

INVOLUNTARY CELIBATES OR VOLUNTARY TERRORISTS?

The media coverage of misogynistic incel mass violence in the United
States, Canada, and the United Kingdom (2014-2021)
A Critical Discourse Analysis

DOROTTYA LUCA ÁGOSTON

Supervisor: Christopher Tulloch

2021/2022 Academic Year

Research Projects of the MA in International Studies on Media,
Power, and Difference

Department of Communication

Universitat Pompeu Fabra

Abstract

The misogynistic-extremist involuntary celibate (incel) movement – as well as the threat it poses to both national security and to the lives of (primarily) women – is growing and globalising. Since 2014 approximately fifty people have lost their lives to misogynistic mass violence. Still, adequate responses to the problem are missing on both policy and societal levels. Since the media not only represents our reality but also creates this very reality itself, changing the framing journalists employ in their reporting of misogynistic mass violence carried out by (mostly white) male perpetrators can have a positive effect on both our societal perception of and our governmental and policy responses to the incel issue and in general to the way we approach violence against women. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to examine the general patterns emerging from how mainstream media reports on male supremacist mass violence in order to urge change.

Keywords: incel, misogyny, terrorism, male supremacist movement, violence against women, manosphere, right-wing extremism

Research Dissertation

Women have always been the canaries in the coal mines, quietly singing. But we are so used to seeing them die at men's hands, so used to justifying and excusing it as normal or "understandable", that it wouldn't occur to us to consider this enough of an aberration to raise alarm. And so women continue to suffer and die in silence. And, sometimes days, sometimes weeks, sometimes months, down the line, men (or rather, as they are seen, "people") die, too. Then how we shout and react.

- Laura Bates

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION	4
II. LITERATURE REVIEW	6
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	6
PREVIOUS RESEARCH	10
III. RESEARCH	11
RESEARCH QUESTIONS	11
HYPOTHESES	12
LIMITATIONS	12
IV. METHODOLOGY	14
CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS	14
SITE/POPULATION SELECTION AND SAMPLING STRATEGY	15
DATA COLLECTION METHODS AND ANALYSIS PROCEDURES	16
<i>Language</i>	16
<i>Sources</i>	17
<i>News production</i>	17
V. RESULTS	17
LANGUAGE	17
<i>Incels</i>	18
<i>The attacks</i>	19
<i>The perpetrator</i>	19
SOURCES	20
<i>General</i>	21
<i>Sources from the “perpetrator’s circle”</i>	22
<i>Expert sources</i>	22
<i>Official sources</i>	22
<i>Sources from the “victim’s circle”</i>	23
NEWS PRODUCTION	23
VI. DISCUSSION	24
EMERGING DIFFERENCES	24
OVERALL PATTERNS	26
<i>Terrorism as theatre</i>	27
<i>The tragic fall of the mentally ill “lone wolf”</i>	28
<i>Red flags and online hoaxes</i>	29
<i>A conversation about men, by men</i>	30
<i>“Rampage”, “mass shooting” – anything but terrorism</i>	31
VII. CONCLUSION	33
VIII. BIBLIOGRAPHY	35
PRIMARY SOURCES	35
SECONDARY SOURCES	37
IX. APPENDIX	40
APPENDIX A	40
APPENDIX B	40
APPENDIX C	41

I. Introduction

Not many people had heard of the “manosphere” in 2014, when self-proclaimed “involuntary celibate” (incel) and misogynist extremist Elliot Rodger killed six people and injured fourteen others in his attack at the University of California, Santa Barbara campus. The “sprawling web of groups, belief systems, lifestyles and cults” that is the manosphere united by “an antagonism towards women, a vehement opposition to feminism, and the production of hyperbolic misogynist discourse”, radicalising men and glorifying violence against women – and to some extent, its public recognition – has been expanding ever since (Bates 2020, 11; Jane 2017b). Still in the eyes of most, it remains an abstract, strictly online compound of communities, that are separate from, on the one hand, “offline” men who abuse, harass, and kill women, and on the other, from terrorists (Bates 2020, 181). At the same time, violence linked to manosphere ideology in North America constitutes a security threat akin to that posed by Islamic fundamentalism, as it has led to the death of as many as forty to fifty people in the United States and Canada between 2014 and 2018; and is an emerging problem in the United Kingdom as well (Tomkinson, Harper, and Attwell 2020, 155). *The Guardian* reported that “2020 saw a string of incel-related incidents” and that there are “signs [that] the ideology is spreading beyond North America” (Beckett, 2021). In a report prepared by the European Commission in 2021 focusing on incels in Europe, Germany was highlighted as the EU country with the most significant incel congregation, with 189 registered incel.is users (European Commission and Radicalisation Awareness Network 2021, 12). Therefore, the misogynistic-extremist movement, as well as the threat it poses to both national security and to the lives of (primarily) women, is growing *and* globalising.

The manosphere encompasses various communities including incels (involuntary celibates), men's rights activists (MRAs), Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW), and pick-up artists (PUAs), among others. While their methods vary, manosphere groups share the basic ideology that men are the victims of an unfair feminist system which materialises in the form of the so-called “sexual marketplace” allegedly created and controlled by women in a way that 80 per cent of women pursue the top 20 per cent of men, leaving the bottom 20 per cent of women for the remaining 80 per cent of men. Making the conscious choice to realise that socially,

economically, and sexually men are at the whims of women's power and desires, is referred to, in manosphere circles, as taking the “Red Pill.”¹

Different manosphere groups diverge in the steps they take after accepting this believed “truth.” PUAs, for example, promote the possibility of improving one’s “sexual market value” through learning the “game” (not only condoning but promoting rape), earning more money, and/or improving their physical appearance. Meanwhile, those who reject the idea that individual-level attempts can help to achieve sexual relationships with women, refer to their further radicalisation as taking the “Black Pill”. By doing so they accept that looks are genetically determined, and women choose sexual partners based solely on physical features, thus whether a man is an incel is pre-determined. “Black Pillers” generally believe they have two options open for them, either they accept their fate as an involuntary celibate – which usually ends in promotion of suicide – or they try to change society structurally to their advantage, an idea that is advocated as potentially achievable by means of mass violence and terror. Proponents of this latter option argue that “such mass bloodshed is ‘the only way that sluts and alphas will realize and accept that there are serious consequences for allowing so many males to live their lives in misery.’” (incel blogpost quoted in Kelly, DiBranco, and DeCook 2021, 19). This series of acts of mass violence carried out by incels to bring forth “structural change” is widely referred to as the “Incel Rebellion” or “Beta Uprising.”

The Covid-19 pandemic has made the issue of the manosphere and incel ideology fuelled mass violence especially relevant. Ware argues that the pandemic has significantly altered the “threat landscape” regarding incels, as the “incel community exists almost entirely online, which enhances the prospect of pandemic lockdowns contributing to a significant rise in popularity for virtual extremist networks” as well as giving space for “a significant increase in murderous fantasies” (Ware 2021, 14–5). The effects of which we will certainly observe (and we are already observing) in the “post-pandemic” world.

Current research focusing on terrorism in the media, in particular on who gets counted as a terrorist, rarely mentions misogynistic mass violence; and in a similar fashion, scholars writing on online misogynistic extremism do not put emphasis on how the media covers acts of violence committed by members of these radicalised communities. Thus, there is a void at the

¹ The irony of using a reference from the Matrix movies, created by two trans women, seems to be lost on the extremist misogynist community.

meeting point of these two areas of study, waiting to be filled. This paper, therefore, situates itself at the intersection of media studies, gender studies, and terrorism studies; examining a media phenomenon surrounding terrorism through a gendered lens, heavily relying on feminist scholarship. The purpose of this study beyond analysis is to call for change in the way the media reports on incel terrorist attacks. Since the media not only represents our reality but also creates this very reality itself, changing the framing journalists employ in their reporting of misogynistic mass violence carried out by (white) male perpetrators can have a positive effect on both our societal perception of and our government and policy responses to the incel issue and in general to the way we approach violence against women.² The first step towards bringing forth this change – and what this paper sets out to accomplish – is examining the general patterns emerging from how mainstream media reports on misogynistic or male supremacist mass violence, following the imperative that we must name a problem to solve a problem.

II. Literature review

Theoretical framework

The issue of incel ideology-fuelled mass violence attacks and how they are represented in the media is imbedded into the theoretical traditions of gender studies, terrorism studies, and media studies. Nonetheless, there is a visible lack of interdisciplinarity in the existing literature surrounding the topic. First, current research focusing on terrorism in the media, in particular on who gets counted as a terrorist, rarely mentions specifically misogyny-fuelled mass violence, and in a similar fashion, scholars writing on online misogynistic extremism do not put emphasis on how the media covers acts of violence committed by members of these radicalised communities. And secondly, academics researching the topic and policy makers, law enforcement institutions, politicians and so on do not seem to interact with each other. This results in, on the one hand, the nexus of media-misogyny-terrorism not only being left unexplored but outright misinterpreted. Since the findings of media-misogyny, media-terrorism, and misogyny-terrorism research are automatically applied to the media-

² The Anti-Defamation League in 2018 compiled a list of policy recommendations for lawmakers, educators, the technology sector, journalists and so on to tackle the epidemic of misogynistic violence. The report can be found here: <https://www.adl.org/resources/report/when-women-are-enemy-intersection-misogyny-and-white-supremacy> (Anti-Defamation League 2018).

misogyny-terrorism framework, without it getting its own inquiry. And on the other hand, the lack of communication and cooperation between researchers and policy makers leads to an inability to enact change based on the trends discovered in academic research, an inability that has already claimed the lives of fifty people and will only continue to proliferate in the future.

Although, in public discussions and in the minds of most people incels are still “dismissed as a tiny fringe group of online weirdos”, considered “separate from the ‘offline’, common-or-garden variety of men who abuse, terrorise, stalk, harass and murder women,” and again from “the ones who use weapons to inflict mass acts of violence and murder”, it is important to note that the academic literature surrounding the incel community is expanding (Bates 2020, 11, 181). This expansion (hopefully) signals a shift towards taking incel-related threats and in general the manosphere more seriously, which is a shift in and of itself located in a larger trend of understanding that the “online world” is intrinsically intertwined with the “offline world” and thus, online communities, discussions, movements, threats etc. can and do have real life consequences.

