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ABSTRACT

Misogyny has been increasingly identified as a driving force for terrorism due to recent instances of political violence associated with the involuntary celibate (incel) community. Incel discourses are embedded in an extreme misogynist ideology that provides a framework for understanding the incel experiences and their reality. The present paper explores how this ideology serves as a driver for incel terrorism by identifying the ideological elements present in incel discourse that justify the use of terrorism through a narrative that positions misogynists in a defensive position. It argues that such a misogynist framework allows incels to articulate an unjust grievance against which to struggle by identifying women's sexual liberation as an attack on the patriarchal system which renders incels unable to perform successful masculinity due to a lack of access to women's bodies. Additionally, misogynist ideology positions incels as victims of a system that is perceived as unjust, and therefore rationalises a reactionary political struggle through terrorism. While the incel worldview might be unique to the community, identifying the ideological elements of incel discourses positions incels as part of a wider extreme misogynistic ideological milieu, which should be regarded as the source of incel terrorism.

Keywords: *terrorism, incel, misogyny, feminism, sexual liberation*

INTRODUCTION

Misogyny, dominant and hegemonic, had never needed terrorism before. Due to its ideological dominance in Western societies, misogyny has had access to a wide range of violences, other than terrorisms, through which to maintain a patriarchal social system. While a central element of violent ideologies such as jihadism or the far right, and a

motivator for their terrorism, misogyny on its own has not been regarded as a source for terrorism (Roose and Cook, 2022: 7; DeCook et al., 2022: 707). However, as a result of the growing challenges to patriarchy and male dominance put forward by the claims for women's liberation on multiple spheres, misogyny has increasingly been situated by scholars as one of the key drivers of certain forms of terrorist violence in the West, manifesting especially through the frame of incel or incel-inspired terrorism (Barcellona, 2022: 180). Embodying a reactionary misogynist ideology, incel terrorism has come to the attention of academics and security professionals as a result of several attacks that have taken place throughout the last decade in Western Europe and North America, such as the Isla Vista attack in 2014 - considered to be the first attack linked to incels (Barcellona, 2022: 176) - or the 2018 van attack in Toronto.

The present paper adds to a growing body of literature that examines incel terrorism, by exploring the direct causes of this form of misogynist political violence through the incels' own ideological understanding of the world and their grievances. It argues that incel terrorism represents a violent and political expression of a reactionary misogynist ideology that has emerged as a reaction to the growing salience of gender issues in Western societies. Incel terrorism represents a rational choice by misogynist extremists. This choice is based on how they understand society, themselves, and their political grievances, all of which are informed by a misogynist ideological framework. It embodies a political reaction to the progress of women's freedoms that has taken place over the last few decades, especially those related to sexual rights. It does so by framing feminism as the political discourse that has allowed women to subvert what misogynists understand to be the natural

hierarchical order of society, built along gender and sexual lines. Through a traditionally misogynist lens, incels understand men's sexual and social domination over women as natural, and therefore experience their involuntary celibacy as an unjust deprivation caused by the advancement of women's sexual freedom (Baele et al., 2021: 1679). Moreover, by portraying the patriarchal political project and the masculine subject as being threatened by women's sexual liberation, incel discourses feed on misogyny to justify and incite terrorism. Consequently, incels, as part of a wider misogynist milieu, see themselves in a context of struggle against women and what they consider a new gender order, which not only justifies terrorism, but even portrays it as necessary.

It is important to note that only a small portion of the members of incel communities online have taken the step to engage in terrorism. However, as Baele *et al.* (2021: 1668) state, incel discourses display the necessary elements to incite terrorist violence by radicalising those who identify with their worldview. Moreover, the widespread positive regard that perpetrators of terrorism enjoy within incel spaces points towards the acceptance of terrorism and violence among community members (O'Donnell and Shor, 2022: 346; Witt, 2020: 683). Consequently, it is relevant to examine the ideological nature of incel discourses to better understand why incel terrorism has emerged, why it must be regarded as an emerging terrorist threat, and how to address extreme misogynist radicalization.

This paper first develops a contextual and theoretical framework to introduce both the object and the theory that structure the present analysis. It then provides a brief illustration of the incel community and its association with terrorism, followed by an overview of the theory on the causes of terrorism, the concept of ideology, and misogyny as a reactionary ideology. After a brief exposition of the methodology that will guide the subsequent analysis, a third section discusses the ideological components present in incel discourses that indicate how incels understand reality and, therefore, what causes incel terrorism.

CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Incels and terrorism

Involuntary celibates (incels) are a predominantly online sub-community of individuals "who define themselves by their inability to have sexual or romantic relationships" (Preston et al., 2021: 824). Most users who participate in incel forums are under the age of 30, men, and live in North America or Europe (Beauchamp, 2019). The term 'incel' was coined by a Canadian bisexual woman in the late 1990s (DeCook and Kelly, 2022: 708). However, soon after it came to be associated with a predominantly masculine and heterosexual community characterised by extremely misogynistic narratives, male entitlement, and the dehumanisation of women (Kelly et al., 2021: 4).

The incel community is part of a wider set of male-centric and misogynist online groups often referred to as the 'manosphere' (Ging, 2019: 638). The manosphere's sub-communities are united by their hatred of women and their adherence to the Red Pill framework which, in turn, connects it to broader alt-right and supremacist communities who have also adopted the terminology (Barcellona, 2022: 175). In incel ideology, 'Taking the Red Pill', or 'redpilling' represents becoming aware and accepting that "men are the true victims of the current gender order" (DeCook and Kelly, 2022: 709). Incels stand out due to their adherence to a nihilistic version of this framework, called the 'Black Pill', which advocates for the acknowledgement that the system is genetically determined, and self-improvement is impossible (DeCook and Kelly, 2022: 709). Such an approach can facilitate the normalisation of violence, since the nihilistic undertones of the 'Black Pill' narrative foster feelings of resentment and exasperation among community members (Cottee, 2021: 95).

The incel community has come under the intense attention of mainstream media, as well as security academics and professionals, because of the several violent attacks perpetrated by persons associated

with it (Brzuszkiewicz, 2020: 3). As is well known, terrorism remains a contested concept (Schmid, 2023: 2). However, acts of violence committed by incels present certain characteristics that coincide with several working definitions of terrorism. Highlighting its political nature, Crenshaw (1987: 13) defines terrorism as “a means to a political end”, emphasising, as does Richards (2014: 213), terrorism as a method that can be used by a variety of actors with political ends. Despite historically being linked to structured organisations and distinct political ideologies, terrorism can, and it increasingly is, a tool used by unstructured and idiosyncratic communities such as incels (Norris, 2020: 4).

Additionally, Crenshaw (1981: 379) distinguishes between the direct targets of the violence and the wider audience for whom the message is intended, to highlight the communicative and symbolic nature of terrorist violence. This emphasises the psychological effects of terrorism, which generates fear and terror while conveying a political message to society as a whole (Schmid, 2023: 7). The recurrent use of online posts of varied forms by perpetrators of incel attacks in order to claim the violence and frame it through their political message illustrates how incel attacks are intended as communicative and symbolic to convey the incels' hatred of women and society (O'Donnell and Shor, 2022: 342).

It is important to note that there remains academic disagreement regarding the terrorist nature of incel attacks. Some scholars argue that no distinctive politics can be identified within incel discourses (Gursky, 2020; Hoffman et al., 2020; Cottee, 2021). They argue that since incels do not have a clear political project, nor do they promote and seek a coherent idea of a desired form of state, they do not possess a political agenda (Cottee, 2021: 96). Since terrorism is a form of political violence, if incels do not possess a political agenda, their violence cannot be terrorism. Consequently, these scholars regard incel narratives as reproducing emotional frustration, rather than as “a political call to action” (Ging, 2019: 648).

However, as multiple scholars have argued, the core idea in incel ideology is one concerned with the subordination of a part of the population and the establishment of a hierarchical and patriarchal form of society, which is deeply political (DeCook and Kelly, 2022; O'Donnell and Shor, 2022; Brzuszkiewicz, 2020). Incels discuss and formulate political proposals, such as the (re)distribution of sex, the limitation of women's rights, enforced monogamy, or the legalization of rape (Baele et al, 2021: 1679; De Cook and Kelly, 2022: 711; O'Donnell and Shor, 2022: 341). A failure to identify a politics within incel discourses stems from a failure to regard misogyny as political, and a narrow understanding of politics as concerned only with state affairs. Nevertheless, following such scholars, this paper sustains that misogyny is a political ideology that seeks to control and subjugate women, which it sees as inferior, through the imposition of social and political limitations to their freedoms (De Cook and Kelly, 2022: 710; O'Donnell and Shor, 2022: 341). Consequently, considering the political nature of the violence associated with the incel community, as well as its use as a tool for communication, the present paper frames incel violence as terrorism.

