

Chapter 52

Misogynistic Males: Mass Murders, the Incel Subculture, and Ways to Assess Risk

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ABSTRACT

Scholars have begun to identify the links between incidents of mass murder and misogynistic behaviors. From the 2014 Isla Vista campus shootings in California through to an incident of mass violence with a van in Toronto in 2017, identifying as an “incel” has been cited as a motivating factor in the perpetrators’ pre-attack writings. “Incel” stands for “involuntary celibates,” an online subculture of males displaying rage at females, expressing fandom for mass shooters, and fantasizing about violence. Further complicating matters is the frequent overlap between intimate partner violence and/or stalking with acts of mass violence. In this chapter, suggestions are advanced for ways to effectively assess the risk of mass violence when misogynistic behaviors are present. The potential use of risk assessment instruments is discussed, in addition to ways to devise an effective threat assessment system.

INTRODUCTION

The pressure to adhere to gender scripts can act as a catalyst for violent offending, whereby crime is a means of “performing masculinity” (Messerschmidt, 1993). Gender role stress, coupled with challenges to masculinity from females, can motivate inclinations towards gender-based violence (Scaptura, 2019; Scaptura & Boyle, 2020). This is particularly evident within the subculture of “involuntary celibates,” known more commonly as “incels.” Members of this community have failed to secure sexual relationships and feel that they have not lived up to masculinity norms. With beliefs being misogynistic in nature, rage is commonly displayed at females. As a result of this, members can favor violence as a means to reject victimhood and obtain masculinity status (Bosman, Taylor & Arango, 2019; Cottee, 2021; O’Malley, Holt & Holt, 2020; Scaptura & Boyle, 2020). Consequently, a number of incels are carrying out acts of

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mass violence to gain recognition for the movement and fame for themselves. The first of these acts to garner attention was the 2014 Isla Vista killings by Elliot Rodgers (Rouda, 2020; Young, 2019).

With this being an under-researched field in academia (Young, 2019, p. 2), this chapter aims to add to the current body of knowledge. Firstly, the notion that “hegemonic masculinity” is in crisis is debated (Hall, 2002; Jefferson, 2002). Violence as a means of “doing masculinity” (Messerschmidt, 1993) is then discussed. Further, the idea of a toxic form of masculinity called “hypermasculinity” in which emotions like empathy are repressed is shown to be a factor in violent offending (Kupers, 2005; Toch, 1998; Scaptura, 2019). Moving on from that, this chapter goes into a discussion about incel subculture, describing its lexicon and ideologies. The work of scholars in this area is documented (Ging, 2017; O’Malley, Holt & Holt, 2020; Jaki et al., 2019; Scaptura, 2019; Scaptura & Boyle, 2020; Young, 2019). Further, the links between incel subculture and mass violence are detailed (Rouda, 2020; Young, 2019). Additionally, the link between mass shootings and other gender-based violence like stalking and intimate partner violence are outlined (Kerr, 2018). The final part of this chapter centers on ways to manage incel-related violence. Discussed are possible risk assessment instruments that could be used, including the TRAP-18 (Meloy, 2016) for lone-actor terrorism; as well as those for gender-based violence. Lastly, a threat assessment approach (see Cornell, 2013; O’Toole, 2000) is recommended as a way to determine the seriousness of threats posted in online incel spaces.

MASCULINITY IN CRISIS?

Theorists have postulated that a “crisis of masculinity” has been caused by a destabilizing paradigm shift in gender roles (Clare, 2000; Jefferson, 2002). When talking about gender roles, Goffman (1979, p. 8) argued there is a “schedule” for the portrayal of masculinity and femininity. Measures like the Bern Sex Role Inventory (1974) have been used to calculate how masculine, feminine or androgynous one is. For instance, scores on the submissiveness scale correlate positively with femininity and negatively with masculinity. This highlights the idea that such a measure is a “conglomerate of stereotypes” (Yonge, 1978, p. 1245); thus, rendering it reductive and not representative of the genders. It is more accurate to instead view masculinity as a descriptive element of the cultural ideologies and observed behaviors of men. Conceptually, however, it is ill-defined because masculinity is often conceived of differently, frequently within the same text (Collier, 1998, pp. 16, 84). This means that Treadwell and Garland’s (2011, p. 3) assertions that “masculinity is multidimensional, varied and malleable” and there exists a “multiplicity of masculinities” are credible.

Buttressing this argument are claims about “hegemonic masculinity,” wherein males are able to wield control of the most powerful social institutions and reinforce male dominance (Scaptura, 2019). This can be “complicit” within men who do not actively apply it, but still benefit from the benefits it yields; as well as “marginalized,” when men are subordinated because of other factors such as their ethnic group (Connell, 1987, pp. 79-80). Jefferson (2002, p. 66), however, questions how masculinity can be both hegemonic, with its connotations of success, and in crisis, which connotes instability. An alternative viewpoint is that the *concept* of hegemonic masculinity should be viewed as being “in crisis.” Traditional “white male privilege” has faced a number of challenges in recent years: deterioration of the labor market, resulting in wage stagnation, underemployment and downward mobility; the increasing presence of females within the workplace; growing rights for women as well as the LGBTQ+ community (Ging, 2017, p. 653). Extrapolating from this, masculinity is an extremely complex concept and the most viable

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