People who abuse women (both on- and offline) go far beyond the incel community, however the manosphere, as Laura Bates pointed out in her book *Men Who Hate Women*, is both a creation of a society in which violence against women is at tremendous levels and a reaction to the intention to reduce this violence and inequality (Bates 2020, 182). Incels, and in general the manosphere, therefore grew out of, thrive in, and reinforce a society that is entrenched in toxic masculinity and chauvinism. As journalist Laurie Penny observed writing on the Isla Vista killings, imbedded into incel ideology “there is an overpowering sense of rage and entitlement: the conviction that men have been denied a birthright of easy power”, this type of culture and ideology drives violence in a direct way (Penny 2014).

Some scholars have argued that while incels are vocal and expansive about what they *hate*, they are far more ambivalent on what they *want*, hence the “political content of the incel worldview is much harder to capture” (Cottee 2020, 96). Nonetheless, Caron Gentry highlights that the desire “to control women is [the desire] to control society and preserve an order that serves white men” (Gentry 2020, 182). Bates reiterates this argument, stating that far from being “apolitical”, “the primary goal of these reactionary groups, like much of the alt-right and other online supremacist groups, is to regress to an idealised state of white, heteronormative male control and power” (Bates 2020, 181–2).

Recognising this political nature of manosphere ideology, recent literature on incels has increasingly focused on placing the group within the larger far-right online supremacist movement. So much so that the Southern Poverty Law Center – a non-profit legal advocacy organisation known for its legal cases against white supremacist groups – added male supremacist hate groups to their “hatewatch” lists (Southern Poverty Law Center 2017). Both the incel community and the alt-right display similar tendencies in promoting racism and anti-Semitism, fighting against immigration and the advancement of women’s rights, which is only reinforced by established connections between MRA groups and the Proud Boys, an American far-right, neo-fascist organisation (Am and Weimann 2020, 133). Another tell-tale sign of the overlap between manosphere groups and the alt-right is that incel “Red Pill” terminology has been widely adopted by the far-right and white supremacist groups to “describe their own versions of awakenings [and] conspiracist worldviews” (Kelly, Dibranco, and Decook 2021, 18).

Moreover, as Hoffman et.al. illustrate, several recent European far-right attackers have displayed incel tendencies, whether in public statements or in their online profiles, a pattern that “point[s] to an increasing convergence between the radical right and incel communities” (Hoffman, Ware, and Shapiro 2020, 574). Thus, integrating incel groups into the “alt-right tapestry” has the potential to open new ways of interpreting and understanding male supremacist mass violence, as far-right extremism has already established a foothold in terrorism studies (*ibid.* 572).

Misogynistic violence, on the other hand, has not been widely accepted as a form of terrorism by mainstream terrorism studies, nor in the larger public debate (Gentry 2020, 164). “Misogynistic terrorism” as a concept has also not been defined along strict lines; whether it is solely mass violence that can be counted as terrorism or more generally all violence against women, including domestic violence, can fall into this category is heavily contested. Nonetheless, the connection between “terrorist acts and domestic violence is something that feminist academics and activists have long warned of” (Bates 2020, 186). Bates argues that “if terrorism is a means of attempting to exert control and wield power by creating fear, then, at a micro or individual level, it precisely described domestic abuse.” (Bates 2020, 182). In accordance with this argument, some scholars choose to place terrorism on a continuum in which different categories such as “intimate”, “everyday”, “private”, “public”, “global” terrorisms all coexist (Gentry 2020, 177; Bates 2020, 186; McCulloch et al. 2019, 438). Even

when incel-ideology related mass violence is acknowledged as terrorism within the field of terrorism studies, it is often, as DeCrook and Kelly argue, typologized, classified, and standardised as the “incel menace”, neglecting to “interrogate the role that misogyny and violence against women play in violent extremism” (DeCook and Kelly 2021, 2).

Incorporating violence against women into terrorism studies is also hindered by the definition of terrorism itself varying based on country, discipline (legal definition, public definition etc.), and other factors. Some elements that appear in all definitions of terrorism across the three countries this study is focusing on – namely the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom – however, are that it is premeditated and motivated by a political, religious or ideological purpose, it is perpetrated against non-combatant targets with the intention of intimidating the public or compelling a government organisation, and in all cases the act of terrorism must also have “violently caused death or serious injury, endangered life or resulted in a significant risk to public safety” (Bates 2020, 190-1). Since the “terrorism” label carries with it important psychological, political, and legal implications, clearly defining what types of violence constitute terrorism is critical (D’Orazio and Salehyan 2018, 1018).

Scholars working on the intersection of terrorism studies and violence against women and girls/misogyny attribute current attitudes towards incel ideology fuelled attacks and the reluctance to classify misogynistic violence as a form of terrorism to the fact that doing so would mean seeing “those who are typically aligned with counter-terrorists as suddenly aligned with the terrorists themselves” (Gentry 2020, 166). This phenomenon of “in-group” solidarity and “out-group” hostility relies on the proposition that there is a societal and media tendency to excuse the behaviour of and sympathise with the “in-group” (white Christian men), regarding violent “in-group” actors as being mentally ill and violent “out-group” actors as motivated by identity. This is a tactic that is employed to create distance between the perpetrator’s actions and what is normative among the broader “in-group”, without having to confront the very bases of said group (Betus, Kearns, and Lemieux 2021, 1137; Noor et al. 2018, 2).

The “in-group” solidarity and “out-group” hostility phenomenon raises the question of whether it is society in general that creates this pattern, and the media solely reproduces it, or if the media is the primary creator of such sentiments that then take hold in society. The answer appears to be both. Since the media is in a symbiotic relationship with both the legal and the

societal context in which it operates, it both underlies social reality and constructs the very reality they embody acting as “constitutive of the social world, rather than just representative of it” (Budarick 2011, 4). What this entails in the case of mass media reports on incel terrorist attacks is twofold. First, the media will use the language that official, legal, and wider societal circles use when referring to incels, thus analysing media coverage of incel attacks sheds light onto more general patterns of our collective attitude towards the manosphere and violence against women. Secondly, through framing, mass media influences the way people perceive these attacks and their perpetrators. Since the media “establish what the public needs to know and highlight the most relevant and salient dimensions of how information should be understood and discussed” (Betus, Kearns, and Lemieux 2021, 1135). This in turn, Bates argues, can contribute to our “societal normalisation of such [misogynistic] ideologies and such violence [against women], and reinforces the weakness of our government and policy response to the problem” (Bates 2020, 192).

Previous research

As terrorism is an act of violence that functions by attracting public attention, public opinion plays a centre role in defining what constitutes as terrorism. Huff and Kertzer in their 2018 study investigated how the public defines terrorism through presenting their study participants with a series of incidents with randomly generated features and then asking them whether they would classify each incident as terrorism (Huff and Kertzer 2018, 59). D’Orazio and Salehyan conducted a similar study in the same year, presenting their research subjects with a fictional news story about a planned mass shooting, varying the ethnicity of the perpetrator and their connections to a militant group (D’Orazio and Salehyan 2018, 1019). The two studies found that a) “out-group” attackers are typically seen as being driven by extreme ideologies, while “in-group” perpetrators (white men) are more likely to be assumed mentally ill, and b) perpetrators associated with groups and acting purposively for some broader political agenda are more likely to be labelled terrorist. In accordance with this, “Americans view threats from “outgroups” [non-white or Muslim men] as more troubling, and more readily apply the terrorist label to them.” (Huff and Kertzer 2018, 62; D’Orazio and Salehyan 2018, 1035).

Exploring how mass media covers acts of terrorism is also crucial, given the influence the media has on societal opinion and judgement. Betus, Kearns, and Lemieux in their 2021 study examining the text of print news coverage of all terrorist attacks in the United States between

2006 and 2015 show that not only is the media more likely to frame attacks with Muslim perpetrators as terrorism, “Muslim-perpetrated attacks receive more media attention than attacks by non-Muslims” to begin with. However, they found no substantial difference in reference to mental illness between terrorist attacks perpetrated by white people compared to people of colour. (Betus, Kearns, and Lemieux 2021, 1133–4). Their findings are particularly important when taken together with the discoveries of Huff and Kertzer and D’Orazio and Salehyan’s on the public biases around the same issues. As Betus et. al. points out, through media framing, “dominant ideologies and perspectives come to be viewed as *common sense*” in larger society rather than “simply possible interpretations of a complex world” (*ibid.* 1136).

Further inquiring into the idea that an important connection between media portrayals and coverage of terrorism and, how in turn, the public conceptualises terrorism exists, in her prominent 2011 study, Kimberly Powell analysed the American media coverage of terrorism since 9/11 (Powell 2011). Powell sheds light onto a thematic pattern present in terrorism coverage, in which the fear of international terrorism is dominant, particularly “Muslims/Arabs/Islam working together in organised terrorist cells against ‘Christian America’”, while domestic terrorism is “cast as a minor threat that occurs in isolated incidents by troubled individuals” (Powell 2011, 91). This presumed “reality” created and reinforced by the media influences public opinion and perceptions of the world, resulting in lasting images and stereotypes about certain groups, religions, and peoples (Kearns, Betus, and Lemieux 2019, 988; Powell 2011, 93). This can, in turn, actively obstructs government response and policy change surrounding the issue of incel-related terrorism, leaving women (among other groups) vulnerable to structural and ideology-driven violence.

III. Research

Research questions

The purpose of this study is to examine the general patterns emerging from how mainstream media reports on misogynistic/ male supremacist mass violence carried out by white – or non-Muslim – male perpetrators. It will do so by focusing on the following research questions.

RQ1. What kind of picture do newspaper reports paint of the perpetrators of incel mass violence attacks?

RQ2. Does the coverage focus on incels? If yes, how do the articles relate the online male supremacist group to the “real-life” attacks?

RQ3. How do the reports depict the attacks, do they use the word “terrorism” when referring to them?

RQ4. Is there a difference between the coverage in different media outlets? If yes, what causes the difference? (possible reasons: country/political leaning/gender of the author of the article/date of production)

Hypotheses

Before commencing this study, four hypotheses are proposed after consulting previous research and theoretical discussions around incel-related acts of mass violence. The author of this research believes that:

- (1) The political leaning of the newspaper will be the most significant source of difference between the articles.
- (2) In the description of the incel terrorists (perpetrators) the most substantial emphasis will be put on mental illness across all articles.
- (3) The overwhelming majority of sources used in the articles will come from the “perpetrator’s circle” including materials produced by the perpetrators (such as manifestos, videos etc.).
- (4) The attacks will not be referred to as acts of terrorism.

