

# The Rise of the Incel Mission-Oriented Attacker

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## Abstract

This article describes characteristics of individuals who subscribe to the involuntary celibate (incel) ideology and claimed this as a central motivation in their mission-oriented attack. Incel ideology should be seen as a range of behavior, similar to indoctrination spectrum. The authors draw from 15 cases of targeted violence where incel ideologies were a central motivation. They review common incel thoughts, language and ideas, core ideological beliefs (entitlement, misogyny, and jealousy), and how hopelessness, alienation, and depression give rise to an escalation of physical violence. Suggestions for therapeutic interventions are provided to assist those providing treatment to incel clients from the existential, narrative-based, cognitive-behavioral, and reality therapy modalities of treatment.

**Keywords:** incel, involuntary celibate, threat assessment, targeted violence, mission-oriented violence, mass shootings, treatment for incel

## Introduction

THE INVOLUNTARY CELIBATE movement, shortened to the abbreviation incel, started in 1997 from an unlikely place. A woman named Alana authored a website, “Alana’s Involuntary Celibacy Project,” to help those struggling with forming intimate sexual relationships (Taylor 2018). Users shared difficulty finding a relationship and offered advice to those stuck in a dating dry spell or too shy to approach others. She could not have predicted it would become the catchphrase of a movement of hate directed at women.

Times, however, have been changing. There has been an increase in mission-oriented violence by those who express an ideology based in the involuntary celibate (incel) philosophy. These include the 72-year-old self-described “anti-feminist” lawyer who is believed to have shot and killed a rival men’s rights attorney in July 2020 (Appendix A1: 15); the 24-year-old man who killed nine and injuring dozens at a Dayton, OH nightclub shooting in August of 2019 (Appendix A1: 14); the 40-year-old self-proclaimed misogynist who killed two people and injured five others before killing himself at a yoga studio in Tallahassee, FL (Appendix A1: 13); and the 25-year-old man who drove his van onto a crowded sidewalk, killing 10 people and injuring 16

in Toronto, Canada in April of 2018 (Appendix A1: 13). The common string uniting these attacks is the disdain, hatred, and anger fueled by their failures with sexual encounters with women.

Those who follow the movement claim that a large percentage of women (~80%) are said to be drawn to the more attractive alpha male (or Chads), with the rest consenting to have sex with a perceived lower valued beta male. They believe these superior genetic factors, that are directly related to an individual’s musculature, weight, height, build, skin tone, and eye color, determine all physical and sexual attractiveness. When these factors are missing or substandard in the incel, they become less desirable. With this rejection by women, along with their perceived and actual marginalization, they become isolated, lonely, and increasingly frustrated and jealous at the life everyone else seems to have. Not surprisingly, this kind of reductionistic view of women and relationships excludes homosexuality, the idea that women may not want a sexual relationship solely based on physical appearance, and the idea that any diversity of physical appearance or other traits could be additional factors to consider in sexual encounters.

Incel ideology represents a spectrum of behavior, similar to indoctrination in cults or terrorist organizations. One is not simply an incel or not an incel. There is a range of

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investment within the incel movement, from simple curiosity to full on indoctrination and application of the ideals. Some are attracted to the solace found in a group that shares mutual challenges and experiences. Others look for ways to manipulate and control women to achieve their short-term sexual goals. These levels of investment are easier to understand when the reader is familiar with the terminology. Terminology is important to this movement. A summary of these terms is provided in Table 1. For example, in the incel lexicon, the term “blackpill,” is expanded from the Matrix movies’ “redpill,” that frees the protagonist Neo from the artificial intelligence menace. Sexual desire, according to the blackpill theory, is determined by biological traits, with Chads and Stacys as the top desirable male and female specimens. Those who subscribe to the blackpill have the ultimate level of

indoctrination in the movement. There is no positive spin to the blackpill; those who are genetically inferior have only one choice left, kill themselves and/or kill others.

Why should anyone care about studying or helping the incel? Although they have strong, hateful beliefs, so do white supremacists, anti-Semites, bigots, and homophobes. Why not simply shun this supremely distasteful way of thinking? Forgo the empathetic understanding and simply terminate the online discussion boards that have lived on 4chan and 8chan? Why give them any attention?

If the incel’s indignation and resentment toward women remains unchecked, it tends to fester. As they gnaw and chew on their sexual failures, actual or perceived, they cultivate the desire to punish women, to make them pay for their discourteous treatment. As the incel increases in their radical

TABLE 1. COMMON INVOLUNTARY CELIBATE THOUGHTS AND IDEAS

<i>Phrase</i>	<i>Description</i>
Betabux	A romantic relationship in which the man provides financially for his partner; often used to imply that the woman is only with him for his money
Big Black Cock Theory (BBC)	The theory that black men are inherently more virile and sexually appealing, making them able to “dickmog” (see mog/mogging) other races
Blackpill	The belief that genetics predetermine one’s status and desirability; women are only attracted to those with superior genes
Bluepill	A term taken from the Matrix movies that generally means to ignore reality; in this context it is the belief that relationships are formed based on compatibility and kindness and respect toward women
Chadfish	Pretending to be an attractive man in your photos when you are not one
Cope	Adopting a false but comforting belief to avoid the hash truth; often used by trolls to mock everyday activities
Day of Retribution	Idealized day in which incels will strike back against Chads and women; also referred to as the “Beta Uprising” or “Incel Rebellion”
FOOS	“Fall on One’s Sword”
Go ER/ER/Go Rodger	To go on a killing spree, like Elliot Rodger; the letters E and R are sometimes capitalized in unrelated words (i.e., sEcuRity)
Heightpill	A subset of blackpill, which suggests women are primarily drawn to tall men
Juggernaut Law	The theory that you can’t stop a woman’s dating potential; unattractive and flawed women make men feel like they have a chance, so they will still have their pick of men
LDAR	“Lie Down and Rot”
-Maxx/-Maxxing	An attempt to improve dating chances by improving an aspect of one’s life (e.g., looksmaxx)
Mewing	An attempt to improve one’s jawline by holding the tongue hard against the roof of the mouth; created orthodontist Mike Mew
Mog/Mogging	The shortened form of AMOG (Alpha Male of Group), to mog is to be more good looking or superior in some way
My Twisted World	Name of Rodgers’ manifesto, which is often seen as a basis of incel philosophy
NEET	“Not in education, employment, or training”
PSL	An acronym for the forums “PUA hate.com/Sluthate/Lookism.net”
Pump and Dump	Having sex with a woman who is looking for a relationship with no intention of pursuing a relationship
Redpill	In the Matrix movies, the redpill wakes one up to the truth of reality; in incel circles, it is the belief that all women are attracted to the most alpha man and that one can compensate for poor genes by working out or gaining wealth or status
RGIF	“Raping Girls is Fun”
Rope/Roping	To commit suicide
Ropfuel/Suifuel	Suicide fuel; something deeply depressing that drives self-hate (e.g., an attractive woman in a relationship with someone you consider less attractive than yourself)
Saint Alek	Alek Minassian (Toronto Van Attack)
Saint Elliot	Elliot Rodger (Isla Vista Killings)
Saint Yogacel	Scott Beierle (Tallahassee Yoga Studio Shooting)
Supreme Gentleman	How Elliot Rodger referred to himself; women are attracted to Chads even though incels are “Supreme Gentlemen”
The Wall/Agepill/Milkmired	The inevitability of age making men and women less fertile and attractive

