlights five steps to indoctrination, and explores key forms of prevention through inclusive and comprehensive relationships and sex education (RSE).

This guide about Incels is for particular use by caregivers, teachers, schools, and universities. It's important that all teachers, school leaders, and named 'Prevent' leaders within Further and Higher Education are familiar with the information laid out in this document.

1. WHAT IS THE INCEL MOVEMENT

The Incel (Involuntary Celibates) movement refers to a community of predominantly young men, who feel rejected by women - and at times society more generally - and who take to the digital space to voice their frustrations, anger and often, desires for revenge. Sometimes these behaviours lead to physical harm to others and themselves.

The Incel community often feel a sense of entitlement to sex and women, blaming 'shallow' women, for their apparent inability to form romantic and intimate relationships (Haenfler, 2018).

Incels, who are largely men in their late teens to early 20s, believe that wider societal changes are also to blame, specifically the social mobility of women and people of colour, for reducing the power men hold. Often, the vulnerable individuals who join the Incel community, feel discriminated against by women and society based on their appearance, which they consider to be outside of their control. The Incel community then provides a welcome space for an individual seeking belonging and a space to air their frustrations, which then further removes a need for socialising and physical interactions.

Research would suggest that Incels are not in fact 'lone wolves' as the media might often lead us to believe, but are a part of a sophisticated community which 'display a clear pattern of behaviour' that reinforce and amplify misogyny in a 'cyclical way' (Regehr, 2022).

- The accessibility of digital spaces;
- Connectivity of social media;
- The nature of echo-chambers;
- And consumption of high volumes of misogynistic content;

work together in transforming feelings of loneliness, frustration, and isolation into rage and even violence in vulnerable individuals (Regehr 2022).

Platforms:

Digital platforms that are popular within Incel communities are (but not limited to):

Reddit, 4chan, Incel.me, Incel.net, Lookism, Looksmax, Braincels, Discord, Sluthate, incels.co, and Incelistan.

General purpose social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, TikTok and X have also been used by Incels to promote their views (Byerly 2020).



Background to the movement

The movement was started in 1997 by a queer woman and undergraduate student, known as Alana, with the aim of providing a platform for people to vent their frustrations about dating. Alana wanted to build a community of support for those who did not 'fit in', open to all genders and sexualities. As the internet developed, the movement was 'hijacked' by violent misogynistic discourses.

Incels fall under the Men's Rights Activists (MRA) groups that promote anti-feminist and often racist tropes within the wider Manosphere (Mesner 1998, Ging 2017, Ging 2023). The Manosphere is a collection of websites, blogs, and online spaces that engage in misogynistic tropes, such as: women owe men sex, women oppress men and that a woman's value is based solely on how sexually desirable she is.

Some Incel terms or ideology you may have heard:

- **Chads and Stacys:** regarded as popular men and women, respectively.
- **Lookism:** discrimination towards someone based on their appearance.
- **Normies:** people who have relatively mainstream interests and beliefs.
- **Mentalcel:** an Incel with mental health problems.
- **The 'Pill':** concept based on The Matrix, where Laurence Fishburne's character, Morpheus, offers Keanu Reeves's character, Neo, a choice between a **'red pill'** (which reveals the true nature of reality) and a **'blue pill'** (which would allow him to live in comfortable ignorance).
- **The 'Red Pill':** within the Manosphere relates to waking up to feminism's brainwashing which in their eyes has allowed women to dominate men.
- **The 'Black Pill':** a 'doomed existence' because of the belief that 'the world is stacked against low-status men in favour of women and alpha males' (Lindsay 2021). This ideology suggests that because of physical characteristics that cannot be altered, such as height, shoulder-width, strong jawline etc, these men will always be rejected and treated cruelly by women. The hopelessness perpetuated by **'black pill'** ideologies may encourage violence as retribution, self-harm and even suicide (Regehr, 2020). As a result, some of these **'black pill'** communities celebrate and deify past mass murders committed by Incels.

A more expansive terminology list can be found [on the Moonshot website](#).



2. WHY SHOULD WE BE CONCERNED?

What is the 'Incel Rebellion'?

The 'Incel Rebellion', also referred to as 'beta' uprising, is where Incels commit acts of violence as revenge against feminism and society for their own perceived failure at romantic relationships.

The Incel Rebellion was referenced by Alek Minassian, shortly before he used a van to attack pedestrians in Toronto, killing 10 and injuring 15 people (BBC News 2018).

The attack in Toronto is one of several instances where online misogyny has translated into violence offline. In fact, researchers have found a correlation between misogyny consumed in digital spaces to physical violence, recommending that these online discourses should be treated as potential acts of physical violence (Regehr 2022; Diax & Valji 2019).

The Cycle of Violence:

Access to digital spaces, technology facilitated echo-chambers and consumption of large volumes of toxic misogyny which are promoted by platform algorithms (see Ging 2023), create a vicious cycle to the violence. This is particularly evident in the

celebration of physical acts of violence committed by other Incels. The violent behaviour as being encouraged in digital spaces, performed as physical violence or abuse, documented, shared, and celebrated again in a continuous loop (Regehr 2022).