Drivers of terrorism

Terrorism has long constituted a topic of concern for academics, who have sought to provide explanations for why groups and individuals perpetrate terrorist attacks. Scholars have identified a multiplicity of variables that come into play when considering what provokes terrorism, which can be approached from different levels (Lia and Skjølberg, 2000: 8).

Crenshaw (1981: 380) suggests to “approach terrorism as a form of political behaviour resulting from the deliberate choice of a basically rational actor”, which is informed by the environment said rational actor is embedded in. Similarly, Wilkinson (1987: ix) argues that explaining terrorism must focus on the context that frames the terrorist's ideologies and beliefs. These approaches, which lean towards psychological explanations, are based on the idea that “[the] way in which people comprehend and

make sense of the social world has consequences for the direction and character of their action and inaction" (Purvis and Hunt, 1993: 474).

For Crenshaw (1981: 383), the direct causes of terrorism are the reasons that lead a group or an individual to engage in terrorism, which are based on the terrorist's perception of an unjust grievance or deprivation. Gurr (1970) approaches political violence through a similar lens, calling the frustration that emerges from a disparity between expectations and reality 'relative deprivation'. Human frustration has, in fact, been identified as a leading cause of political violence for centuries, and is present, for example, in studies of revolutions from Aristotle and Tocqueville, all the way to Sloterdijk (Lia and Skjølberg, 2000: 11; Sloterdijk, 2006).

According to Crenshaw (1981: 387), terrorism is a decision made from a position of relative weakness. The decision to employ terrorism highlights one's self-perceived position of inferiority regarding the object identified as the source of grievance or deprivation. An individual or group that decides to perpetrate terrorist violence understands themselves as occupying a position of inferiority in society, and therefore see themselves as lacking other means through which to achieve their political goals (Crenshaw, 1981: 387). Consequently, the way an individual regards their own positioning in social hierarchies becomes central in causing terrorism, because it serves as a rational justification for the strategic value of terrorist violence.

Following both Crenshaw's (1981: 383) understanding of terrorism as a "rational political choice", and the theory of relative deprivation, the terrorist's perception of reality and their position within it emerges as a key element in comprehending why terrorism occurs. The rationality of terrorism has been called into question due to the empirical ineffectiveness of the method in achieving its goals or the apparent absence of "objective utility calculations" in the decision to engage in terrorism (Fortna, 2015: 549;

Nalbandov, 2013: 94). However, this paper understands rationality through the lens of 'procedural rationality' as defined by Herbert Simon (1976: 67), which concerns itself with the process of deliberation, rather than the outcome itself. The interpretation the individual makes of their environment is what drives the use of political violence, for it is this perception that informs the grievances and the self-perceived defensive position that renders terrorism a rational choice (Crenshaw, 1981: 383). Through the lens of procedural rationality, terrorism is regarded as rational because it emerges as a conscious decision informed by an actor's "subjectively constructed assessment of the objective reality", and it is this subjective assessment that guides the intellectual process that leads to the decision to engage in terrorism (Nalbandov, 2013: 94). Terrorism is, therefore, rational, within the incels' misogynist interpretation of reality and their personal experiences.

Ideology

Ideology is crucial in understanding the occurrence of terrorism for it represents the political narrative that informs an individual's perceived position in social hierarchies and the grievances that drive the choice to engage in political violence. It can be understood as a representation of reality that shapes a group's political identity through a set of shared beliefs "about its fundamental conditions and ways of existence and reproductions" (van Dijk, 2006: 116). Deeply connected to the Marxist history of thought, ideology is concerned with the forms of consciousness that condition the way people comprehend their "conflicting interests and struggles over them" (Lichtheim, 1965: 175; Purvis and Hunt, 1993: 476).

The concept becomes crucial for the present analysis because ideology provides the frame through which the incel grievances are articulated, by bringing forward a narrative that explains the incel experience and lived reality. Althusser's concept of 'interpellation' illustrates such a mechanism, for he argues that ideology constitutes people as subjects by speaking

to and explaining their experiences as social subjects, embedding them within a group's identity (Althusser, 1971). Therefore, an ideology serves as a group's self-definition (van Dijk, 1993: 248). It has an important hermeneutic dimension, in so far as it constitutes a model by which individuals interpret their reality and experiences; but it is also inherently socio-cognitive because it is a shared belief system constructed through social discursive practices (van Dijk, 1993: 245).