Incel, involuntary celibate.

and extremist beliefs, they become a greater threat. We need to understand the individual and the movement, particularly regarding those with nothing left to lose. We need to improve our assessment of their indoctrination and develop treatment measures to pull them back from the brink of suicide and mass killings.

Those indoctrinated more fully into the incel movement follow a profoundly racist, misogynistic, bigoted philosophy that leaves its acolytes lost in a self-destructive and nihilistic and future. The incel's attitude toward women reinforces negative stereotypes, harms development, and increases negative interactions. As they express these extreme thoughts, they are often rejected and experience further isolation and alienation, finding their only solace in the dark chat rooms of the internet. This loneliness develops in step with increased depressive and suicidal thinking, founded in the hopeless premise they will always be denied the one thing they truly desire. In the cases outlined in Appendix A1, their frustration intensifies and narrows, developing a laser-like rage toward punishing those women who rejected them along with those who are successful and happy in relationships.

Although there has been an increase recently, this is not a new phenomenon. Two examples are particularly useful in understanding this mentality, perhaps due of the metaphorical "father/son" relationship between 42-year-old Sodini, the 2009 LA Fitness shooter (Appendix A1: 7) and 22-year-old Rodger, the shooter in Isla Vista in 2014 (Appendix A1: 8). Although the two were not in contact, there is an eerie similarity in their thoughts, planning, and actions. Perhaps it is the amount of writing and videos that they shared to explain their movement toward violence. Each left a rather lengthy manifesto explaining their motivations for their attacks.

Rodger writes, "If only I had a beautiful girlfriend to experience such an event with! I would have even dressed up in a costume with her. It would have been so blissful and euphoric, to walk around in all of that excitement with a beautiful girl on my arm, to attend every single party because anyone would admit a beautiful girl into it, to make passionate love to her in my room at the end of the night, to snuggle next to her sexy warm body as we drift off to sleep together. THAT is the life I should have lived. So many other guys are able to experience that, and just thinking about it filled me with extreme agony. Life is not fair" (Rodger 2014, p. 94).

In Sodini's blog, he admits that he hadn't had sex in 19 years and hadn't had a girlfriend in 25. He details his loneliness and frustration at the rejection he feels from women. He consistently uses objectifying language when talking about women, referring to them as "edible," "hoez," and "so beautiful as to not be human." He asserts he is not responsible for his difficulties, writing, "Everything stays the same regardless of the effort I put in. If I had control over my life then I would be happier. But for about the past 30 years, I have not" (Sodini 2009, p. 8). Those efforts including attending dating classes by Don Steele, who reports to teach older men how to date younger men and insists "nice guys must die."

The prevention of this violence lies in understanding the drives and motivations for those falling deeper into the ideology. In the next section, we offer a review of 15 cases outlined in Table 2 and summarized in Appendix A1. Following the case review, we explore the core beliefs from

TABLE 2. SUMMARY OF INVOLUNTARY CELIBATE ATTACKS

No.	Case	Date of incident
(1)	Tsuyama Massacre	May 21, 1938
(2)	Rose-Mar College of Beauty Shooting	November 13, 1966
(3)	St. Pius X High School Shooting	October 27, 1975
(4)	École Polytechnique Massacre	December 6, 1989
(5)	Pearl High School Shooting	October 1, 1997
(6)	Thurston High School Shooting	May 20–21, 1998
(7)	LA Fitness Shooting	August 4, 2009
(8)	Isla Vista Killings	May 23, 2014
(9)	Portsmouth Stabbings	6–7, 2014
(10)	Umpqua Community College Attack	October 1, 2015
(11)	Aztec High School Attack	December 7, 2017
(12)	Toronto Van Attack	April 23, 2018
(13)	Tallahassee Yoga Studio Shooting	November 2, 2018
(14)	Dayton Shooting	August 4, 2019
(15)	Hit List Lawyer	July 11–19, 2020

the incel movement: entitlement, misogyny, jealousy, alienation, and depression. Finally, we will discuss how several therapy approaches can be used to treat those deep into the incel indoctrination.

### Summary of Research

As part of the research for their upcoming book *Understanding and Treating Incels* (2021), Drs. Van Brunt and Taylor examined 50 cases in which the attacker either self-identified as an incel or otherwise displayed incel-like beliefs and motivations. The cases were primarily found using an internet search that included the key terms "incel threat/violence," "misogyny threat/violence," and "anti-women threat/violence." The details of each case were reviewed to determine the common elements to develop a tool to examine the depth of indoctrination into the incel belief system. Summaries of 15 prominent or illustrative cases can be found in Appendix A1 and they are listed in Table 2.

There were several cases reviewed that pre-date the term "incel," coined in 1997 (Taylor 2018), but that clearly demonstrates that the dangers of the incel belief system have long been apparent. These attacks are important to study as they offer meaningful insight into the early framework for this movement and help guide the reader along the journey of the rise of the incel. The earliest case in the research involves a man in 1938 who, after a tuberculosis diagnosis causes the women in the village to reject him, killed most of the people in the village in an overnight rampage (Appendix A1: 1). In addition to a broad spectrum of dates and times of attacks, these cases also range across continents providing both domestic and international examples. This gives the reader the opportunity to observe the cultural factors that may be at play in specific cases while simultaneously acknowledging that the intrinsic incel philosophies remain the same despite geographical distance.