Limitations

It is crucial to acknowledge that the study relies on both a fundamentally subjective methodology (Critical Discourse Analysis) and sampling strategy. As CDA is more an approach than an actual methodology, it offers less distinct and objective rules for the researcher to follow. Nonetheless, it allows for research to be combined with theory and a wider societal critique which is essentially the purpose of this study. Basing my argument on Mayring’s assessment of qualitative content analysis – as I believe the same principles are applicable to CDA as well – I believe that subjectivity in this paper helps the creation of a more

“reflexive and adaptable research design” which will in turn ensure a “holistic approach” (Mayring 2014, 14).

Regarding the samples used in my analysis, the paper examines a heavily limited pool of articles, specifically chosen by the author of this research, albeit in accordance with a set criterion (which will be presented later). This results in two important limitations. First, the chosen articles will inevitably reflect some of the author’s preconceived notions about given newspapers and the type of reporting they would likely employ. And secondly, the relatively small number of articles will result in an analysis that is not fully representative of either the newspapers the reports appeared in, nor the full media coverage of this issue. However, it will still highlight some emerging general trends in the media coverage on incel mass violence.

I am also aware of the issues regarding reducing the victims of misogynistic violence into numbers and data as well as the reproduction of parts of incel ideology within this paper. The risk of doing so is providing further platform and exposure for a misogynistic-extremist political movement. In this study, I will, according to my best abilities, avoid the reproduction of such materials and the mentioning of any potential sites or forums whose aim is to radicalise individuals, unless it is strictly necessary for the purpose of the study. As a mark of respect for those who lost their lives in the attacks examined in this paper, let us call them by name here: George Chen, Chengyuan "James" Hong, Weihai "David" Wang, Katherine Breann Cooper, Veronika Elizabeth Weiss, Christopher Ross Michaels-Martinez, Beutis Renuka Amarasinghe, Andrea Knafelc Bradden, Geraldine Brady, So He Chung, Anne Marie D'Amico, Mary Elizabeth "Betty" Forsyth, Chul Min "Eddie" Kang, Ji Hun Kim, Munir Najjar, Dorothy Sewell, Amaresh Tesfamariam, Maxine Davison, Lee Martyn, Sophie Martyn, Stephen Washington, and Katherine Shepherd.

Finally, I ought to address all that this paper could (and perhaps should) include but that is not within the scope of my current study. First, in my inquiry into the language used in the examined articles, the headlines each piece ran with would have deserved special attention and a specific analysis on their own. Secondly, when analysing the news production aspect of the articles, the paper is limited to examining the authors of the study. I suggest that this aspect of the research should be complemented by an inquiry into the locations where these articles were produced. Furthermore, I propose that a separate analysis focusing solely on the images featured in these articles should be conducted in order to paint a more detailed picture of the

media coverage of incel-related mass violence in the chosen news outlets. And finally, the attacks at the centre of the reporting and the sample analysed for this study are taken from three anglophone countries, the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. I believe that the issue at the heart of this paper should be examined in multiple countries all over the world, bringing non-English language news outlets into the spotlight of analysis in order to produce a more nuanced and comprehensive picture of media representations of incel terrorism. I hope that in the future I can continue my work on this deeply complex and layered topic and investigate the aspects that could not be considered this time around.

IV. Methodology

Critical Discourse Analysis

To conduct this research, a Critical Discourse Analysis approach was employed. This approach was chosen by the author of this study since it combines theory with empirical research and allows for the issue to be treated subjectively and sensitively. As CDA aims at understanding the underlying power relations of a given problem and is specifically interested in power abuse, it serves as the most appropriate approach to research a topic that connects the effect of media on our society, the proliferation of online violent misogyny, and our characterisations of who gets counted as a terrorist. Furthermore, CDA places an emphasis on language, enabling the researcher to “focus on the signifiers that make up the text, the specific linguistic selections, their juxta positioning, their sequencing, their layout and so on.” And then to tie their findings to “socially regulated discourses” and examine how “the processes of production and reception are socially constrained” (Janks 1997). This can be carried out through Fairclough’s “three-dimensional” framework of inquiry, joining the three separate forms of analysis alluded to above: “analysis of language texts [the object of analysis], analysis of discourse practice (processes of text production, distribution, and consumption) and analysis of discursive events as instances of sociocultural practice” (Fairclough 1995, 2).

Moreover, CDA will be employed since it promotes an additional step, moving beyond analysis, calling the dominant discourse into question. This last step implies an inherent “activist” nature of CDA which is essential when approaching a topic which has grave real-life consequences. In accordance with van Dijk’s principle of CDA, in which the analyst takes an

explicit sociopolitical stance, spelling out their “point of view, perspective, principles and aims, both within their discipline and within society at large,” this research firmly agrees with treating the examined cases as acts of terrorism and is devoted to contributing towards changing the conversation around incel violence to make it into a topic that is taken more seriously on a media, societal, and a policy level (van Dijk 1993, 252).

Site/population selection and sampling strategy

This analysis will examine how terrorist attacks carried out by misogynistic-extremist incels are covered in mainstream media through analysing some of the media coverage of the attacks carried out by Elliot Rodger (Santa Barbara, USA 2014), Alek Minassian (Toronto, Canada 2018), and Jake Davison (Plymouth, UK 2021) in US, Canadian, and British media. All three perpetrators have been linked to the male-supremacist incel ideology and movement. Mainstream media here refers collectively to the various large mass news media (in the case of this study, online newspapers) that influence a wide array of people, and both reflect and shape prevailing currents of thought. This paper specifically focuses on what Noam Chomsky calls “elite media” or “agenda-setting media”, news outlets that “set the framework in which everyone else operates.” Their main audience is the “political class”, the ones “involved in the political system in an ongoing fashion” and hence, the most traditionally influential class in shaping and reflecting currents of thought (Chomsky 1997).³ The main criteria for the chosen newspapers were that they, (a) were “elite media” and hence excluded tabloids, (b) were widely distributed or reached a wide audience, and (c) had an online website. According to these criteria, for the inquiry, I chose two online newspapers from each country, one left-leaning and one right-leaning; respectively *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Guardian*, *The Telegraph*, the *Toronto Star*, and the *National Post*. The political leaning of each newspaper has been verified through mediabiasfactcheck.com and allsides.com, the media bias assigned to each of the newspapers according to these websites can be found in **Appendix A**.

From each news outlet three articles were analysed, one on each attack. The chosen articles can be found in **Appendix B**. Given that, in most cases, the news outlets ran multiple reports on the attacks – and by the nature of this study it is not within its scope to analyse them all –

³ Discussing whether currents of thought actually originate from the elite classes (and hence the “elite media”) or emerge from bottom-up is not within the scope of this essay. For the purpose of this study, the author took a traditional (hierarchical) approach to information dissemination methods.

the selection of the eighteen articles reflect some subjectivity. Nonetheless, all chosen articles were news reports, excluding opinion pieces and editor's notes from the samples. Moreover, all eighteen reports were published within the first week of the attack and, in the cases where more than one article discussing an attack was published in the given newspaper, the article chosen for analysis was not the first report.⁴ This sampling strategy was chosen in order to give the media outlets the "benefit of the doubt"; assuming that focusing on articles published not immediately after the attacks, but rather a couple days later, would imply that newspapers had more time to publish a well-informed and thorough report on the incidents, expressing special sensitivity towards discussing the perpetrator's identity and the type of violence carried out by him.

Through this sampling strategy, the research paper will be able to on the one hand, detangle patterns across country, political leaning and so on, regarding the media coverage of terrorist attacks linked to incel ideology; and on the other, examine potential emerging differences along the aforementioned lines, with a special focus on how discourse and reporting possibly changed between 2014 and 2021.

Data collection methods and analysis procedures

The chosen articles will be analysed according to three main categories: language, sources, and news production. These categories will then be further examined on various axes in the discussion.

Language

To analyse the language used in the chosen articles a combination of qualitative text analysis and critical discourse analysis approaches were employed. First, a glossary of terms was collected incorporating all nouns and adjectives used in relation to the attacks and the perpetrators of said attacks. The related words then were organised into a table according to the newspaper they appeared in and the attack they covered. This table can be found in **Appendix C**. Subsequently, a chart illustrating the words that appear with the most frequency in the coverage was assembled (see *Figure 1* in **Language**).

⁴ In the case of *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* reporting on the attack carried out by Davison the first reports had to be used since they both only ran one piece covering the event.

Sources

In order to paint a full picture of the articles, the sources mentioned in them were collected. Sources here refer to any identified entities outside the authors of the piece, from whom the authors either took quotes or whom they paraphrased in the article. Videos, blog posts, manifestos were also considered as sources for the sake of this study. The main goal of this analysis of sources is to investigate whose “side of the story” mass media outlets are most likely to broadcast or reproduce and to examine whether different newspapers use the same sources in their coverage. The sources identified in the articles were organised into a table dividing them according to whether they represent the perpetrator’s circle (e.g., family member), the victim or witnesses’ circle, officials or authorities (e.g., police), or experts (e.g., researchers in the topic of incels). A chart was then assembled demonstrating the frequency with which sources belonging to each of these categories appear in the news articles (see *Figure 3* in **Sources**).

News production

The analysis of the news production facet of the coverage revolves around the author(s) of the article. The paper considers two main aspects: first, the gender of the authors and secondly, whether the article was sourced from a news agency. Examining these two aspects will shed light onto a) who is involved in the production of coverage on incel mass attacks and b) how common it is for newspapers to outsource this coverage to news agencies, resulting in various news outlets running virtually the same story.

V. Results

Language

The language analysis of the articles divided the category into three inter-related parts: language around incels, words relating to the specific attacks, and descriptions of the perpetrators. Based on this inquiry, the prototype of an incel terrorist was drawn as *a troubled young man struggling with mental health issues who retreated into the internet*.

reports on the earliest attack carried out by Rodger (2014) feature the word “misogyny” or “misogynistic”.

- (3) The specifically online element of incel groups is also highlighted as language specific to the “online world” is often used in the articles. Words such as “social media”, “meme”, “red flag”, “online hoax”, and “trolling” appear in ten out of the eighteen articles.
- (4) Seven out of the twelve articles covering the Minassian and Davison attacks mention Elliot Rodger, he is referred to in *all* the coverage on Minassian.

The attacks

- (5) When describing the attacks, the articles most frequently use the adjectives “deadly” (or some variation e.g., “deadliest”) and “shocking” (or “shocked”). One-third of all articles refer to the attack they are reporting on as “deadly”, and 22% as “shocking.”
- (6) In the case of the Davison attack (taken place in Britain) the overseas uses “rare” the most frequently. The word appears in all four Canadian and US reports on Davison.
- (7) The most recurrent noun appearing across articles in relation to the attacks is “rampage” (appearing in 50% of articles), followed by “shooting” and “killings” (one-third of articles).
- (8) One-third of the articles (six pieces) specify that the attacks were not terrorism related.