The connection between terrorism and ideology becomes evident in the way individuals and groups situate themselves within their social realities which in turn, provides the rationale behind the choice to engage in terrorist violence. Particular ideologies and beliefs articulate the political motivations behind terrorism and, therefore, are among the most powerful tools to understand why terrorism occurs (Wilkinson, 1987: ix). Roose and Cook (2022: 4) argue that three key components of ideology emerge as relevant for terrorism: a grievance, a culprit to whom the grievance is attributed, and the understanding of terrorism as morally righteous to "right this perceived wrong". The presence of these elements within incel discourses exemplifies the facilitation of political violence within their ideology.

MISOGYNY AS A REACTIONARY IDEOLOGY

Kate Manne (2018: 33) defines misogyny as "the system that operates within a patriarchal social order to police and enforce women's subordination and to uphold male dominance". Following her definition, this paper defines misogyny as an ideology because it 'interpellates' individuals, and particularly men, by providing a framework through which to interpret their experiences as members of a group in order to uphold a patriarchal social model.

Historically, women have occupied a position of subordination under a patriarchal system. Radical feminists such as Firestone and Jeffreys argue that relations of reproduction lie at the core of the patriarchal system of oppression, in which men

exercise power over women by controlling and owning their reproductive powers (Beechey, 1979: 69). Reproduction and sexuality are cornerstones of the domination exercised in traditional patriarchy, and the limitation of women's sexual freedoms constitutes a primary articulation of masculine power (Siapera, 2019: 33). Following a misogynist understanding of gender relations, which incels perpetrate and reproduce, a man is entitled to a woman's sexual and reproductive functions due to men's natural ownership of women's bodies (Beechey, 1979: 69).

Patriarchy is the political and social system structured around the subjugation of women to male power, and it constitutes a cornerstone of misogyny in so far as it represents the hierarchical understanding through which individuals interpret their positions in society (Roose and Cook, 2022: 4). While the patriarchal system remains pervasive, the gradual successes of the feminist movement and the sexual liberation movement from the 1960s have challenged the hegemonical status of misogyny in Western societies by presenting a struggle against the power exercised over women through sexual control in the forms of sexual violence, morality, and gender roles. According to Kimmel (2015: 28), the traditional ideal of masculinity has been increasingly questioned over the last few decades, which has led to the emergence of feelings of emasculation and humiliation among Western men, who often place the blame on women as the source of their aggrieved deprivation since they can no longer practise their masculinity through domination. This has led to the emergence of what Siapera (2019: 24) calls a "regressive and reactionary gender ideology", which is another manifestation of misogyny and which incels embody.

Misogyny is what we could call an 'implicit' ideology, in so far as it is so embedded in everyday practices and language that it becomes almost invisible. However, as van Dijk (2006: 134) argues, implicit ideologies become explicit in contexts of struggle and resistance. Misogyny perceives women's advancements as a threat to the patriarchal system, which, subsequently, causes the ideology to assert

itself in order to regain the dominance it considers to have lost (Roose and Cook, 2022: 2; Dahl et al., 2015: 251).

Violence, physical and symbolic, is a way in which misogynist ideology can make its resistance explicit. While misogyny has historically used violence as a tool to subordinate women, such violence has not been regarded as political because, being usually perpetrated against particular women within the private sphere, it is considered as not being a public or political affair (Gentry, 2022: 211; Beechey, 1979: 71). Misogyny is not regarded as a source of political violence because misogyny is often not identified as political, despite being a constitutive element of jihadist and far right ideologies, both of whom are widely linked to terrorism and other forms of political violence (Roose and Cook, 2022: 7). The failure to identify the politics of misogyny has, in fact, been central in denying the terrorist nature of incel violence (Gentry, 2022: 210).

Nevertheless, the present paper sustains that misogyny is a political ideology that has become reactionary due to the challenges it faces as a result of the growing emancipation of women, especially in sexual and reproductive terms. Consequently, as misogyny is political, misogynist violence can be regarded as terrorism.