As the incel movement began to establish their own sense of culture with specific terminology, websites, and memberships, these cases became easier to distinguish in the media and within our field. This was particularly helpful in terms of conducting our research, as these perpetrators so readily identify themselves with the incel movement and want

society to know the reasoning behind their attacks. This is carried out in numerous ways, whether it is directly communicating with law enforcement or the media, or through written letters, manifestos, and/or online blogs found post-attack. They are quick to pay homage to prior incels who they desperately seek to align themselves with. Common examples include LA Fitness and Isla Vista attackers, who, as discussed previously, are often regarded in a “father/son” association among this community.

Beyond the core beliefs of the incel movement, these cases often share other common themes. The attackers often display an inaccurate self-conception. Many are plagued with thoughts of low self-worth and self-esteem, whereas at the same time, they often self-aggrandize and see themselves as all powerful avengers. The attackers often display rage and hopelessness at their lack of relationships, thinking things can or will never change. These feelings are often displayed through physical or verbal altercations with others, telegraphing the violence to come. Most display some suicidal ideations and are likely to catastrophize events, leading to a sense of free fall.

Because of the transparency among many of these incel perpetrators, we have been able to continue our research on recent attacks using search criteria around “incels” along with any references or “name-dropping” of prior incels attackers. Although it has been incredibly helpful to have these new indicators available to us to more easily identify incel attacks, our search parameters are broader and focus on the fundamental beliefs of the incel individual: entitlement, misogyny, and jealousy. Through significant evaluation and consideration of these central themes, Van Brunt and Taylor (in press) developed the Incel Indoctrination Rubric (IIR). The IIR can be used to analyze the depth of a perpetrator’s incel beliefs and commitment to the incel movement. The IIR is composed of 20 risk factors: Misogyny, Racism, Blackpill, Inaccurate Self-Conception, Fame-Seeking, Rage, Hopelessness, Catastrophe, Disability, Abandoned, Approach Behaviors, Howling, Suicide, Past Attacks, Redpill, Incel Materials, Rejection, Bullied, Failure to Change, and Free Fall. A free website has been developed to offer those researching this topic a clearinghouse of information related to social media threats and incel violence ([www.dot-iv.com](http://www.dot-iv.com)).

### Core Ideological Beliefs

What makes up an incel ideology? There are three core beliefs that contribute to the indoctrination and these are, misogyny, jealousy, and entitlement (Van Brunt and Taylor, in press). Imagine these three ideas as the sides of a triangle. As a fire needs heat, oxygen, and fuel, the incel has a deeply objectified and reductionistic view of female worth, intense jealousy at being left behind by women who choose lesser men, and a certainty they are entitled to women and sexual fulfillment.

#### Entitlement

The core concept of entitlement reflects these intense feelings and beliefs on what the incel feels he deserves from women and society in general. He prioritizes his own needs and lack of satisfaction, disregarding the feelings, agency, or thoughts of others. This entitlement, left unchecked, fuels

the aggression and violence targeted toward those who the incel sees as the obstacles to obtaining what is owed to him.

One of the first incel inspired attacks occurred in Tsuyama, Japan. The individual had participated in Yobai, an ancient Japanese custom during which young men sneak into a woman’s bedroom and, if she consents, they have intercourse. The 21-year-old man in question was diagnosed with tuberculosis and the women of the village began rejecting him. This led him to killing half the population of the village (Lynch 2017). A more recent example of this comes from the stabbing attacks that occurred over June and July 2014 in Portsmouth, United Kingdom. Here an 18-year-old was convicted of attempted murder for stabbing three women as they walked home. He felt so wronged by his lack of sexual experiences that he wrote, “I was planning to murder women as an act of revenge because of the life they gave me, I’m still a virgin at 17” (Allegretti 2015, p. 1).

The killer in the 2015 attack at Umpqua Community College was similarly motivated by his sense of entitlement and insurmountable obstacles keeping him from his goals. Everywhere he looked, he saw others succeeding with women. He idealized past attackers and wrote in his manifesto, “And here I am, 26, with no friends, no job, no girlfriend, a virgin. I long ago realized that society likes to deny people like me these things. People who are elite, people who stand with the gods. People like Elliot Rodger, Vester Flanagan, The Columbine kids, Adam Lanza and Seung Cho. Just like me those people were denied everything they deserved, everything they wanted” (Harper-Mercer 2015, p. 1).

#### Misogyny

The incel sees women on a continuum of sexual value and considers them as singular dimensional possessions valued only for their beauty. Incels reject a wider assessment of a woman’s worth as a personal agency, disregarding intelligence, personality, health, or achievements. Physical attractiveness, reducing desirability and beauty to those who are young, tall, blonde, blue-eyed Caucasian woman, is the ultimate desirable asset. Any diversity based on culture, sexual orientation, skin color, weight, height, age, or ethnicity are seen as less than desirable.

Attractive women, gifted by their European genetics and a society that values them, are seen as the root of all evil. Biology denies less physically attractive men from having any access to genetically superior women. Against this dystopian backdrop of isolation and hopelessness, the incel’s hatred and rage escalates to the most logical conclusion, dismissing those who have been successful in this rigged system and sometimes acting out violently toward them. With no hope of a better outcome, the suicidality of the attacker becomes the most central risk factor for mass violence (Lankford 2018; Van Brunt 2012, 2015).

A tragic example of this rage and violence occurred in 1989 at École Polytechnique in Montreal, Canada. A 25-year-old man had twice failed in his application for the school and had long complained about women working in “nontraditional” jobs. He killed 14 women and wounded another 10 before taking his own life. In his manifesto/suicide note, he wrote, “[Women] are so opportunistic that

they neglect to profit from the knowledge accumulated by men throughout the ages. They always try to misrepresent them every time they can” (Lépine 1989, p. 2).

More recently, a 40-year-old self-proclaimed misogynist killed two people and injured five others before killing himself at a yoga studio in Tallahassee, Florida. In his videos, he mentioned the Isla Vista killer, called black women “ugly and disgusting” and described times when women rejected his advances. He refers to women as “sluts” and “whores” and in reference to women in interracial relationships, “There are whores in—not only every city, not only every town, but every village” (Gathright 2018, p. 1).