The perpetrator

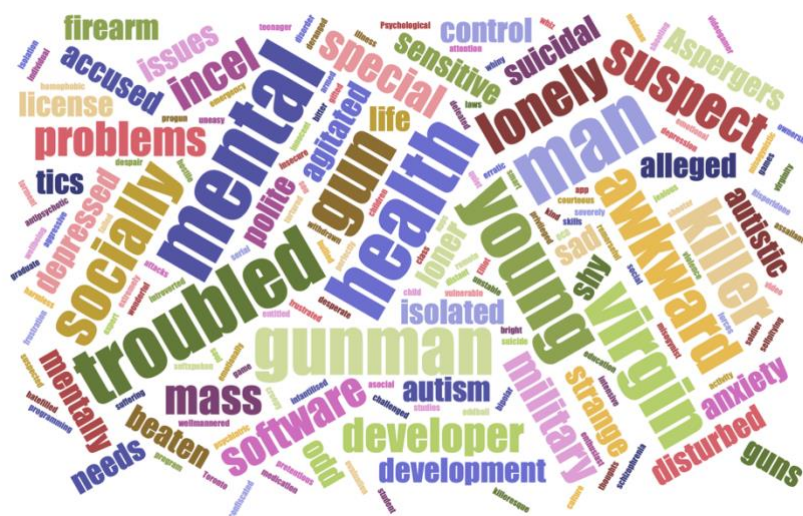


Figure 2. Word cloud illustrating the most frequently used words to describe the perpetrator

- (9) When it comes to the perpetrator, he is referred to as a “young man” or “young student” in seven articles, six of which are reporting on Rodger (hence, all coverage on Rodger calls him a “young man”).
- (10) The aspect that is most emphasised in relation to the perpetrator is his isolation or loneliness and his poor mental health and/or neurodivergence.
- a. Twelve articles describe the perpetrator as “lonely”, “troubled”, “socially awkward” and similar adjectives.
 - b. Some allusion to mental illness (depression, anxiety, mental health, certain medication etc.) or neurodivergence (autism, Asperger’s, OCD, schizophrenia) appears in thirteen out of the overall eighteen articles, making mental health and neurodivergence an aspect of 72% of all articles.
- (11) While positive adjectives are often quoted about perpetrator in the Rodger coverage –the most frequent of which is “polite”, “smart” (or “bright”), and “harmless” (or “innocent”) – these kinds of words virtually disappear in the reporting on the Minassian and Davison attacks in all countries.
- (12) Coverage also highlights some of the interests of the perpetrators as well as related issues. This tendency is less visibly in the Rodger coverage, meanwhile in the case of Minassian, his computer skills (calling him a “computer whiz”) and military past are emphasised, and with Davison, the issue of his gun license is in the focus of the reporting.

Sources

The findings of the analysis of sources were organised according to the four categories outlined earlier – sources from perpetrator’s circle, from the victim’s circle, official sources, and experts –, and they are as follows:

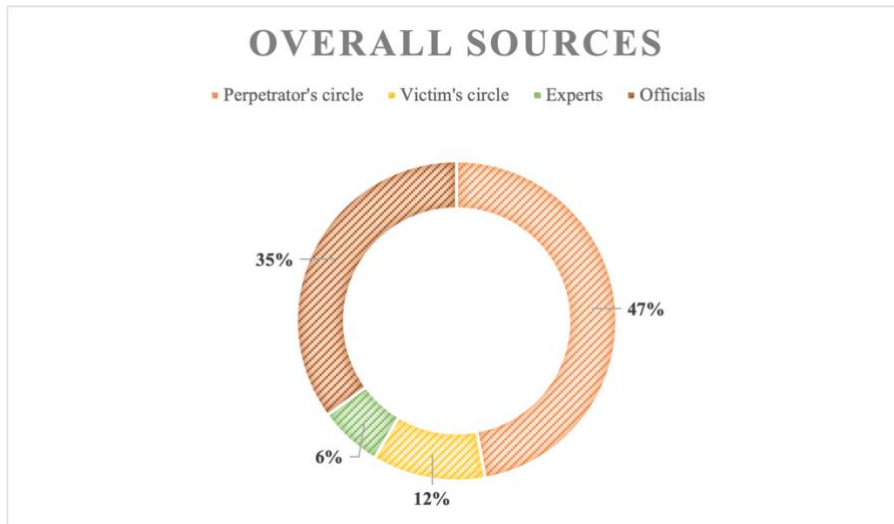


Figure 3a. Frequency of “overall sources” according to category

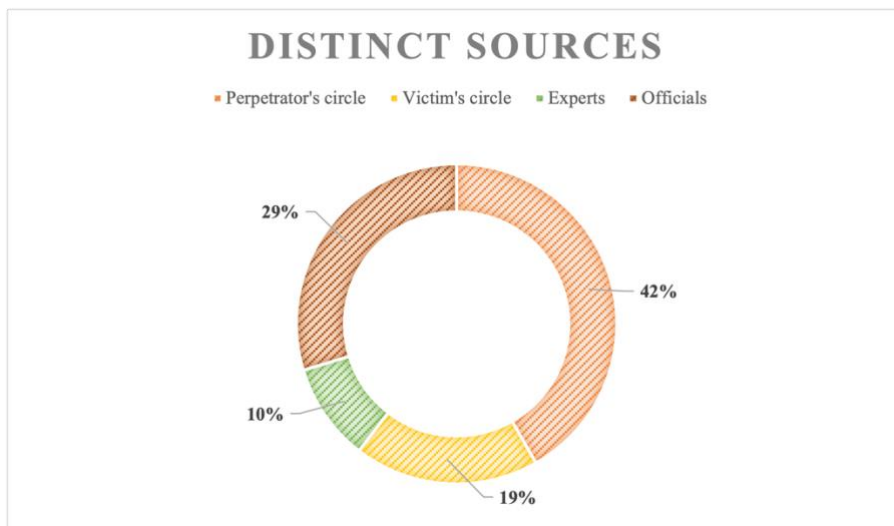


Figure 3b. Frequency of “distinct sources” according to category

General

- (1) Out of the 157 overall sources across all media outlets (8,7 sources per article in average) 91 distinct sources were identified. This means 42% of the sources were reused across articles.⁵
- (2) There is no significant difference between the number of sources employed in the coverage of the Rodger (63 overall, 36 distinct) and Minassian (62 overall, 37 distinct)

⁵ “Overall sources” are calculated by taking all sources that appear in each article, however if a source appears twice in the same article, it is only counted once (e.g., “police” as a source appears an average of five times in each article, but it is counted only once per article). If officials are named within a given source-entity (e.g., “Toronto Police” and “Detective Sgt. Graham Gibson of the Toronto Police”) they are counted as separate sources.

attacks, however the coverage of the Davison attack generally features significantly less sources (32 overall, 18 distinct).

Sources from the “perpetrator’s circle”

- (3) In both “overall sources” and “distinct sources”, sources representing the perpetrator’s circle are in relative majority (47% and 42% respectively). An average of four sources from the perpetrator’s circle are featured in each article.
- (4) The frequency with which the perpetrator’s circle is represented through sources in the article does not display a significant difference between the coverage of the Rodger (51% overall, 42% distinct) and the Minassian (52% overall, 49% distinct) attacks, however a drop is observable in the coverage of the Davison attack (31% overall, 28% distinct).
- (5) Sources directly linked to the perpetrators (manifestos, online videos, social media posts) appear fifty-nine times overall across articles, an average of three point three times per piece.
- (6) The coverage of Rodger’s attack featured sources linked directly to the perpetrator (see point 5) most frequently, thirty-one times overall. The coverage on the Minassian and Davison attacks both featured fourteen of these sources.

Expert sources

- (7) The most under-represented source category across all articles are experts, making up only 6% (overall) and 10% (distinct) of the sources.
- (8) Out of the nine distinct expert sources, one-third were women, Laura Bates (*Telegraph*), Doris A. Fuller (*National Post*), and Whitney Phillips (*Toronto Star*).⁶

Official sources

- (9) The police (including police spokespersons, officials, sheriffs etc.) is quotes and paraphrased ninety times overall across all articles, an average of five times per piece.⁷

⁶ The *Telegraph* article was co-written by a woman, the *National Post* piece is by a man, and the author of the *Toronto Star* article is a woman.

⁷ Left-leaning and right-leaning newspapers use the police as a source in a quite equal manner, the right forty-seven times and the left forty-three times out of the mentioned ninety.

Sources from the “victim’s circle”

- (10) Sources from the victim’s circle (witnesses of the attack, acquaintances of the victims) appeared eighteen times overall, hence an average of one victim-circle source was featured per article, one-fourth the times perpetrator’s circle sources appear per article on average.
- (11) Overall, five witnesses and ten sources from the victim’s circle in general (including acquaintances of the victims *and* witnesses) were named, leaving almost half (44%) of victim-circle sources unnamed.

News production

Looking at news production, specifically the authors of the examined articles, four main outcomes became visible:

- (1) Out of the thirty-two authors, nine were women, making up 28% of all authors. The most female authors appear in the *Wall Street Journal*, four in total, three of which co-write the same article on the Minassian attack.
- (2) Out of the eighteen total articles, seven (38%) were written or co-written by women. Four of these articles appeared in right-leaning newspapers, while the left-leaning *Toronto Star* featured a female author in all three of their analysed articles.⁸
- (3) Two authors had special titles, “crime correspondent” in the *Telegraph* and “identity and inequality reporter” in the *Toronto Star*, both of these authors were women.
- (4) News agencies were displayed as authors four times, the Associated Press three times and Reuters once, all of them in the Canadian newspapers covering the Rodger and Davison attacks. In the *Guardian*’s coverage of the Rodger attack, an “and agencies” label appears after the authors, nonetheless it is not disclosed which news agencies. The US papers did not use news agencies.

⁸ None of the articles published in the *Guardian* and the *New York Times* were written by women.

VI. Discussion

Emerging differences

Before we turn to a discussion on the general trends that emerge from the analysis conducted, first it is necessary to consider some of the observed differences and where they originate from. I propose that they are primarily the effects of a set of intertwined factors, including date and time of the coverage, country, and political leaning of the newspaper. I emphasise their intertwined nature, since the articles first, do not exist in a vacuum, and secondly, represent a very limited pool of sample.⁹ Thus, in most cases where differences among the articles arise in the data, there is a need to rely on speculation to some degree. This discussion, nonetheless, offers a possible interpretation of where these differences apparent in the data originate from.