It is also worth noting that incels are not alone in their misogyny (Kelly et al., 2021: 4). Their discourses present certain particular elements that facilitate the rational process of deciding to engage in terrorism, but their understanding of society remains deeply embedded in extreme misogyny. While incel discourses might contain a higher potential for terrorist radicalization (Baele et al., 2021: 1686), it would be a mistake to pathologize the incels' misogyny as unique, rather than as the structural problem it is, because while more outlandish and reactionary than before, "the beliefs [they] espouse are merely repetitions of long-standing misogynistic and patriarchal beliefs" (DeCook and Kelly, 2022: 710).

IDEOLOGICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS: AN APPROACH TO DISCOURSE

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an approach concerned with the social implications of language that seeks to uncover the power relations and discriminations embedded in discourse (Wodak, 2001: 2). Consequently, it constitutes an ideal framework to uncover the ideological implications of discourse through an approach van Dijk (2006: 127) calls Ideological Discourse Analysis. The present paper will follow said approach in order to uncover the ideology present in incel discourse, which will allow for a better understanding of the causes of incel terrorism. It will reveal how the community perceives reality and defines itself in a way that leads to engagement in terrorist violence.

The relationship between ideology and discourse is complex, not so much because it is difficult, but rather because the lines between both concepts are blurred (Purvis and Hunt, 1993: 474). Both relate to the way humans understand social realities and how they are conscious of the relations and practises they participate in, and therefore they have sometimes been used interchangeably (Purvis and Hunt, 1993: 474).

However, a way to distinguish them is by differentiating "discourse as process and ideology as effect" (Purvis and Hunt, 1993: 496). Following this understanding, ideology is the meaning conveyed through discourse, and it is through interpellation by ideological narratives that subjects are placed within a specific discursive context (Althusser, 1971). Consequently, it is possible to uncover ideological implications through analysing discourse, because "[...] ideologies are preferably produced and reproduced in societies through forms of text and talk of social actors as group members" (van Dijk, 1995: 245).

This paper builds upon the growing literature that collects and examines incel discourse, which illustrates the metanarratives that dominate

interactions and practices within the community that convey meaning. These metanarratives are examined through the lens of ideology, based on the Ideological Discourse Analysis approach, in order to uncover the elements of discourse that indicate the construction of group identity by defining this group's position within social hierarchies and the grievances that articulate its political project and interests.

DISCUSSION: THE MISOGYNY EMBEDDED IN INCEL DISCOURSE

Since the incel community is an eminently online phenomenon, interactions between its members take place through language, whether it be in posts, forums, videos, or manifestos. This has allowed scholars to identify the main elements that compose incel discourse and the meanings they convey by studying and observing how members of the incel community communicate on online platforms. Building from this existing literature, the following discussion identifies the ideological elements within discourse that inform how incels understand the world. This, in turn, allows for a better understanding of the drivers of incel terrorism.

Kelly et al. (2021: 8) state that the incel worldview is "shaped by the sexual entitlement and dehumanisation towards women endemic in society", which places incel discourses within a broader set of misogynist views. The way the term 'incel' itself is used conveys significant meaning with regard to the group's self-definition. Both words that make up the term 'involuntary celibate' are telling of the problem that incites incel terrorism. 'Celibacy' indicates the centrality of sex as a core masculine identifier; incels want to assert themselves as men (Sharkey, 2022: 43). However, they believe the way to do so is through sexual relationships. Being unable to have such relationships excludes incels from identifying as real men, according to a hegemonic understanding of masculinity.

On the other hand, 'involuntary' denotes the perceived injustice of said celibacy. Incels believe they

are entitled to sex, but women's sexual liberation has led to the establishment of a system in which they believe women hold all the power to exclusively choose successful and attractive partners, leading to a state of hypergamy for some, and celibacy for others (Kelly et al., 2021: 10; Baele et al., 2021: 1679). Involuntary celibacy is, therefore, the lived experience that community members seek to understand. Misogynist ideology present in incel discourses provides an explanation that rationalises and explains the individual's 'inceldom', thus informing a specific understanding that acts as the lens through which to articulate specific discourses that define the group's identity and its conditions of existence in reality. This ideology, therefore, provides violent incels with the reasons directly behind their decision to engage in terrorist violence.