### Jealousy

For the incel, jealousy is a frequent emotion. Their jealous is targeted at those women who reject them, or who they think would reject them if they approached. It is aimed at less attractive beta men who are in sexual relationships with more attractive women. It is aimed at the women who date less attractive men. It is paradoxically targeted at a society that perpetuates the genetic superiority and physical attractiveness of Chads and Stacys. The jealousy and rage often have racial and bigoted overtones, as incels see nonwhites as genetically inferior than others.

In the 2015 Umpqua Community College attack in Oregon, the killer writes, “When the girls would rather go with alpha thug black men, we can all agree that somethings wrong with the world. When good individuals like myself are alone, but wicked black men get the loot, like some sort of vaginal pirate, it’s not fair” (Anderson 2015, p. 1).

The driver of the rental van in the 2018 Toronto attack that killed 10, shared during his police interview, “I would say that sometimes I am a bit upset that they choose to date

obnoxious men instead of a gentleman.” “On Halloween of 2013 I was attending a house party—and I walked in and attempted to socialize with some girls, however they all laughed at me and held the arms of the big guys instead” (Humphreys 2019, p. 1).

### Alienation, Depression, and Hopelessness

In addition to the qualities of entitlement, misogyny and jealousy, the incel experiences feelings of alienation, depression, and hopelessness. They have difficulty approaching women, talking with them and taking any proactive steps toward flirtation or courtship. They have often been teased, bullied, or rebuffed in social situations or when approaching women. This rejection leads to sadness, frustration, and loneliness that fuels a negative view of social interaction, sexual or otherwise. There is a growing realization they have become undesirable loners, further ostracized as their desire for female connection and sexual relationships drifts further from their reach.

When incels are unable to obtain desirable women, they begin to adopt a view of self as weak and less-than; a beta status to the other alpha males. They attempt to mitigate this loneliness by reaching out to other men, often online, who share the same nihilistic impression of social interaction. In these online forums and discussion boards, they speak with each other in specialized terms. A brief summary of this language is contained in Table 3.

### Escalation to Physical Violence

As the alienation and depression grows, the incel further falls into a spiral of sadness, isolation, and self-loathing. These sad and frustrated men often commiserate online about

TABLE 3. COMMON INVOLUNTARY CELIBATE TERMS FOR INDIVIDUALS

Term	Meaning
Alpha Male	A bold, confident leader; the opposite of a beta
AMOG	“Alpha Male of Group”
Becky	An average young woman, subordinate to a Stacy in looks and status
Beta Male	A weak man; the opposite of an alpha
-Cel	This suffix can be used to define one’s subset within the incel community based on physical features, interests, race, or defining traits (e.g., a gingercel is an incel who has red hair)
Chad	An ideal male specimen, Chads can attract nearly all women easily; ethnic counterparts are Tyrone (black), Chaddam (Arab), Chadpreet (Indian), Chang (East Asian)
Cuck	Short for cuckold, this is a man with an unfaithful wife/girlfriend; also used for men who are considered weak or servile and often used as a derogatory term for men with moderate or progressive views
Femoid/Foid	Demeaning term referring to women as less than human
Incel/Inkwell	Invuntary celibate man; common subsets include: Baldcel: Bald or balding Currycel: Indian Clowncel: Identifies with and admires the Joker from <i>Batman</i> Fakecel: Pretending to be incel to be edgy or to fit in Framecel: A man with the bone structure of a young teen Gymcel: Believes he can compensate with muscles Heightcel/Shortcel: A short man who is an incel because of his height Mentalcel/medcel: Has psychological illnesses or medical issues Workcel: Too preoccupied with work for a relationship
Noodlewhore	An Asian woman
Normie	An average boring person, someone who is average in looks, between a Chad and an incel
Soyboy	An effeminate, feminist or non-fighting man, with low athleticism; incels believe soy lowers testosterone
Stacy	The female counterpart to a Chad; the ideal woman who is out of reach for any non-Chad man
Thot	A woman who has many casual sexual encounters

the unfairness of their lives and the lack of any hope that things will improve. They seek advice to find connection with women, or how to lure and manipulate them into sexual encounters. Yet these practices often lead to more failure, rejection, and the belief that they will never reach their goals.

In the extreme cases mentioned in Appendix A1, the individual begins to craft a plan, or exit strategy. They desperately want to be understood, to punish those they blame for their unsuccessful life, and ultimately, to make the pain of this existence stop. The incel moves from sad, lonely, and frustrated to a mission-oriented plan to go out in a blaze of glory, finally believing they will achieve the meaning and popularity that has eluded them for their entire lives.

We see these escalations often in the Isla Vista attacker's manifesto, written before his shooting. He writes, "As I made my way back from school one day during the first week, I was stopped at a stoplight in Isla Vista when I saw two hot blonde girls waiting at the bus stop. I was dressed in one of my nice shirts, so I looked at them and smiled. They looked at me, but they didn't even deign to smile back. They just looked away as if I was a fool. As I drove away I became very infuriated. It was such an insult. This was the way all girls treated me, and I was sick and tired of it. In a rage, I made a U-turn, pulled up to their bus stop and splashed my Starbucks latte all over them. I felt a feeling a spiteful satisfaction as I saw it stain their jeans. I then quickly speeded away before they could catch my license plate number. How dare those girls snub me in such a fashion! How dare they insult me so! I raged to myself repeatedly. They deserved the punishment I gave them. It was such a pity that my latte wasn't hot enough to burn them. Those girls deserved to be dumped in boiling water for the crime of not giving me the attention and adoration I so rightfully deserve!" (Rodger 2014, p. 100).

We hear their voices, desperate and angry, shouting at women and a society who left them behind (Table 4).

### Moving Forward

Addressing targeted violence from any type of attackers is best accomplished through a reduction and/or management of risk factors while increasing and nurturing addi-

tional protective or stabilizing factors. Although the risk factors for targeted violence have been written about extensively in other books and articles (Lankford 2018; Van Brunt 2012, 2015; Van Brunt and Lewis 2014), they should be considered with an awareness of the stabilizing influences that help reduce the risk for escalation of violence. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines these protective factors as "individual or environmental characteristics, conditions, or behaviors that reduce the effects of stressful life events. These stabilizing influences also increase an individual's ability to avoid risks or hazards and promote social and emotional competence to thrive in all aspects of life, now and in the future" (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC] 2018, para. 2).