Time appears to be one of the most significant factors in prompting differences between the articles, especially when it comes to language. As the 2014 Rodger attack is often regarded as the first incel-ideology driven act of mass violence, it was also the incident that brought incels and the larger manosphere into the spotlight for the first time. And along with incels gaining public recognition came their terminology, bleeding into our mainstream vocabulary. As we have seen in the results, the word “incel” itself only made an appearance in one of the Rodger reports in 2014, however by 2018 when Minassian carried out his act of terror, incels were mentioned in all articles covering the incident. Incels in news reporting are still largely featured as a phenomenon that needs an introduction and explanation, nonetheless media outlets increasingly rely on a public knowledge on at least the existence of the “involuntary celibate” movement. This also leads to a creation of a “bubble” of cross-references, illustrated by how Elliot Rodger is frequently mentioned in the coverage on Minassian and Davison. Referring to Rodger in the articles as the figure with whom the “movement” got associated invites the reader to familiarise themselves with this world of incel terrorists. In the case of the reports on

⁹ An excellent example of this interplay between the factors causing difference is the way the coverage on Davison (2021) featured significantly less sources in general, and less sources from the perpetrator’s circle specifically than the reporting on the other two attacks. This finding can be the result of the American coverage being immediate reports on the attack together with the Canadian coverage being fully outsourced to news agencies (since the UK coverage featured roughly the same number of sources as in their reporting of the other two attacks). Thus, while at first glance it might appear like employed sources have become more objective over time in the name of a less biased reporting, this is likely not the case, or at least this example is not proof of this argument.

Minassian this tendency is especially pertinent, possibly since Minassian himself had a history of “praising” Rodger online, a practice widely employed on incel forums.¹⁰

Alongside the societal consciousness gaining about incel ideology, since 2014, our vocabulary surrounding violence against women has also grown. The word “misogyny” has been technically in our dictionaries since the 17th century, and it first became popularised by second wave feminist in the 1970s. Nevertheless, its wide understanding and use among the general public has skyrocketed in the past ten years, reinforced by the rise of online misogyny, in both its everyday, individual form and the more coordinated, highly visible harassment campaigns like *Gamergate*.^{11,12} This pattern coincides with the results found in this study that none of the coverage on the Rodger attack (carried out in 2014) featured the word “misogyny” or “misogynistic”, nevertheless the word was so overwhelmingly included in the Minassian and Davison coverage that it became statistically one of the most frequently used words in relation to incels overall in the analysed articles. It can also be argued that employing “big words” such as “misogyny” in news reporting can be alienating towards a certain kind of audience, and that rather than the more frequent use of the word representing a tendency of wider understanding and use of it generally in society, it signals a pattern of over-academisation of our everyday language without the general knowledge and understanding behind it.

When looking at the country of origin of the newspapers and how this factor affected emerging differences in the data, what this study did *not* find is a country where the coverage of male supremacist attacks would be fundamentally “better” than elsewhere. The country of the newspaper as an aspect causing difference in reporting comes into play in another way, most notably with regards to how the North American press treats news from the United Kingdom. The use of the word “rare” in *all* North American reporting of the Davison attack is immensely illustrative of what is considered the biggest news value overseas when it comes to news from the United Kingdom. Unexpectedness – identified as one of the twelve news factors by Galtung

¹⁰ Phrases such as “going ER” and “hERo” are popular among incels, glorifying Rodger and his attack, urging each other to follow in his footsteps.

¹¹ According to Google Trends, “misogyny” (the word, not the phenomenon) has begun its rise in 2012, and the frequency with which people search the word on Google has not dropped below 2012 levels ever since. The most interest in “misogyny” (at least in the world of the search engine) was in November 2016, when former US president Donald Trump was elected.

¹² For more on online misogyny see Jane, Emma A. 2017a. *Misogyny Online: A Short (and Brutish) History*. London: Sage Publications Ltd. (Jane 2017a).

and Ruge – is what the American and Canadian press relies on in their coverage (Galtung and Ruge 1965, 70).¹³

Finally, in complete opposition with what was predicted and expected as the most significant governing factor in creating differences between the articles, the political leaning of the news outlets chosen for analysis did not play a noteworthy role in this process. There was no substantial difference in language use, sites on the left employed sympathetic, humanising language towards the perpetrator just as generously as right-wing papers. In the sources they used, similarly, there was no difference, both ends of the ideological spectrum giving overt emphasise and spotlight to sources from the perpetrator’s circle. Gender was not a dividing factor either between left and right, nearly the same number of articles were (co-) written by women on both sides, and female expert sources were included in similar numbers as well. If anything, the right-leaning outlets featured slightly more female voices than the ones on the political left. Of course, the media outlets chosen for this analysis all hovered around the centre of the political spectrum, rather than the far-right or the far-left. Nonetheless, the lack of differences in reporting on the left and on the right signals that there is an existing universal narrative employed by the media reporting on incel terrorism regardless of political ideology.

Overall patterns

After establishing some of the key differences between the reporting each article employs, let us now turn to some of the overall patterns that arise from the analysis of the coverage. Taking the inquiry into the language aspect of the articles together with the sources they employed, and the news production details, a set of discernible trends emerges across all articles regardless of political leaning, date of production, country of origin and so on. This analysis has identified five main patterns: first, the emphasis on broadcasting the perpetrator’s point of view both through the language and the sources employed; secondly, the notable focus on the perpetrator’s mental illness and social isolation; thirdly, the wide usage of “online language”; fourthly, the apparent gender discrepancy – the under-representation of women – in who leads the conversation around incels; and finally, the media’s reluctance to refer to misogynistic mass attacks as terrorism.

¹³ “The more unexpected the signal, the more probable that it will be recorded as worth listening to” (Galtung and Ruge 1965, 65).

Terrorism as theatre

All analysed news outlets reported on the incel mass attacks from the perpetrator's point of view. Sources representing the perpetrator's circle represented almost half of all sources included in the coverage across articles, while victim's circle sources appeared one-fourth the times perpetrator's circle sources were featured per article. Journalists, therefore, considered it a priority to give voice to the perpetrator's family, friends, neighbours, elementary school teachers, high school classmates and so on. On the other hand, the loved ones of victims only appeared in one out of the overall eighteen articles. This tendency resulted in a general coverage in which the audience is encouraged to feel for the perpetrator, for this "young man", someone's son, "our Elliot", essentially humanising a man driven to mass violence by an extremist far-right ideology. Taken together with the language that is reproduced through the sources – the language of shock, of how no one could have seen this coming, of testimonies presenting a mass killer as a "harmless" and "kind" young man – this humanising effect creates an image of the perpetrator where he is (or he could have been) the "kid next door". A prominent method of reproducing and reinforcing "in-group" solidarity in the readers.

Alongside mainly relying on sources from the perpetrator's circle, the media coverage specifically employs and reproduces sources directly linked to the perpetrator, including their manifestos, online videos, social media posts and so on. Using these sources, I argue, is especially contentious. On the one hand, they highlight the perpetrator's relation to and radicalisation within the incel movement, shedding light onto his explicit misogyny. On the other hand, however, through these sources the perpetrator's narrative directly becomes the narrative of the media coverage, resulting in two noteworthy issues: first, the reproduction of extremist materials in an easily accessible way that reaches wide audiences; and secondly, that broadcasting these messages the perpetrators left achieves their precise goal as "perpetrators engage in violence to communicate with an audience" (Kearns, Betus, and Lemieux 2019, 989).

Understanding terrorism as theatre here is crucial, as the media coverage reporting on the event and specifically employing sources directly linked to misogynistic terrorists "amplifies the group's messaging and sensationalises the event." (*ibid.*) The mutually reinforcing relation between the media and terrorist groups is a highly contested issue. In the case of incel-ideology

fuelled terrorism, reporting in the first place runs the risk of giving further platform to misogynistic, male-supremacist groups; nevertheless, not reporting on the incidents or not specifying the ideology behind the attacks would mean failing the victims of the said attack and all those future victims whose deaths could be avoided if it weren't for the complicit silence of the media. Balancing the sources journalists feature in their reporting could potentially serve as a proverbial golden mean to this problem. Reducing the number of “perpetrator’s circle” sources as well as sources linked directly to the attacker and providing more space for the “victim’s circle” and experts may lead to a coverage less focused on reproducing incel ideology and humanising the attacker, and more so on bringing attention to the dangers of said ideology.

The tragic fall of the mentally ill “lone wolf”

A pattern that has been widely emphasised in previous research on terrorism and that was a highly anticipated outcome of the study is the central position mental illness receives in the coverage of mass violence carried out by (mostly) white men, in other words by members of the “in-group.” When it comes to “in-group” terrorists, there is a considerable media tendency to downplay and justify the behaviour of the attackers as well as to use mental illness or neurodivergence as a way to separate the “in-group” perpetrator from the supposed norm of the group. When it comes to misogynistic “in-group” attackers this pattern is reinforced by the wider practice of excusing men who commit violence against women. As Laura Bates argues, “[e]ven when killers kill in the name of explicit misogyny, even when they spell it out for us in manifestos or scream it in the faces of their victims, we will still look somewhere – anywhere – else for explanations.” (Bates 2020, 196).

Social isolation, mental health and neurodivergence are an aspect of three quarters of all analysed articles. The attackers are described across the articles as lonely, troubled, socially awkward, bullied, depressed, struggling with mental illness, mentally unstable, having autism, Asperger’s, OCD, schizophrenia, and bipolar disorder. The first category of words, I would argue, reinforces the humanisation of the perpetrator, inviting the audience to feel pity for a troubled young man who could never fit in, and to some extent excusing or justifying his crimes, while the second set isolates him from the “norm” of the “in-group”, making it possible for the group not to be defined by him while he can still remain associated with (and therefore, protected by) it. This method reinforces several harmful stereotypes and tendencies. First, it

fails to acknowledge the actual reason behind the attacks, the extremist male supremacist ideology and its real threat value. Secondly, by suggesting that the perpetrator's rampant misogyny and the attack he carried out was a result of being bullied, not having many friends, and/or being a virgin – which places the blame on anyone *but* the perpetrator of the attacks – it excuses the crimes of a terrorist leaving behind immense injustice. Thirdly, it assumes that the attackers are the exception rather than the rule in their group, obscuring the effects of toxic masculinity and violent hetero-patriarchy that govern the “in-group” and give soil for groups like the incel movement to thrive in. And finally, it produces negative images of mental illness and neurodivergence painting them as something inherently violent, which can in turn take hold in larger society as harmful stereotypes encouraging hate and discrimination instead of prompting understanding and support.