One of the main components in incel discourses that exemplified the dominance of misogynist ideology is the belief in a clearly structured system that classifies individuals and establishes subgroups not only along gender lines, but also through the performance of different forms of masculinity (DeCook and Kelly, 2022: 713). Said system manifests in a hierarchical structure based on sexual achievement and physical attractiveness as a means of success. Incels believe that society is organised according to a 'mating market', dominated by women and attractive men and in which incels are marginalised due to their lack of physical attractiveness (Brzuszkiewicz, 2020: 15). The term 'mating market' denotes the centrality that relationships of reproduction have within the incel ideology, as it indicates how incels believe social interactions with women are almost exclusively directed at establishing sex(affective) relationships, through which an individual's measure of personal success is established (Brzuszkiewicz, 2020: 15).

Here, the use of specific language also becomes crucial in portraying how incels establish a classification that allows them to explain their lived experiences through a common ideological lens. Neologisms and jargon are extremely present in

incel spaces which are used to classify individuals according to how they perceive that the world is organised (Brzuszkiewicz, 2020: 7-8). The term 'Chad', for example, refers to the ideal man, whom women are attracted to and whom incels regard with both jealousy and admiration (Preston et al., 2021: 832-833). Similarly, the term 'Stacy' refers to women who allegedly have multiple relationships with men (Brzuszkiewicz, 2020: 7). They, like all women – who are often referred to as 'foids' or 'female humanoids' – are dehumanised and villainized, yet at the same time desired as an object through which to achieve sexual gratification and social recognition (Barcellona, 2022: 174). Such an understanding provides incels with a framework to articulate their experience, as well as their belonging to the group, by establishing rigid and impermeable lines of division among individuals. In turn, this facilitates the articulation of grievances and political narratives reproducing in-group/out-group dynamics (Baele et al., 2021: 1674).

Within this social structure, incels perceive themselves as occupying the lowest position in the masculine hierarchy because of their inability to perform masculinity successfully (O'Donnell and Shor, 2022: 344). Successful masculinity is measured by means of sexual activity, reproducing the patriarchal instrumentalization of sex which, as Sharkey (2022: 43) states, becomes a marker of the change from boyhood to adulthood. For incels, sexual relationships are important not for the sexual experience itself, but rather as markers of identity and social recognition as men. In fact, in incel discourses, women are objectified and valued only through the sexual and emotional labour they can perform in the service of men (Bratich and Banet-Weiser, 2019: 5012). This denotes an element of extreme misogynist ideology, in which women's subjugation in society is justified due to their biological reproductive functions, and echoes a clear feature of the traditional patriarchal system in which women exist as subordinate and men assert their masculinity through domination (Siapera, 2019: 31; Bratich and Banet-Weiser, 2019: 5008). Through the

use of denigrating and sexual language (such as the terms 'roasties', 'holes', 'foids'), incels dehumanise and villainize women, which allows them to justify violence in their defence of patriarchy, thus normalising violence as a means to an end (Kelly et al., 2021: 15). Through the nihilistic approach of the Black Pill framework, the incels' involuntary celibacy is explained by a narrative of genetic determinism (Brzuszkiewicz, 2020: 13). Incels believe "people's attractiveness depends exclusively on how genetically gifted they are, and this is not in their hands" (Brzuszkiewicz, 2020: 6). Consequently, since they perceive themselves as unattractive, through the common use of self-deprecating labels incels can discursively place themselves in a position of weakness with respect to the broader system (O'Donnell and Shor, 2022: 338). This allows the incels to frame their own experiences in a way that exteriorizes any form of blame, and it provides an explanation for their marginalisation and for their failure to perform ideal hegemonic masculinity (Brzuszkiewicz, 2020: 12). This discursive move also allows incels to position themselves at a disadvantage regarding the rest of society, additionally rationalising the choice to engage in terrorism as a way to convey their political message.

Incels represent a complex performance of "hybrid masculinity" because while they do not frame themselves as successfully masculine, they still express entitlement to the domination of women and access to their bodies (Ging, 2019: 651; O'Donnell and Shor, 2022: 338). This duality denotes the contradictory relationship that incels have with masculinity. In the diagnosis incels make of society, masculinity is an unattainable reality that contributes to the exclusion and humiliation of the men who self-identify as incels. However, incels strive to challenge and subvert the system and the object that denies them access to masculinity. Masculinity becomes both wholly unattainable and the ultimate goal. While positioning themselves as unable to perform hegemonic masculinity, of which they are, in fact, critical, they are still deeply embedded in an extreme misogynist framework (Vito et al., 2018: 91).