The research on these stabilizing influences is not as extensive as the research on risk factors; however, there are some organizations and researchers that have begun to address these (O'Toole 2002; Van Brunt et al. 2017; National Threat Assessment Center [NTAC] 2018; Schiemann et al. 2019). A helpful table of the most common stabilizing influences is provided in Table 5.

Stabilizing influences provide a framework for prevention programs and initiatives related to targeted violence. By increasing and enhancing existing stabilizing influences, we reduce the risk of targeted violence. This helps push the incel to move off the pathway of violence by scaffolding them with harm reduction strategies, building increased connection, and supporting nonviolent attitudes and behaviors.

To increase protective elements and stabilizing ways of thinking, psychotherapy and clinical mental health treatment is often used. Several popular approaches to treatment are offered here as ways to help decrease risk factors and increase protective factors.

### Existential therapy

In his book *Existential Psychotherapy* (1980), Irvin Yalom explains that we each confront four ultimate concerns in life. These are (1) dealing with the vastness of the freedom of our choices, (2) the anxiety that exists when contemplating death, (3) wrestling with what it means to be connected with others yet ultimately alone, and (4) coming to terms with an ultimate meaning in our existence. Yalom

TABLE 4. VOICES FROM THE PAST

Case	Year	Journals, manifestos, and interviews	Killed
2	1966	"I wanted to get known, just wanted to get myself a name."	5 Women
3	1975	"I don't want to die before I have had the pleasure of fucking some girl"	1 Woman
4	1989	[Feminists] "... are so opportunistic that they neglect to profit from the knowledge accumulated by men throughout the ages. They always try to misrepresent them every time they can."	14 Women
5	1997	"With this writing, I do swear, that I shall never get myself in a position where I can be hurt by a woman ever again. To myself I swear this, and to the higher powers I swear this."	2 Women
6	1998	"Love at first sight is only in movies. Where the people in the movies are better than you ... My cold black heart has never and never will experience true love. I can tell you one about love. It does more harm than good. I plan to live in a big black hole. My firearms and [illegible] will be the only things to fight my isolation. I would also like to point out Love is a horrible thing. It makes things kill and hate."	4 People
9	2014	"I was planning to murder women as an act of revenge because of the life they gave me, I'm still a virgin at 17. I think every girl is a type of slut, they are fussy with men nowadays, they do not give boys like us a chance."	3 Women stabbed
11	2017	"If things go according to plan, today would be when I die. I go somewhere and gear up, then hold a class hostage and go apeshit, then blow my brains out."	2 People

TABLE 5. STABILIZING INFLUENCES THAT REDUCE INVOLUNTARY CELIBATE VIOLENCE

Social support	Empathy to others	School engagement	Religious supports
Family support	Perspective taking	Work engagement	Non-violent outlets
Positive outlook	Intimate relationship	Positive self-esteem	Problem solving
Limited lethal means	Knowledge of self	Consequence aware	Emotional stability
Social/political safety	Housing stability	Resiliency	Lacks reactivity

offers these four challenges correspond well with the struggles faced by the incel. Although a more advanced therapeutic concept, we believe it will be helpful to see how some of these struggles directly relate to the struggles the incel faces. They offer insight into some of the theoretical challenges they may be facing that underpin their sadness and rage.

#### *Person-centered therapy*

Carl Rogers (1961), the humanistic psychologist and father of the *Person-Centered Approach* to treatment offers the following: "... when someone understands how it feels and seems to be me, without wanted to analyze me or judge me, then I can blossom and grow in that climate" (p. 62). The person-centered approach to treatment prioritizes empathy, active listening, congruence, genuines, and authenticity as part of the therapeutic alliance. Empathy means seeing the world from someone else's eyes, understanding from their perspective. Congruence is about the therapist con-

veying a sense of genuineness and authenticity to the client. This is particularly useful for the incel as they often have internalized the idea that they are worth less than everyone around him and they have no worth or value. The therapist offers attention and focus to what the incel is saying. This provides them an opportunity to feel heard and understood. This true listening, caring for the person, and understanding their experiences provide a sense of hope for a better future.

#### *Narrative therapy*

Everyone has a story. For the incel, these stories are often infused with racism, misogyny and self-loathing. To redirect the incel away from their harmful beliefs, treatment providers must learn their stories. It is in these stories, often shaped by experience, that we become seen as an interested party and potential ally to their health and well-being. The approach to treatment known as *Narrative Therapy* (NT), created by Australian family therapists Michael White and

TABLE 6. SUMMARY OF STABILIZING INFLUENCES AND TREATMENT

<i>Stabilizing factor</i>	<i>Descriptions</i>	<i>Treatment</i>
Environmental and emotional stability	An individual's life experiences have consistency and constancy, and their reactions to change or crisis represent a similar calm and resilience.	PCT: to assist building connection and genuine support; CBT: to improve future choices through critical decision making; NT: to help redefine negative stories and empower future stories
Social health and relationships	They have stability in relationships with family, friends, and significant others.	CBT: to assist in building positive relationship and supports; RT: to problem solve challenges to forming friends and relationships
Access to nonviolent outlets	Individuals have opportunities for positive collective action on issues and concerns instead of turning to violence.	CBT: using critical thinking to develop innovative and creative outlets; ET/RT: to take ownership of choices and focus on personal responsibility
Empathy and connection	The empathetic or compassionate person demonstrates the ability to consider others' perspectives or others' ideals without seeing them as challenging or competitive to their own beliefs.	PCT: to improve empathy skills, active listening and caring for others in an open, genuine and congruent manner; ET/RT: to respect what is in your control and how to better relate to others who are struggling; NT: to appreciate the way our individual stories impact our view of self and others
Positive social and individual action	There is a focus on the betterment of a group or community and an awareness of how their choices result in positive or negative consequence.	CBT: to discover empowering ways to make personal choices to create better outcomes; RT: to build a plan forward to support future positive decisions that create a better outcome for all
Positive masculinity	There is a healthy awareness of masculinity and an openness to a variety of possible masculinities that provide a foundation to improve self-worth and value with a positive view of the feminist perspective.	CBT: to explore the roles of our thoughts and beliefs and how they impact our behavior; PCT: to learn the inherent worth of all individuals and become free from limiting descriptions of what can be accomplished; NT: to engage in a reauthoring of past experiences and define masculinity in a way that allows for inclusion
Affirmative sexuality	Sexuality and sexual behavior are consent based and equitable between those involved.	CBT: to better understand the path to sexual intimacy and how to overcome myths, poor goals and frustration tolerance; PCT: to appreciate the power of empathy and understanding others needs in relationship to fulfilling your own

CBT, cognitive behavioral therapy; ET, existential therapy; NT, narrative therapy; PCT, person-centered therapy; RT, reality therapy.