This trend was started by Elliot Rogers who killed and injured many people in 2014, followed up by Alek Minassin, both of who are widely hailed as heroes within the Incel community. However, these are not isolated instances of violence and there are many more examples internationally.

Following the murder of a woman by an Incel in February 2020, the Canadian Police treated the attack as an act of terrorism, categorising it as a form of 'violent extremism', (Global News, 2020). The murder has since been ruled as a terrorist attack (BBC 2023).

The Incel movement fosters radicalisation and needs to be treated in the same way as other types of digital extremism on a more global scale (Regehr 2022, Hoffman, B., Ware, J., & Shapiro, E. 2020).



The Cycle of Violence



3. SIGNS TO SPOT

Many feelings and behaviours typically associated with Inceldom can be synonymous with teenage development and asocial behaviour. These behaviours or experiences can be: loneliness, isolation, mental health struggles, social anxiety, having experienced bullying, and struggling to 'fit in' or form healthy relationships with people.

These can all be common feelings felt by men in their late teens and early-to-mid twenties. Although these behaviours may need additional support such as counselling or mentoring, they do not always result in seeking connections with the Incel community.

However, someone experiencing these feelings can be particularly susceptible to indoctrination when combined with the following attitudes and behaviours:

- **Feeling entitled to sex, particularly that women owe them sexual pleasure;**
- **Holding harmful or misogynistic views about women and anger towards intersectional feminism;**
- **Spending large quantities of time digesting digital content that perpetuates anti-feminist tropes;**
- **Following or consuming large amounts of white supremacy and patriarchal discourses;**
- **Exhibiting little to no porn literacy, specifically no critical evaluation of mainstream media like porn and Hollywood, and how consent, relationships, equality, and bodies are depicted;**
- **Holding harmful beliefs around consent, communication, and equal pleasure;**
- **Having strong feelings of anger and entitlement, particularly towards women, but also wider society for their own apparent lack of status in society;**
- **Experiencing social anxiety and difficulty in forming friendships and romantic relationships.**

In recent years there has been an observed rise in the spread of the sentiment of male entitlement online. Figures like Andrew Tate, for instance, have brought these misogynist 'manosphere' ideologies to the mainstream (Haslop et al 2024), normalising the idea of male supremacy which promotes feelings of entitlement at the core of the Incel ideology.



4. HOW CAN THIS BE ADDRESSED?

Comprehensive relationships and sex education (RSE) provides young people with the tools to make informed decisions about their physical health and wellbeing, as well how to build healthy relationships and connect to those around them.

Inclusive relationships and sex education can help challenge and prevent harmful views associated with Inceldom by:

- Developing young people's critical thinking skills to navigate consent, equality, power, and digital spaces in a healthy way;
- Reducing harmful behaviour, such as sexual violence, discrimination and bullying both online and offline;
- Re-defining sex and societal expectations of what sex is (and cis-heteronormativity);
- Building porn literacy, and understanding the lack of consent and body diversity depicted in mainstream porn and Hollywood;
- Challenging the normalisation of gender roles and sexual violence;
- Encouraging young people to understanding healthy and caring behaviours versus controlling and abusive ones;
- Understanding the role of being an active bystander in preventing or reducing harm such as sexism, sexual violence, racism, and transphobia.

Other forms of support include:

Support for mental health

- Seek support via mental health organisations (See Section 5);
- Access [peer support](#) and in-person social groups, such as [The Mix](#), local youth groups or social clubs, and volunteering.

Engage in healthy support groups that tackle social anxiety

- Examples of these include [Anxiety UK](#), [Very Well Mind](#) (not UK-specific), [Social Anxiety Self-Help Groups \(SASH\) London](#);
- [What I Learned at a Social Anxiety Support Group](#) Blog Post.

Encourage peer to peer mentoring

- Discussion of feminism and toxic masculinity to address misogynist tropes and patriarchal oppression;
- Engaging in positive and varying examples of masculinity, including fluidity of gender;
- **Encouraging consumption of different arguments, on different platforms and not just social media. This could include talks, empathetic discussions, and workshops;**
- Diversifying the content followed or digested on social media. This may affect the platform's algorithms which could help change posts shown;
- Listening to and understanding lived experiences of misogyny - and how this harms everyone regardless of gender.



For schools, colleges and universities

Below are practices and activities that schools, colleges, and universities could provide in order to address behaviours that are associated with and make an individual susceptible to Incel indoctrination.

A whole-school, joined-up approach is needed to tackle Incel indoctrination and support vulnerable young people. This should include dedicated PSHE and RSE sessions, themes and assemblies via well-trained staff.

All staff should have a thorough understanding of Inceldom and misogyny. Senior leaders should ensure that policies and curriculum reinforce consent and boundaries throughout.