Red flags and online hoaxes

Using uniquely online turn of phrases and words to report on attacks related to incel ideology is a phenomenon widely employed by journalists in the examined coverage. The use of this “online language” – words such as meme, red flag, online hoax, trolling – tend to have a separating effect, isolating the happenings and ideology of the incel movement from the “real world”, restricting it to an online existence. And by trapping the extremist group in the online sphere, news reporting also separates the men engrossed in this ideology from the common “garden variety” of violent men. Given how much our collective societal knowledge on the inseparable nature of “online” and “offline” has grown in the past ten years, the fact that the media upholds this barrier is, quite frankly, obsolete.¹⁴

Alongside separating the online and offline worlds, this usage of language specific to the online sphere also reads as a minimisation of the radicalising potential of the internet as we encounter words like “meme” and “red flag” in our everyday lives, on the “bright side” of the internet and increasingly offline as well, it becomes hard to believe that *real* terrorist organisations and extremist movements employ the same language and frequent the same sites as we do to radicalise and to plan their attacks. Elliot Rodger's alleged “retreating into the internet” (as appeared in the *New York Times* article) was in fact his radicalisation into the incel movement.

¹⁴ See *Gamergate* for one of the first instances of the collective realisation of this barrier breaking down.

Finally, in somewhat of a contradiction to my previous argument, the media also frequently employs the internet and various facets of it as the scapegoat, the whole online world as the “big bad wolf”, emphasising that the attacker was a “computer whiz” (*National Post*, Minassian) absorbed by the “shadowy digital underworld” (*Telegraph*, Davison). This narrative puts the blame for radicalisation and male supremacist ideology – and for the terrorist attacks themselves to a certain extent – onto the internet as a whole, failing to mention the rampant misogyny in our society that is normalised to such an extent that these groups can exist in the first place.

Nevertheless, the age of the internet provided fertile soil for groups and movements such as the manosphere to spread and grow to unimaginable extent by creating new opportunities for communication, organisation, and mobilisation, and thus, its role in incel terrorism cannot be ignored (Am and Weimann 2020, 134). As “record numbers of young people [are] spending an unprecedented amount of time online, away from real-world friends, often with little-to-no parental supervision, in an age of great political polarisation and disinformation”, education and prevention among young people (young men specifically) are especially important (Ware 2021, 14).

A conversation about men, by men

Conversations around incel-ideology driven mass violence across the analysed articles appears to be primarily led by men. Women make up only about one quarter of the authors of the articles, and less than half of the articles (seven) feature women as writers or co-writers. In two of these articles women were brought on as special correspondents, as “crime correspondent” (*Telegraph*) and “identity and inequality reporter” (*Toronto Star*). Women are also underrepresented as experts (already the most discounted group among the sources), as only one-third of experts featured in the articles were women. This data seems to signal that incel mass violence attacks are news *about* men (the attacker’s side is emphasised in the coverage) to be reported and discussed *by* men. There is no proof that women would report on the issue “better” – in a more sensitive or victim-centric way – since the examined articles that were written by women do not show notable differences to those authored by men.¹⁵ Nonetheless, the tendency that men tend to lead the conversation around incel violence is

¹⁵ Although, a finding worth mentioning is that two out of the three articles that featured female experts were (co-) authored by women.

telling, as the overwhelming male presence in the discussion can establish patterns that then get reproduced over and over again regardless of (the gender of) the author of a given article. It can be argued then, that men directly formulate the ways the media reports on incel mass violence, and while it is certainly progress that women are increasingly becoming part of the conversation, it is not enough to bring forth real change in reporting.

“Rampage”, “mass shooting” – anything but terrorism

One of the main aims of this research paper was to inquire into whether the media reports on incel mass violence as terrorism. I have previously established that I firmly believe that these incidents can and should be considered terrorism, in accordance with the legal definitions of terrorism in the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada, and building on feminist scholarship. Nevertheless, the examined articles highlight the extent to which how authorities considered these incidents gets reproduced in the media coverage. As official sources appear an average of five times per article, the way the law makers and executers conceptualise incel ideology fuelled mass violence guides the way the media reports such incidents. The attacks were reported as explicitly “not terrorism related” in one-third of the articles, with the *Rodger* coverage not mentioning terrorism at all throughout all newspapers. In the case of the *New York Times* reporting on the Minassian van attack, they emphasise that the “Canadian officials were not characterizing the van rampage as terrorism.” Although it did raise “fears about Toronto’s vulnerability to terrorist attack”, claiming that the scenes “evoked memories of deadly vehicle rampages carried out by extremists in a number of Western cities in recent years” listing six attacks all committed by jihadi terrorists, implying that while the Minassian attack was not terrorism, it showed just how vulnerable the city is to “real” (read jihadi) terrorist attacks.

Highlighting that there is no known motive of the attacks and that the police is not considering terrorism as a motive is also a notable pattern across the articles, even when later in the piece, the perpetrator’s incel-connections are explicitly discussed. Thus, authorities and the press acknowledge the existence and relevance of incel-ideology with regards to the perpetrators, nevertheless, they do not seem to consider this ideology as extremist or as the “kind of ideology” that drives terrorism. As previous empirical research illustrated, “in-group” attackers are typically *not* seen as individuals driven by extreme ideologies, and those perceived as acting purposively for some broader political agenda are more likely to be labelled terrorist (Huff and

Kertzer 2018, 62; D’Orazio and Salehyan 2018, 1035). Hence, as long as incel-ideology is not considered “extremist enough” for law makers and executers to give foundation to categorising mass attacks related to the ideology as terrorism, these acts of mass violence will continue to fly under the radar without adequate policy changes to prevent them. The lack of co-operation between academic researchers and policy makers is especially relevant here, since the extensive knowledge academia already holds about the manosphere, their ideology and radicalisation process would be essential for policy makers and counter-terrorism experts to consider.

As much as the media reflects our reality, it also produces that very reality. Through framing the “media establish what the public needs to know and highlight the most relevant and salient dimensions of how information should be understood and discussed”, influencing the way people perceive and structure a given issue and its place in the world and thus, “differences in media framing can influence public (mis)perceptions of violence and threats, and ultimately harm counterterrorism policy” (Betus, Kearns, and Lemieux 2021, 1133–5). By emphasising a “subset of potentially relevant considerations” (such as the perpetrator’s mental health), the audience can be led to “focus on these considerations when constructing their opinion” (Druckman 2001, 230). The effects of framing govern all aspects considered in this discussion; highlighting mental illness, considering sources close to the perpetrator, and using “online language” are all examples through which media outlets frame these attacks.

Moreover, not referring to the attacks as “acts of terrorism” and instead choosing words such as “rampage”, “mass shooting” and “killing spree” emphasise different aspects of the incidents especially taken together with previously mentioned frames. Rampage for example – a word that appears the most frequently in relation to the attacks across the analysed articles – is an especially graphic media word that has a sensationalising effect. Furthermore “to go on a rampage” implies a sense of leaving normalcy, things getting out of control. “To go on a killing spree” invokes similar sentiments, suggesting that something unrestrained happened, leaving behind a feeling of randomness and carelessness. These words the news outlets chose to employ instead of terrorism, therefore, fail to acknowledge on the one hand, the meticulous, premeditated nature of the attacks, and on the other, the perpetrators connections to radical ideology-driven organisations.

Through framing media outlets directly influence societal conceptions of incel ideology and the mass violence it inspires, as well as counter-terrorism policy – or rather, the lack thereof – regarding the “incel menace.” News coverage on male supremacist terrorist attacks, therefore, have two possible routes in front of them. They either wait until policy – and through policy, society – changes first in their conceptualisation of incel violence, although there is no guarantee this change will ever come. Or they – utilising their immense influence on society in general, and in turn, law makers – act to prompt this change themselves. Either way, until this essential and long overdue change comes, the manosphere will continue to rapidly expand and it is devastatingly certain that more lives will be lost in the process.

VII. Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to examine how mainstream media outlets report on acts of mass violence carried out by (mostly) white male perpetrators driven by male supremacist incel ideology. The study has found that there is little notable difference between how the various outlets cover such attacks (RQ4). Those differences that are pertinent mainly originate in the date of production of the articles, identifying that the language used by mainstream media in their coverage has changed to a certain extent between 2014 and 2021. This change can be observed primarily in the articles’ increasing employment of words such as misogyny and their direct reference to the incel movement over time, signalling a wider societal use of and familiarity with such terms and phenomena. Strikingly, the study has shown that the political leaning of the newspapers had no significant effect on their way of reporting – contrary to its initial hypothesis –, indicating that there is an existing universal narrative employed by the media reporting on incel terrorism.

Examining this emerging “universal narrative”, the analysis has identified five main patterns and proposed some policy recommendations in order to urge change in the way mainstream media reports on incel mass violence.

First, all articles reflected in their reporting the perpetrator’s point of view both through the language and the sources they employed, which then in turn both silenced the victims of the attacks and gave a platform to the ideology of the perpetrators (just as they desired). I argued that reducing the number of “perpetrator’s circle” sources as well as sources linked

directly to the attacker and providing more space for the “victim’s circle” and experts may lead to a coverage more focused on bringing attention to the dangers of incel ideology.

Secondly, there was a significant emphasis on the perpetrator’s mental illness and social isolation across articles (RQ1). This method, I reasoned, reinforces the humanisation of the perpetrator, to some extent excusing or justifying his crimes, while at the same time isolating him from the “norm” of the “in-group”, protecting it. The focus on mental health issues and neurodivergence in relation to the perpetrator is harmful to the victims of the attacks – as no proper justice can be made as long as perpetrators are systematically excused –, future potential victims, people who live with mental illnesses and those who are neurodivergent, and to society at large – since it protects the “in-group” from having to question its basic foundations.

Thirdly, the wide usage of “online language” was identified throughout the coverage, specifically in relation to incel ideology (RQ2). This extensive use of “online language” manages to both create a barrier between the online and offline spheres – and violence in particular – and categorise the internet as the sole culprit for the rise of manosphere ideologies at the same time. I acknowledge that the role of the internet in organisation, communication, radicalisation, and expansion is undeniable when it comes to extremist ideologies, and thus, argue that education and prevention among young people (young men specifically) are especially important.

Fourthly, the study has shown that male supremacist mass violence is primarily a discussion about men, by men. While women are increasingly getting seats at the table, their involvement in the conversation is not enough to enact real change. The overwhelming male presence in the discussion on incels – and hence a fundamentally male view on violence against women – can establish patterns that then get reproduced over and over again in media coverage (regardless of the author of a given article).