David Epston (1990), suggests that we use our stories to organize and give meaning to our experiences. As such, incels construct their meaning through the stories they share and treat these as the “truth” (Corey 2001). When we listen to their lives through the stories they tell, we can then assist them in revising their stories so they have increased ownership and control over negative past experiences. NT helps separate the incel from the negative, damaging stories he tells himself and find new stories that lead to a more constructive outcome.

### *Cognitive behavioral therapy*

As the relationship is established with the incel through rapport building and developing a relationship based on mutual respect, another approach to change involves assisting the client to learn how to think differently about low self-esteem, rejection from women, a negative self-concept, and actual and perceived unfair experiences. The cognitive behavioral approach to therapy (Ellis 2007; Glasser 1975, 2001) rose in popularity as it brought increased attention on empirically validated treatment to help clients think differently about their problems and, subsequently, behave differently and avoid a larger escalation to mission-oriented violence. Identifying and managing the daily frustrations and slight experiences by the incel requires him to first identify how his body is experiencing biological changes as he becomes increasingly upset and frustrated. These environmental stimuli are seen as irritations and annoyances, or “trigger events,” that elicit a biological reaction. This could be another man having success dating an attractive woman, rejection following an attempt to ask out a woman, or bullying and teasing behavior experienced by the incel.

These activating events are described in detail through the therapeutic approach called *Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy* (REBT). This approach to treatment was developed by Albert Ellis (2007) and is useful to assist clients in identifying irrational thoughts they have in response to these activating events. The REBT approach can be described in terms of A-B-Cs: Activating events, Beliefs about these events, and the Consequences of these beliefs. Assisting the incel to see his irrational and catastrophizing thoughts is the first step to helping him discover alternative ways to process the world around him. This process begins with the incel identifying upsetting events that experiences and labeling these “activating events.”

### *Reality therapy*

Glasser (1975, 2001) founded a therapeutic system called *Reality Therapy*. In this system, he suggests the importance of creating plans with clients that will be achievable. Glasser (1975, 2001) outlines a process of change based on the understanding of and assessing the needs of the incel client. This plan is abbreviated as *WDEP*. This stands for identifying the Wants and needs, Direction and what they are doing, an Evaluation of their behavior, and Planning and commitment to change. When reviewing plans with the incel, it is suggested the plans be simple, attainable, measurable, immediate, consistent, controlled by the client, committed to by the client, and timely. Plans that are created by a therapist that do not have buy-in from the client or are too complicated or broad to be measured are doomed to failure.

Table 6 provides as a summary of these treatment modalities along with some practical examples of treatment goals that should be central in the deprogramming of those who have become radicalized through the extremist indoctrination of the incel movement. This can best be accomplished through a reduction of the risk factors that contribute to the escalation of the radical beliefs, the attendance of educators, counselors, and law enforcement to the catalyst events often moving the incel forward on their pathway to violence while increase the stabilizing and protective elements in their lives.

The incel movement offers shelter to those frustrated men who are increasingly dismayed at their failure to obtain a satisfying, long-term sexual relationship, infuriated at women who reject them, and disenfranchised from a society that perpetuates the intrinsic values of the Chad and Stacy standard of worth. Very few of these men move forward with violent attacks to others and it has been well established in literature that predatory and instrumental attacks are best understood by looking at numerous motives, risk factors, and stabilizing elements. Even so, the internet and online discussion boards have provided these men a place to gather and discuss their radical and nihilistic beliefs, growing the numbers of extremist incels to a concerning level.

The solution here is understanding the motivations of the incel, obtained through past attacks, and an analysis of their writings and stories, to provide a treatment and care roadmap for clinical staff, educators, and law enforcement to better address the risk factors for targeted violence as well as opportunities to increase supportive and stabilizing influences for those exposed to the radical and dangerous incel ideas.

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## Appendix

### Appendix A1

(1) Tsuyama Massacre, May 21, 1938, Kamo, Tsuyama, Japan

Yobai (night crawling) is an ancient Japanese custom during which young men sneak into a woman's bedroom and, if she consents, they have intercourse. In rural Japan, it was a normal way to find a spouse. After practicing Yobia for several years, a 21-year-old man in Kamo was diagnosed with tuberculosis and the women of the village began rejecting his sexual advantages. This led to feelings of isolation and loneliness. In his suicide notes, he wrote about the tuberculosis turning him into a social pariah. He decided to kill those who he felt had wronged him.

Late on May 20, 1938, he cut the power to the village. He started his rampage around 1:30 am by killing with grandmother so she wouldn't have to live with the shame of his actions. Over the next 90 min, he killed another 29 neighbors—approximately half the population of the village. He then shot and killed himself.

<https://historycollection.co/dont-know-tsuyama-massacre-tuberculosis-tipped-madman-edge>

(2) Rose-Mar College of Beauty Shooting, November 13, 1966, Mesa, Arizona

An 18-year-old high school senior shot and killed four women and a 3-year-old girl. He told police, "I wanted to get known, just wanted to get myself a name." The attacker was a poor student, having repeated grades in school, and was teased or ignored by other children. He was strongly affected by the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, his personal hero. He began an interest in true crime and a fascination with assassins and murderers. His grades improved, but his social isolation worsened. A classmate recalled, "I'm sure he never dated a girl at our school." He reportedly "entertained fantasies in which women were shot or stabbed."

He took inspiration from the mass killings by Richard Speck in Chicago and Charles Whitman in Austin, Texas and began planning his attack in the summer of 1966. He chose the beauty school hoping for a large death toll.