Practices and activities for schools & colleges:

- Set up buddy or mentoring programmes;
- Ensure bullying policies and procedures are implemented across the school or college;
- Review school policies, such as school uniform and online sexual harassment policies to ensure they are consent led and reinforce consensual practices throughout;
- Signpost mental health services that young people can access;
- Encourage mental health talks via lunchtime 'Time to Talk' sessions.

Practices and activities for universities:

- Set-up mentoring programmes;
- Challenge harmful behaviours in line with policies, not conflating misogyny or other forms of harm with 'free speech';
- Include Incel ideologies within the University's 'Prevent' policy;
- Signpost mental health services both internal and external;
- Encourage societies to run a diverse set of events that include a wide range of interests;
- Encourage mental health talks within the SU, Departments or Faculties;
- Appoint Bullying and Harassment advisor within Departments - with links to Student services and regular training;
- Provide staff training, particularly for those managing student accommodation.

Education programmes that cover:

- Consent
- Body image and diversity
- Healthy relationships
- Media literacy - critical analysis of porn and Hollywood
- Sex and pleasure vs societal expectations and definitions of sex
- Toxic Masculinity & Intersectional feminism
- Tools for supporting mental health
- Bystander intervention
- Digital defence and self care



5. SOURCES OF SUPPORT

Mental health support organisations (UK specific):

- [Mind, the mental health charity](#)
- [Mental Health Foundation](#)
- [Rethink Mental Illness - Get Help Now](#)
- [Young Minds - children and young people's mental health charity](#)
- [The Mix - Essential support for under 25s](#)
- [Need to talk? | Befrienders worldwide](#)
- [CALM Homepage - Campaign Against Living Miserably](#)
- [SurvivorsUK - We challenge the silence to support sexually abused men](#)
- [Talk Club - UK charity helping men to improve their mental health](#)

Talk to a professional:

- School or University Wellbeing Services or Councillors
- Student accommodation managers and support staff
- NHS suggested [Mental health apps](#)

Some book suggestions:

- Mask Off by JJ Bola
- The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love, bell hooks
- The Right to Sex, Amia Srinivasan
- [Sex Ed: An Inclusive Teenage Guide to Sex and Relationships](#), School of Sexuality Education



What might Incel culture look like coming from young people?

Below are some terms relating to Incel ideology and examples of how they might show up in what young people say.

We've also given some illustrations of ways in which educators might go about challenging problematic ideology, without punishing or shutting down the individual expressing it.

Patriarchal Discourse: Narratives that suggest men are and should be dominant over women. This will likely be more subtle than "I hate women". Look for anything that marginalises or homogenises women.

Student: I prefer dating Asian girls. I've been out with other races too, but I know I'm really attracted to Asians.

Teacher: When people say things like that, it makes me uncomfortable. It sounds racist.

Student: How can that be racist?! I'm saying I like Asian girls. Besides, it's just a preference and I can't help how I feel.

Teacher: When you say you're attracted to 'Asian girls', it suggests that you think all Asian women are the same. This sounds dehumanising - not recognising that people are individuals. Let's have a think about what qualities you consider attractive and see if you really think they apply to all people of one race.

White Supremacy: Prioritising and privileging whiteness. This can include anything which suggests White bodies are better or 'the norm'. It can also include anything where Black, Asian or other non-White cultures are suggested to be inferior, weird ('othering') or even just that everyone in this group is the same - as this can have a dehumanising effect.



What might incel culture look like coming from young people?

Student: If a girl gives a guy her nudes, she shouldn't be surprised if he sends it to everyone. She should've had more respect for herself - what did she expect?

Teacher: It's really harmful to share sexual images of someone without their consent. It's called 'image based abuse' - and it's against the law to do this or threaten to do this to someone. Let's do a quick 'active bystander' challenge. I want you to imagine that this scenario happened in this school - that a student sent another student nudes, and they were then sent to others without consent. I want you to write down as many things that you could do, as a bystander, to challenge this harm. Your answers should focus on making the person who caused the harm accountable, not on blaming the person who has been harmed.

Porn Literacy: The ability to think critically about porn. Someone who is 'porn literate' doesn't necessarily think that porn is always a bad thing - but they do engage with ideas about the impact porn has on how people think and feel about sex - both on an individual and a societal level.

Student: I don't get why some girls don't look after themselves. They should just get to the gym so they look nice.

Teacher: What do you mean by 'look nice'?

Student: Nice legs, thin waist, big boobs - just a nice body.

Teacher: It sounds like you think women should change their bodies for the benefit of other people. Can you think of any problems with this?

Student: No - it just means they'll be able to get a guy more easily.

Teacher: Nobody should be made to feel bad or uncomfortable about their body. And no one should feel that they have to change their body for other people. [To rest of the class] Can anyone tell me how it might impact someone of any gender, if they thought they did have to change their body for others? How might they feel and what might they do? [Gets class to make a list]

Intersectional feminism: recognises that oppression on the basis of gender is often connected to other types of discrimination. For example, misogynistic expectations of how women 'should' be often also rely on racist, transphobic, heteronormative and ableist ideas of what the ideal woman looks like.

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