Finally, I have identified the media’s general reluctance to refer to misogynistic mass attacks as terrorism (RQ3). As it was established in the Literature review, clearly defining what types of violence constitute terrorism is crucial, since the “terrorism” label carries with it important psychological, political, and legal implications. The media plays a crucial role in deciding what incidents are considered acts of terrorism. The media – through both using the language that official, legal, and wider societal circles use when referring to incels and creating their own frames of reference – influences the way people perceive these attacks and their perpetrators, creating lasting images, associations, and stereotypes, and thus, directly effecting policy change and governmental responses to the “incel issue.”

My intentions with this paper were to draw attention to the way mainstream “elite” media reports on incel terrorism and to urge them to change their ways. Mass media outlets have the potential to influence the minds of people all over the world and to prompt governmental and policy change. This potential has mostly been explored in communications scholarship as a negative or frightening aspect; nevertheless, this research has presented a way in which journalists can use this potential to enact real change that saves lives. The media cannot put an end to the incel mass violence epidemic alone, to achieve that we will need the co-operation of sectors ranging from lawmakers to educators, to academics and the technology sector. Nonetheless, without the media we hardly stand a chance. And until that day of change comes, women (among others) will continue to die at the hands of “sexually frustrated” “socially troubled” “young men.”

VIII. Bibliography

Primary sources

Allen, Nick. 2014. “‘Virgin Killer’ Elliot Rodger Planned to Murder His Family.” *The Telegraph*, May 27, 2014.

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/northamerica/usa/10858971/Virgin-killer-Elliot-Rodger-planned-to-murder-his-family.html>.

Associated Press. 2014. “Elliot Rodger’s Family Frantically Tried to Intervene before He Went on Killing Spree That Left Six Dead.” *National Post*, May 26, 2014.

<https://nationalpost.com/news/elliott-rodgers-family-frantically-tried-to-intervene-before-he-went-on-killing-spree-killing-six>.

Berzon, Alexandra. 2014. “Elliot Rodger’s Isolation Worried His Parents.” *Wall Street Journal*, May 26, 2014. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/portrait-of-california-shooter-a-troubled-son-1401136376>.

Bilefsky, Dan, and Ian Austen. 2018. “Toronto van Attack Suspect Expressed Anger at Women.” *The New York Times*, April 24, 2018.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/24/world/canada/toronto-van-rampage.html>.

Crilly, Rob, Christopher Guly, and Mark Molloy. 2018. “What Do We Know about Alek Minassian, Arrested after Toronto van Attack?” *The Telegraph*, April 25, 2018.

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/04/24/do-know-alek-minassian-arrested->

- [toronto-van-attack/?utm_campaign=Echobox&utm_medium=Social&utm_source=Twitter.](#)
- Douglas, Jason. 2021. "Rare Mass Shooting in U.K. Claims Five Victims." *Wall Street Journal*, August 13, 2021. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/rare-mass-shooting-in-u-k-claims-five-victims-11628858772?mod=e2tw>.
- Hardy, Jack, Bill Gardner, and Izzy Lyons. 2021. "'I Am a Terminator' Boasted Plymouth Gunman Jake Davison in Final YouTube Video before Rampage." *The Telegraph*, August 15, 2021. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2021/08/15/plymouth-shooting-gunman-said-terminator-final-youtube-video/>.
- Hui, Sylvia, and Associated Press. 2021. "UK Killings Suspect Got Seized Gun, License Back Last Month." *The Toronto Star*, August 14, 2021. <https://www.thestar.com/news/world/europe/2021/08/14/uk-gunman-had-gun-license-returned-to-him-last-month.html>.
- Humphreys, Adrian, and Jake Edminston. 2018. "Toronto van Attack Suspect Alek Minassian's Interest in 'Incel' Movement the Latest Sign of Troubled Life." *National Post*, April 24, 2018. <https://nationalpost.com/news/alek-minassian>.
- Mackrael, Kim, Jessica Donati, and Jacquie McNish. 2018. "Toronto Attack Brings Fringe Online Element into the Spotlight." *Wall Street Journal*, April 25, 2018. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/toronto-attack-brings-fringe-online-element-into-the-spotlight-1524694499>.
- Mendoza, Martha, Michael R. Blood, and Associated Press. 2014. "Killer's Family Frantically Tried to Intervene before California Rampage." *The Toronto Star*, May 26, 2014. https://www.thestar.com/news/world/2014/05/26/killers_family_frantically_tried_to_intervene_before_california_rampage.html.
- Nagourney, Adam, Michael Cieply, Alan Feuer, and Ian Lovett. 2014. "Before Brief, Deadly Spree, Trouble since Age 8." *The New York Times*, June 1, 2014. <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/02/us/elliott-rodger-killings-in-california-followed-years-of-withdrawal.html>.
- Pengelly, Martin, Martin Williams, and agencies. 2014. "Seven Dead Including Gunman in 'Mass Murder' California Shooting." *The Guardian*, May 24, 2014. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/24/drive-by-shooting-near-uc-santa-barbara-leaves-seven-dead>.

- Reuters, and Natalie Thomas. 2021. "In Rare British Mass Shooting, Gun Kills Five, Including 3-Year-Old Girl." *National Post*, August 13, 2021.
<https://nationalpost.com/pmnn/news-pmnn/crime-pmnn/in-rare-british-mass-shooting-gun-kills-five-including-3-year-old-girl>.
- Victor, Daniel, and Stephen Castle. 2021. "Rare Mass Shooting in Britain Leaves 6 Dead, Including a Child." *The New York Times*, August 12, 2021.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/12/world/europe/england-fatal-shooting-plymouth.html>.
- Weaver, Matthew, and Steven Morris. 2021. "Plymouth Gunman: A Hate-Filled Misogynist and 'Incel.'" *The Guardian*, August 13, 2021. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/aug/13/plymouth-shooting-suspect-what-we-know-jake-davison>.
- Wilson, Jason. 2018. "Toronto van Attack: Facebook Post May Link Suspect to Misogynist 'Incel' Subculture." *The Guardian*, April 25, 2018.
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/apr/24/toronto-van-attack-facebook-post-may-link-suspect-with-incele-group>.
- Yang, Jennifer. 2018. "Facebook Post Linked to Alek Minassian Cites 'Incel Rebellion,' Mass Murderer | the Star." *The Toronto Star*, April 24, 2018.
<https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2018/04/24/facebook-deletes-post-linked-to-alek-minassian-amid-questions-about-its-authenticity.html>.

Secondary sources

- Am, Ari B, and Gabriel Weimann. 2020. "Fabricated Martyrs: The Warrior-Saint Icons of Far-Right Terrorism." *Perspectives on Terrorism* 14 (5): 130–47.
- Anti-Defamation League. 2018. "When Women Are the Enemy: The Intersection of Misogyny and White Supremacy." Anti-Defamation League. 2018.
<https://www.adl.org/resources/reports/when-women-are-the-enemy-the-intersection-of-misogyny-and-white-supremacy>.
- Bates, Laura. 2020. *Men Who Hate Women: From Incels to Pickup Artists, the Truth about Extreme Misogyny and How It Affects Us All*. London: Simon & Schuster.
- Beckett, Lois. 2021. "The Misogynist Incel Movement Is Spreading. Should It Be Classified as a Terror Threat?" *The Guardian*, March 3, 2021.
<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2021/mar/03/incele-movement-terror-threat-canada>.

- Betus, Allison E., Erin M. Kearns, and Anthony F. Lemieux. 2021. "How Perpetrator Identity (Sometimes) Influences Media Framing Attacks as 'Terrorism' or 'Mental Illness.'" *Communication Research* 48 (8): 1133–56.
- Budarick, John. 2011. "Media, Home and Diaspora." *MEDIA@LSE Electronic Working Papers* 21 (January): 1–20.
- Chomsky, Noam. 1997. "What Makes Mainstream Media Mainstream." Chomsky.info. Z Magazine. October 1997. <https://chomsky.info/199710/>.
- Cottee, Simon. 2020. "Incel (E)Motives: Resentment, Shame and Revenge." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 44 (2): 1–22.
- D'Orazio, Vito, and Idean Salehyan. 2018. "Who Is a Terrorist? Ethnicity, Group Affiliation, and Understandings of Political Violence." *International Interactions*, 44 (6): 1017–39.
- DeCook, Julia R., and Megan Kelly. 2021. "Interrogating the 'Incel Menace': Assessing the Threat of Male Supremacy in Terrorism Studies." *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, December, 1–21.
- Dijk, Teun A. van. 1993. "Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis." *Discourse & Society* 4 (2): 249–83.
- Druckman, James. 2001. "The Implications of Framing Effects for Citizen Competence." *Political Behavior* 23 (3): 225–56.
- European Commission, and Radicalisation Awareness Network. 2021. "Incels: A First Scan of the Phenomenon (in the EU) and Its Relevance and Challenges for P/CVE." European Commission.
- Fairclough, Norman. 1995. *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*. London, New York: Longman.
- Galtung, Johan, and Mari Holmboe Ruge. 1965. "The Structure of Foreign News." *Journal of Peace Research* 2 (1): 64–90.
- Gentry, Caron E. 2020. "Disordered Violence: How Gender, Race and Heteronormativity Structure Terrorism." *Critical Studies on Terrorism*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Hoffman, Bruce, Jacob Ware, and Ezra Shapiro. 2020. "Assessing the Threat of Incel Violence." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 43 (7): 1–23.
- Huff, Connor, and Joshua D Kertzer. 2018. "How the Public Defines Terrorism." *American Journal of Political Science* 62 (1): 55–71.