(Appendix continues →)

<https://www.nydailynews.com/news/crime/beauty-salon-massacre-article-1.273663>

(3) St. Pius X High School Shooting, October 27, 1975, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

After raping and killing a girl at his home, an 18-year-old student went to the school and shot seven people, killing one of them, and then killed himself. He had been obsessed with sex and pornography. He kept a scrapbook of nude men and women, a collection of hardcore pornography books and magazines, detailed ratings of photographs and advertisements, and an index of several pornographic magazines.

Before the school shooting, he was suspected in several cases of indecent exposure and attempted rape at the apartment building near his home. In his diary, he wrote, "I don't want to die before I have had the pleasure of fucking some girl," although having recently discovered a sex doll, he also wrote, "Now I no longer think that I will have to rape a girl, and am unsure as to whether or not I will still commit suicide."

[https://schoolshooters.info/sites/default/files/expanding\\_the\\_sample\\_1.5.pdf](https://schoolshooters.info/sites/default/files/expanding_the_sample_1.5.pdf)

(4) École Polytechnique Massacre, December 6, 1989, Montreal, Quebec, Canada

The attacker was a 25-year-old man who had twice failed in his application for the school and had long complained about women working in "nontraditional" jobs. He entered an engineering classroom and separated the men and women. He killed 14 women before killing himself. He left a note that was largely an anti-feminist rant.

His suicide note includes, "[Women] want to retain the advantages of being women (e.g., cheaper insurance, extended maternity leave preceded by a preventive leave) while trying to grab those of the men" and "Thus, it is self-evident that if the Olympic Games removed the Men/Women distinction, there would be only be women in the graceful events. So the feminists are not fighting to remove that barrier." He wrote, "They are so opportunistic that they neglect to profit from the knowledge accumulated by men throughout the ages. They always try to misrepresent them every time they can."

<https://toronto.citynews.ca/2006/12/06/citynews-rewind-the-montreal-massacre>

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/mass-shooting-reshaped-canadian-debate-about-guns-and-political-identity-180962013>

(5) Pearl High School Shooting, October 1, 1997, Pearl, Mississippi

The 16-year-old attacker entered the school and opened fire, killing two students and wounding seven others. Before the shooting, he had murdered his mother with a knife. Six other teenagers were later arrested as well as co-conspirators. The group called themselves the Kroth and were led by an 18-year-old self-described Satanist. A manuscript written by the attacker was discovered that talks about taking revenge on those he believed slighted him.

In his journal, he wrote, "With this writing, I do swear, that I shall never get myself in a position where I can be hurt by a woman ever again. To myself I swear this, and to the higher powers I swear this." His manifesto refers to his dif-

ficulty dating, saying, "I only loved one thing in my whole life and that was Christina Menefee. But she was torn away from me. I tried to save myself with [student's name], but she never cared for me. As it turns out, she made fun of me behind my back while we were together." The attacker and Menefee, who was killed in the attack, dated about a year before the shooting.

<https://www.nytimes.com/1997/10/15/us/grim-details-emerge-in-teen-age-slaying-case.html>

<https://schoolshooters.info/sites/default/files/Luke%20Woodham%20Writings.pdf>

(6) Thurston High School Shooting, May 20–21, 1998, Springfield, Oregon

A 15-year-old attacker shot fellow students in the school cafeteria. He killed two and wounded 25 others. The day before, he had killed his parents at their home. He was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia and was not medicated at the time of the shooting. He wrote in an essay, "Love at first sight is only in movies. Where the people in the movies are better than you ... My cold black heart has never and never will experience true love. I can tell you one about love. It does more harm than good. I plan to live in a big black hole. My firearms and [illegible] will be the only things to fight my isolation. I would also like to point out Love is a horrible thing. It makes things kill and hate."

His journal reflects his loneliness and romantic frustrations, "Every time I talk to her, I have a small amount of hope. But then she will tear it right down. It feels like my heart is breaking. But is that possible. I am so consumed with hate all of the time. Could I ever love anyone? I have feelings, but do I have a heart that's not black and full of animosity?... I need help. There is one person that could help, but she won't. I need to find someone else. I think I love her, but she could never love me. I don't know why I try."

<https://www.npr.org/2018/05/22/612465197/20-years-ago-oregon-school-shooting-ended-a-bloody-season>

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/kinkel/kip/writings.html>

(7) A Fitness Shooting, August 4, 2009, Collier, Pennsylvania

A 48-year-old attacker, angry about being rejected by women, entered an aerobics class, dimmed the lights and opened fire, killing three women, before shooting himself in the head. For month prior, he had kept a blog of his plans to commit the killings.

In it, he admits that he hadn't had sex in 19 years and hadn't had a girlfriend in 25. His blog details his loneliness and frustration at the rejection he feels from women. He consistently uses objectifying language when talking about women, referring to them as "edible," "hoez," and "so beautiful as to not be human." He asserts that he is not responsible for his difficulties, writing, "Everthing stays the same regardless of the effort I put in. If I had control over my life then I would be happier. But for about the past 30 years, I have not." Those efforts including attending dating classes by Don Steele, who proports to teach older men how to date younger men and insists "nice guys must die."

<https://abcnews.go.com/US/story?id=8258001&page=1>

[www.nbcnews.com/id/32335641/ns/us\\_news-crime\\_and\\_courts/t/sodini-was-devoted-follower-dating-guru/#.XrBQO6hKiwc](http://www.nbcnews.com/id/32335641/ns/us_news-crime_and_courts/t/sodini-was-devoted-follower-dating-guru/#.XrBQO6hKiwc)

(8) Isla Vista Killings, May 23, 2014, Isla Vista, California  
A 22-year-old man killed 6 people and injured 14 outside of the University of California, Santa Barbara. He stabbed three people to death in his apartment complex, then drove to the campus sorority houses and shot three women, two of which died. He then drove to a nearby deli, shot and killed a male student inside. He got back into his BMW and drove at a high rate of speed into crowds of pedestrians until having a standoff with police and completing suicide.

Just before his attack at the sorority house, he uploaded a video to YouTube where he talks about his motives, blaming women for rejecting him and punishing men he envied. He then emailed a lengthy manifesto titled “My Twisted World” to friends, family members, and his therapist. This manifesto talks about his difficulties during childhood, family issues, struggles with romantic rejection, and moreover his hatred toward women and couples.