This tension that exists in the incel subject is resolved through the already mentioned hatred and villainization of women. Since the incels' conception of success is based on sexual activity, by denying them access to their bodies, women are perceived as the cause of incels' failure as men. If successful masculinity is unattainable, it is only because women have made it so (Sharkey, 2022: 44).

This can be exemplified by the use of specific language which is indicative of misogynist ideology. Incels use the term 'gynocentrism' to refer to the female-dominated system they believe the advancement of women's sexual freedoms has led to (O'Donnell and Shor, 2020: 345). This term allows incel discourses to do three things: (1) identify women as a systemic enemy, (2) present themselves in a position of weakness, and (3) articulate a political project of resistance. The term illustrates how, as Preston et al. (2021: 824) state, "incels situate their experiences as emblematic of the growing social problems facing men." They believe in a feature that is common throughout the manosphere; that Western societies are currently dominated by a system where men are emasculated and subjected to the power women wield in social, economic, and political terms (Ging, 2019: 640).

Consequently, misogyny provides the ideological framework through which incels can explain their lived experiences in a way that does not challenge their gender expectations, but rather identifies the social system, and specifically women, as the source of their unmet life and masculine expectations. The use of economic language such as the term 'sexual market' or the dominance of discussions regarding the right and (re)distribution of sex or the role of men as household providers, according to Shaw (2018: 193), denotes an undercurrent of economic concerns. Articulated through a misogynist lens, these social and economic frustrations are channelled into desires for sexual domination as a way of asserting masculinity. For these men who find themselves ostracised in a society where success and social expectations are increasingly unattainable to

the average person, misogyny provides an ideological narrative that disregards all other sources of social and structural inequality by using women and feminism as scapegoats. Extreme misogyny weaponizes the lived experience of inceldom in order to promote a narrative of gender struggle that emerges from women having increasing control and autonomy over their sexuality. Embedded in the neoliberal culture of self-improvement and individual effort as a path to success that dominates Western societies, incels are experiencing the consequences of economic precarity and the loss of control that comes with an increasingly unstable socioeconomic context during the last couple of decades (Shaw, 2018: 188; Brzuszkiewicz, 2020: 12). This frustration, coupled with the erosion of the traditional patriarchal subjugation of women through sex, creates the ideal breeding ground for misogynist ideology to foster resentment and entitlement, which can then be mobilised in an active defence of patriarchy.

As Baele et al. (2021: 1679) point out, incel narratives identify the sexual revolution of the 1960s as the turning point that eroded the norms and rules of the patriarchal "golden age". These authors identify themes within incel discourse that frame masculinity as having been "feminised and gradually eroded", a development for which women are to blame (Baele et al., 2021: 1680). Incels believe they can no longer become men (Sharkey, 2022: 45), because women have emasculated them through the establishment of a system in which women deny unattractive men access to their bodies. This creates a sense of aggrieved entitlement expressed by members of the community, who feel they are being deprived of their natural privilege (Kimmel, 2015: 35; Brzuszkiewicz, 2020: 13). Misogynist ideology tells men that they have a right to sexual relations with women as a way of asserting their dominance and gaining social recognition through the performance of heterosexual masculinity, which they are now being unjustly denied (Vito et al., 2018: 89). Said aggrieved entitlement, also identified by Kimmel (2015: 35) and Vito et al. (2018: 90), and reminiscent of Gurr's (1970) concept of

relative deprivation', illustrates the central grievance that articulates the sense of injustice that incels place at the core of the current system against which incel terrorism is directed.

Subsequently, incels perceive masculinity to be in crisis, because the ideal patriarchal model for a man is no longer achievable for them in a society where women are increasingly liberated (Sharkey, 2022: 37). This is perfectly exemplified in an article written by an incel sympathiser under the pseudonym Dr. Castle, in which he states: "Centuries ago, a man's primary role was to provide and protect. Now? We weren't quite sure" (2019, in Brzuszkiewicz, 2020: 4). The previous patriarchal model was one when masculinity was asserted through the subordination of women, and masculine success was expressed through the ability of a man to exercise dominance over the inferior other. Now? A process of increasing sexual and reproductive rights for women, together with a gradual deconstruction of gender roles and patriarchal ideals in Western societies, have dislodged the masculine expectations of success. More sexual rights for women means more power to decide over their sexual experiences, which incels perceive as an attack to their capacity to perform traditional masculinity (Sharkey, 2022: 45). Women's sexual liberation has positioned misogyny in a defensive position, for its old methods to subjugate women are losing their effectiveness. This, subsequently, requires misogyny to make itself explicit, for it needs to defend itself from the erosion caused by the gradual dismantling of the patriarchal system of masculine dominance. One of the many ways it does this is through the instrumentalization of the incels' lived experiences and the exploitation of their frustrations, which can potentially lead to be expressed through political violence. Moreover, by positioning sex and gender relations as political issues, feminism puts misogynists in a defensive position of resistance. Incels, in a clear reflection of misogynist ideology, villainize feminism as the vehicle that has enabled women's empowerment in sex relations, and, in their diagnosis of reality, frame it as a sole culprit of their failed expectations to perform