- Jane, Emma A. 2017a. *Misogyny Online : A Short (and Brutish) History*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- . 2017b. “Systemic Misogyny Exposed: Translating Rapeglish from the Manosphere with a Random Rape Threat Generator.” *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 21 (6): 661–80.
- Janks, Hilary. 1997. “Critical Discourse Analysis as a Research Tool.” *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 18 (3): 329–42.
- Kearns, Erin M, Allison E Betus, and Anthony F Lemieux. 2019. “Why Do Some Terrorist Attacks Receive More Media Attention than Others?” *Justice Quarterly* 36 (6): 985–1022.
- Kelly, Megan, Alex Dibranco, and Julia Decook. 2021. “Misogynist Incels and Male Supremacism Overview and Recommendations for Addressing the Threat of Male Supremacist Violence.” New America.
- Mayring, Philip. 2014. *Qualitative Content Analysis - Theoretical Foundation, Basic Procedures and Software Solution*. Klagenfurt.
- McCulloch, Jude, Sandra Walklate, JaneMaree Maher, Kate Fitz-Gibbon, and Jasmine McGowan. 2019. “Lone Wolf Terrorism through a Gendered Lens: Men Turning Violent or Violent Men Behaving Violently?” *Critical Criminology* 27 (3): 437–50.
- Noor, Masi, Nour Kteily, Birte Siem, and Agostino Mazziotta. 2018. “‘Terrorist’ or ‘Mentally Ill’: Motivated Biases Rooted in Partisanship Shape Attributions about Violent Actors.” *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 10 (4).
- Penny, Laurie. 2014. “Let’s Call the Isla Vista Killings What They Were.” New Statesman. May 25, 2014. <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2014/05/lets-call-isla-vista-killings-what-they-were-misogynist-extremism>.
- Powell, Kimberly A. 2011. “Framing Islam: An Analysis of U.S. Media Coverage of Terrorism since 9/11.” *Communication Studies* 62 (1): 90–112.
- Southern Poverty Law Center. 2017. “Male Supremacy.” Southern Poverty Law Center. 2017. <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/male-supremacy>.
- Tomkinson, Sian, Tael Harper, and Katie Attwell. 2020. “Confronting Incel: Exploring Possible Policy Responses to Misogynistic Violent Extremism.” *Australian Journal of Political Science* 55 (2): 1–18.
- Ware, Jacob. 2021. “Beta Uprising: Is there an incel threat to Asia?” *Terrorist Trends and Analyses* 13 (2): 10–15.

IX. APPENDIX

Appendix A

The media bias of each newspaper according to mediabiasfactcheck.com and allsides.com.¹⁶

New York Times (News):



Wall Street Journal (News):



The Guardian:



The Telegraph:



Toronto Star:



National Post:



Appendix B

Articles chosen for analysis.

United States

¹⁶ As of June 14th, 2022, 12:47 pm.

Case	Left leaning (New York Times)	Right leaning (Wall Street Journal)
Rodger	Before Brief, Deadly Spree, Trouble Since Age 8	Isolated Son Worried Parents
Minassian	Toronto Van Attack Suspect Expressed Anger at Women	Toronto Attack Brings Fringe Online Element into the Spotlight
Davison	Rare Mass Shooting in Britain Leaves 6 Dead, Including a Child	Rare Mass Shooting in U.K. Claims Five Victims

United Kingdom

Case	Left leaning (Guardian)	Right leaning (Telegraph)
Rodger	Seven dead including gunman in 'mass murder' California shooting	'Virgin killer' Elliot Rodger planned to murder his family
Minassian	Toronto van attack: Facebook post may link suspect to misogynist 'incel' subculture	What do we know about Alex Minassian, arrested after Toronto van attack?
Davison	Plymouth gunman: a hate-filled misogynist and 'incel'	'I am a terminator' boasted Plymouth gunman Jake Davison in final YouTube video before rampage

Canada

Case	Left leaning (Toronto Star)	Right leaning (National Post)
Rodger	Killer's family frantically tried to intervene before California rampage	Elliot Rodger's family frantically tried to intervene before he went on killing spree that left six dead
Minassian	Facebook post linked to Alek Minassian cites 'incel rebellion,' mass murderer	Toronto van attack suspect Alek Minassian's interest in 'incel' movement the latest sign of troubled life
Davison	UK killings suspect got seized gun, license back last month	In rare British mass shooting, gun kills five, including 3-year-old girl

Appendix C

Glossary of analysed words.

United States

Case	Left leaning (New York Times)		Right leaning (Wall Street Journal)	
Rodger	<i>Nouns</i>	<i>Adjectives</i>	<i>Nouns</i>	<i>Adjectives</i>

	spree, psychological problems, depression, anxiety, emotional problems, mental issues, mental health, antipsychotic medication, target, torment, intensive individual attention, good liar, “our Elliot”, obsession, anxiety attacks, fear of rejection, well-being, loner, agitated young man, incel, serial killer, killings, online world	troubled, high-functioning autistic, lonely, introverted, distant, remote, withdrawn, emotionally troubled, bullied, smart, very innocent, soft-spoken, privileged, agitated, tortured, sexually frustrated, theatrical, hammy, desperate, insecure, pretentious, entitled, bitter, whiny	son, young man, sensitive child, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, rampage, suffering, spasm of violence, social isolation, risperidone	isolated, shy, lonely, frustrated, vulnerable, sensitive, disturbing, polite, courteous, outrageous, “serial killeseque”
Minassian	<i>Nouns</i>	<i>Adjectives</i>	<i>Nouns</i>	<i>Adjectives</i>
	Toronto van attack, suspect, anger at women, computer studies graduate, deadly rampage, van rampage, vehicular assault, rampage, young man, resentment, computer programming, military, tics, no strong ideological views, fear of women, sympathy for misogyny, Elliot Rodger, incels, frustrations, not terrorism, extremists, shock, horror, disbelief, spirit of tolerance	socially troubled, hostile, deadly, deadliest, troubled, socially awkward, harmless, shocked, odd, loner, skilled at computers	fringe online element, incels, accused attacker, dark corner, 4chan, Elliot Rodger, white men, hate groups, online male supremacist ecosystem, mass-casualty events, special education program, software development, armed forces	fringe, misogynistic, alleged, accused, extremist, male supremacist, socially awkward
Davison	<i>Nouns</i>	<i>Adjectives</i>	<i>Nouns</i>	<i>Adjectives</i>
	mass shooting, child, killings, not terrorism-related, gun control laws, gunman, assailant, license to firearm, domestically related incident, frustration	rare, beaten down, defeated by life, domestic, tragic, shocking	mass shooting, gunman, gun violence, not terrorism, not far-right groups, social media, terminator, serious firearms incident, mental health	rare, strict, illegal

United Kingdom

Case	Left leaning (Guardian)		Right leaning (Telegraph)	
Rodger	<i>Nouns</i>	<i>Adjectives</i>	<i>Nouns</i>	<i>Adjectives</i>
	gunman, suspected gunman, young man, virgin, madman, suspect, shooting, mass murder, premeditated mass murder, suicide	perfectly polite, kind, wonderful, severely mentally disturbed, disturbed	virgin killer, young student, Asperger’s, crime, gun rampage	jealous, creepy, deranged
Minassian	<i>Nouns</i>	<i>Adjectives</i>	<i>Nouns</i>	<i>Adjectives</i>

	van attack, incel subculture, alleged killer, sexual frustration, misogyny, incel rebellion, alleged killer, collective sexual frustration, online subculture, ideology, reactionary subculture, bitterness towards women, rape, violence, mindset, rhetoric, lonely man, mass murderer, social media, Elliot Rodger	misogynist, cryptic, deeply misogynistic, virgin, violent, insurrectionary, lonely	Toronto van attack, mass shooter, misogynistic online community, incel subculture, rant against women, attempted murder, incel rebellion, gunman, virgin killer, Elliot Rodger, frustration, virginity, social or mental disability, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), no violent tendencies, no extremist views, suspect, it expert, developer of apps, software development jobs, international terrorism, van rampage, mental illness, no terrorism	misogynistic, angry, celibate, sexually frustrated, horrendous, cryptic, deliberate, socially awkward, gifted, strange, uneasy, extremely bright, not remorseful
Davison	<i>Nouns</i>	<i>Adjectives</i>	<i>Nouns</i>	<i>Adjectives</i>
	gunman, hate-filled misogynist, incel, man in despair, attacker, unscripted rant, hate-filled views, online hostility, resentment, ideology, terrorism threat, gun control, rants, autism, misogynist views, troubled soul, guns, reddit, mental health, west country accent, male environment, frustration	misogynistic, homophobic, troubled, virgin, fat, ugly, autistic, asocial	terminator, gunman, rampage, incel killer, Blackpill movement, depressed virgin, incel, shooting rampage, violent videos, guns, mental health problems, incel ideology, terror attacks, misogynistic rant, outburst, Blackpill philosophy, love, pro-gun activity, US firearm culture, shadowy digital underworld, gun violence, bitterness, misogynistic views, anti-women rants, Elliot Rodger, terrorism, extremism, radicalisation, deadly shooting, debate, Alek Minassian, counter-terrorism, mixed ideologies	depressed, misogynistic, hostile, troubling, shocking, self-pitying, shadowy, quiet, radical, unstable

Canada

Case	Left leaning (Toronto Star)		Right leaning (National Post)	
Rodger	<i>Nouns</i>	<i>Adjectives</i>	<i>Nouns</i>	<i>Adjectives</i>
	killer, rampage, therapist, manifesto, deadly rampage, mental health, young man, emergency psychiatric evaluation, red flags, suicidal thoughts	well-mannered, shy, virgin, suicidal	killing spree, deadly rampage, ranting manifesto, mental health, therapist, emergency psychiatric evaluation, red flags, young man, manifesto, rampage	deadly, ranting, bizarre, disturbing
Minassian	<i>Nouns</i>	<i>Adjectives</i>	<i>Nouns</i>	<i>Adjectives</i>
	incel rebellion, mass murderer, trolling website, red flag, online hoax, mass killings, Elliot Rodger, hit-and-run spree, van attack, authenticity, mass murders, 4chan, troll culture, online	cryptic, frustrated, misogynistic, devastating, disturbed, sad	Toronto van attack, incel movement, troubled life, criminal allegations, rampage, Elliot Rodger, oddball, women (majority of victims), mental health, special needs class, failed soldier, app developer, computer	troubled, sad, confusing, awful, cryptic, socially awkward, challenged, awkward, infantilized, unorthodox, mentally unstable, erratic, strange, shocked, odd, isolated

	communities, meme, online violence, physical violence, misogynistic rhetoric, online misogyny, military, far-right views		whiz, video game enthusiast, incel, subculture, misogyny, call to arms, incel-dedicated forum, violent language, tics, no strong ideological views, videogamer, shooting games, special needs children, Asperger's syndrome, autism, computer skills, software developer, military	
Davison	<i>Nouns</i>	<i>Adjectives</i>	<i>Nouns</i>	<i>Adjectives</i>
	killings, suspect, gun license, confiscated gun, gun license, mass shooting, firearm crimes, gun control laws, mental health, vigil, no terrorism, no extremist groups, social media, incel forums, violence against women, subculture, incel ideology, misogyny, incel phenomenon, terrorist risk, terrorism, right-wing extremism, Toronto teenager, incel-related terrorism, online community	fatally, rare, domestically related, beaten down, sexually frustrated	mass shooting, gun, killing spree, domestic-related violence, rampage, gun ownership, not terrorism, no far-right associations, shooting spree, mental health issues, incel, deadly militant attacks	rare