The manifesto has been embraced by the involuntary celibate (incel) community. It begins with, “All of my suffering on this world has been at the hands of humanity, particularly women.” He details his childhood and his resentment that his mother had not “married into wealth instead of being selfish.” He felt that wealth was his only path to sex. He also wrote of “how cruel I think women are by nature” and that “All of those beautiful girls I’ve desired so much in my life, but can never have because they despise and loathe me, I will destroy.” Though he says he was bullied by boys in school, he hated the girls even more, since they “flock to these men. Their evil acts are rewarded by women; while the good, decent men are laughed at.”

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-43892189>

<https://www.cnn.com/2014/05/25/justice/california-shoot-ing-revelations/index.html>

(9) Portsmouth Stabbings, June–July, 2014, Portsmouth, United Kingdom

An 18-year-old was convicted of attempted murder for stabbing three women as they walked home. He sent a letter to the police daring him to catch him, in which he wrote, “All women needs to die.” In a letter found by the police, he wrote, “I was planning to murder women as an act of revenge because of the life they gave me, I’m still a virgin at 17.” In a video found on his laptop, he said “I think every girl is a type of slut, they are fussy with men nowadays, they do not give boys like us a chance.”

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-hampshire-31765086>

(10) Umpqua Community College Attack, October 1, 2015, Roseburg, Oregon

A 26-year-old man killed nine and injured seven others before shooting himself. He targeted Christians, asking them to stand before shooting them one by one. In his manifesto, he wrote, “I have always been the most hated person in the world. Ever since I arrived in this world, I have been under siege from it. Under attack from morons and idiots. ... My whole life has been one lonely enterprise. One loss after another. And here I am, 26, with no friends, no job, no

girlfriend, a virgin. I long ago realized that society likes to deny people like me these things. People who are elite, people who stand with the gods.” He compared himself to “Elliot Rodger, Vester Flanagan, the Columbine kids, Adam Lanza and Seung Cho.”

<https://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-school-shootings-2017-story.html>

(11) Aztec High School, December 7, 2017, Aztec, New Mexico

A 21-year-old man disguised himself as a student to enter the high school, where he killed two students and then himself. After the attack, police found a thumb drive and a note that read, “If things go according to plan, today would be when I die. I go somewhere and gear up, then hold a class hostage and go apeshit, then blow my brains out.” In the years before, Atchison had been in contact online with other school shooters. His online presence was rife with white supremacist posts and an obsession with school shooters. He used the name of the Isla Vista attacker as pseudonym, calling him the “supreme gentleman.” In 2016, he was questioned by the FBI but convinced them he was a harmless troll.

<https://www.thedailybeast.com/new-mexico-school-shooter-had-secret-life-on-pro-trump-white-supremacy-sites>

(12) Toronto Van Attack, April 23, 2018, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

A 25-year-old man drove his van onto a crowded sidewalk, killing 10 people and injuring 16. He began planning in earnest about a month before the attack, carefully choosing the van in a size that he could maneuver but would do a lot of damage. The exact location was chosen because he saw a lot of people walking there. He only stopped the attack when “someone’s drink got splashed on my windshield, and I was worried that I would crash the van anyways.” He planned to die through suicide by cop, but the officer arrested him without violence. Minutes before the attack, he posted on Facebook, “The Incel rebellion has already begun! All hail the Supreme Gentleman [the Isla Vista attacker]!”

After his arrest, he told police that he had communicated the Isla Vista and Umpqua College attackers, and they inspired his attack. He said of the Isla Vista attacker, “We discussed our frustrations at society and being unable to get laid.” He had been bullied in school and during his brief time in the military. He had never had a girlfriend and said that after the attack in Isla Vista, he began spending more and more time on incel-related forums. He told police, “It’s basically a movement of angry incels such as myself who are unable to get laid, therefore we want to overthrow the Chads which would force the Stacys to be forced to reproduce with the incels.”

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/alek-minassian-police-interview-1.5298021>

(13) Tallahassee Yoga Studio Shooting, November 2, 2018, Tallahassee, Florida

A 40-year-old self-proclaimed misogynist killed two people and injured five others before killing himself at a yoga studio in Tallahassee. He had a history of violence against women, having been caught on video slapping and grabbing

the buttocks of a woman at an apartment pool complex and grabbing another woman's in a Florida State University dining hall.

He had posted racist and misogynist videos to YouTube and songs to SoundCloud. One of the songs included the lyrics "To hell with the boss that won't get off my back/To hell with the girl I can't get in the sack." In his videos, he mentioned the Isla Vista killer, called black women "ugly and disgusting" and described times when women rejected his advances. He refers to women as "sluts" and "whores" and in reference to women in interracial relationships, "There are whores in—not only every city, not only every town, but every village."

<https://www.npr.org/2018/11/04/664157610/gunman-in-yoga-studio-attack-had-a-criminal-history-posted-racist-and-sexist-vid>

(14) Dayton Shooting, August 4, 2019, Dayton, Ohio  
Connor Betts, 24

The attacker, wearing body armor and carrying high capacity magazines, fired into a crowd outside a Dayton nightclub, killing nine and injuring dozens. He fired at least 41 times in 30 sec before being shot and killed by police. His sister was killed in the attack.

According to a friend, "He was kind of hateful to women because they didn't want to date him." In high school, Betts

made a list that threatened violence or sexual violence against those on it, mostly girls. At least one of the girls on the list had turned him down when he expressed interest in her. "After that, it turned into cold hatred the way he stared at me," she said.

<https://www.cnn.com/2019/08/05/us/connor-betts-dayton-shooting-profile/index.html>

(15) Hit List Lawyer, July 11–19, 2020, Los Angeles CA and North Brunswick, NJ

A 72-year-old self-described "anti-feminist" lawyer is believed to have shot and killed a rival men's rights attorney. He then shot the husband and son of a US District Judge, killing her son, before killing himself. A list of names, including several judges, was found in his car. His website includes a "Cyclopedia," a 152-page document filled with misogynistic and anti-feminist writings. He had argued and lost a case before the judge concerning the legality of the draft, arguing that it was unconstitutional since it barred women from registering. His website also included a document disparaging the judge.

<https://www.cnn.com/2020/07/20/us/suspect-shooting-at-judge-salas-home/index.html>

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2020/08/01/roy-den-hollander-bitter-tale-misogynist-lawyer-turned-killer/5532110002>

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