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# LONELY BOYS AND MISOGYNIST INCELDOM: CONSIDERATIONS FOR PRACTITIONERS WHO ENCOUNTER BOYS AND MEN AT RISK OF MALE SUPREMACIST THINKING

A summary of findings from Allysa Czerwinsky's doctoral work, examining entry pathways into misogynist incelism and subsequent considerations for practitioners who may encounter at-risk individuals.

Male supremacist ideologies are increasingly discussed and (re) produced within both online platforms and offline environments, spreading from fringe spaces to the mainstream and prompting concern for parents, practitioners, and policymakers alike. Informed by my research examining the entry stories of current, exiting, and former self-identified incels across three online forums, this article outlines key findings and considerations for practitioners who encounter boys and men who may be at risk of turning to male supremacist thinking.

## EXCLUSION, MARGINALISATION, AND VICTIMHOOD

Social exclusion and marginalisation were common across entry stories, including experiences of bullying, ostracisation, and feeling disconnected from peers, particularly those with sexual or romantic experience. These were linked to perceived deficits in physical attractiveness and personality characteristics, with community members using language demonstrating negative self-perceptions and low self-esteem. Experiences of exclusion and marginalisation due to physical unattractiveness and social deficits contributed to a narrative of difference from peers and a sense of unjust victimhood, feelings that may motivate at-risk individuals to seek out alternative avenues for belonging.

## NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES WITH WOMEN

Struggling with heterosexual dating was an important pull factor, with repeated rejections acting as a catalyst for seeking out and participating in male supremacist spaces. Rejection sensitivity may heighten negative feelings toward women, who are viewed as the cause of repeated failures in the dating realm. Self-identified incels also reported experiences with women outside of dating that pushed them towards male supremacist thinking, including bullying, strained relationships with female family members, and trauma (sexual abuse and emotional manipulation) from maternal figures. These experiences may foster misogynist and anti-feminist views before individuals encounter male supremacist communities, which are further confirmed and legitimised once entering these spaces.

## SHARED STORIES AND GRIEVANCES

Seeing similar experiences discussed by other users was a key influence in choosing to adopt the incel label and join male supremacist online spaces. Shared experiences and similar grievances helped foster belonging for newcomers through acceptance and validation. Open discussion and shared stories were also attractive features for individuals who felt that talking about men's struggles, society's increasing focus on attractiveness in dating, and their negative experiences with women were taboo within mainstream social spaces both online and off. For at-risk individuals, seeing similar experiences of marginalisation and rejection openly discussed in online communities may foster a sense of belonging and acceptance, acting as a powerful draw to join male supremacist communities.

## 'TRUTHFUL' IDEOLOGIES AND ATTRACTIVE ALTERNATIVE BELIEF SYSTEMS

Within male supremacist spaces, ideologies are largely framed as truth by community members, who use misinterpreted scientific knowledge or statistics presented out of context as evidence to support misogynist ideas and concepts. The black pill philosophy, one of the guiding worldviews for misogynist incels, posits that society is structured around a binary hierarchy of attractiveness informed by racial and class dynamics which is responsible for incels' suffering. This worldview reframes experiences of exclusion and rejection as a fundamental part of the incel experience, blaming both women and other men for prior victimisation. For at-risk individuals, male supremacist ideologies may allow them to weaponise experiences of victimisation against outgroups, legitimising harmful language and, at times, offline violence. Importantly, these belief systems transfer blame outward, making

them an attractive philosophy for individuals who may already feel unjustly victimised and hold negative self-perceptions.

## INTERSECTIONS AND COMPLEXITIES

Additional identity factors contribute to experiences of incelism, including race and neurodiversity. Misogynist incel spaces appealed to non-white and neurodiverse men, as shared experiences of racism, racial prejudice, and the devaluing of neurotypical traits in the dating sphere and wider society were shared by other non-white and neurodiverse users in forums. Similarly, male supremacist spaces often speak directly to prior experiences of racism encountered by minority members, using pseudoscientific concepts and misinterpreted studies to prove women are responsible for upholding a societal structure that devalues non-white men. Ideologies that are structured around rules and black-and-white thinking may be particularly attractive to neurodiverse boys and men, who might struggle to form connections with peers and succeed in the dating sphere.

## COMBATting MALE SUPREMACIST IDEOLOGIES: CONSIDERATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Self-identified incels' entry stories displayed shared factors that contributed to participating in male supremacist communities and adopting associated ideologies. For some, experiences of exclusion and marginalisation, repeated rejection and negative experiences with women, and finding belonging and shared grievances can act as important pull factors for involvement in male supremacist communities. Additionally, male supremacist ideologies may allow individuals to rationalise prior negative experiences through an alternative belief system underpinned by evidence-based misogyny and clear rules around in and out groups. Practitioners who encounter individuals at risk of male supremacist thinking may benefit from:

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- Acknowledging and validating prior feelings of hurt and harm, while working to offer alternative interpretations of life events beyond male supremacist ideologies
- Working to counter evidence-based misogyny through debunking, counter-narratives, and alternative evidence
- Building resilience through bolstering self-esteem and establishing systems of alternative support and belonging, including mental healthcare and social networks
- Considering the intersections between wider identity factors (race, neurodiversity, among others) and male supremacist thinking, and incorporating these into interventions and means of support.

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