hegemonic masculinity.

Consequently, incel discourses are dominated by themes of victimhood, which fit into the way Crenshaw (1981: 387) links terrorism with a self-perceived position of weakness (Zimmerman, 2022: 6). Violence comes to be framed as a tool by which to subvert the unjust social order at the bottom of which incels perceive themselves to be, and fear and intimidation are "often promoted as the only means of achieving change for inceldom" (O'Donnell and Shor, 2022: 346; Kelly et al., 2021: 16). Consequently, terrorism comes to be understood as a rational choice to make explicit the resistance of the misogynist ideology incels subscribe to, because they perceive terrorism to be the 'tool of the weak' that they can use in a society in which they are at the mercy of women's power. Ultimately, this would re-establish a system of patriarchal domination of men over women. Themes of victimhood and aggrieved entitlement, therefore, become the crucial elements that frame terrorism as rational from incels' perspective, because they perceive society to be against them.

As has been illustrated throughout this section, an extreme and reactionary misogynist ideology can be identified throughout incel discourses. Misogyny provides the belief system that articulates a specific understanding of the world that contains all the elements necessary to possibly lead incels to engage in terrorism. Moreover, incel discourses are embedded within an extreme misogynist ideology based on a reactionary defence of a patriarchal system through the demonization of women for withholding sexual relationships. The centrality of sex throughout incel discourse, additionally, highlights what the core issue incels' political grievance is: women's sexual liberation.

CONCLUSION

Women are increasingly making strides for gender equality, especially in terms of sexual liberation. This is allowing them to become empowered and free themselves from the subordination that

characterises the patriarchal system. Misogyny, as the ideology that upholds this system, has come to see women's sexual freedoms as a threat to its survival and has become reactionary.

The present paper has identified how incel discourses are embedded in misogynist ideology. This ideological frame defends a patriarchal system which is believed to be under threat by the advancement of women's sexual freedoms. Extreme misogyny, therefore, positions the misogynist individual in a defensive and weak position in regards to the changes that have been taking place in Western societies in the last few decades, by framing the current reality as a woman-dominated environment where men are oppressed. Incel discourse clearly reproduces this narrative, constructing a worldview that justifies, and even deems necessary, to engage in terrorist violence.

Terrorism emerges as a rational political choice when an individual or a group perceive themselves to suffer an unjust grievance in a system where they occupy a position of weakness (Crenshaw, 1981: 383). As this paper has argued, incel discourses reproduce such a framework through the construction of a highly hierarchical understanding of society based on sexual achievements and genetic determinism. By positioning themselves at the bottom of said hierarchy, incels understand their status as one of victimhood created by a system which they believe to be unjust. Here, misogynist ideology provides incels with an explanation of their experiences and a justification for their sense of anger.

As has been argued, misogyny can no longer afford to be invisible, for the victories of feminism and the sexual liberation movement have been slowly eroding its power. Consequently, it has instrumentalized the lived experiences of incels by providing an ideological framework that articulates their social ostracization as a grievance for which women and their sexual liberation is deemed responsible. By upholding a hegemonic model of masculinity in which manhood is asserted through domination and sexual conquest, the misogynist

ideology perfectly positions incels in a situation that renders terrorism rational and necessary as the only way in which misogyny can defend itself from the threat of women's sexual freedoms.

Further research on incel discourses can shed additional light on the nature and the dynamics of incel terrorism. A better understanding of the ideological mechanisms that sustain and promote incel violence is crucial in order to properly tackle the phenomenon. Further examinations of incel discourses can promote a greater understanding of the grievances and experiences that foster resentment and hate among community members. This should provide a basis from which to address and challenge the spread of incel narratives and misogynist ideology among young men, subsequently tackling the potential for political violence within extreme misogynist ideology.

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