

# *A HORROR TALE OF MALE ENTITLEMENT: JACK THE RIPPER AND 'HIS' SHADOW, THE INCEL MOVEMENT*

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This paper explores the potential link between the misogynistic violence of the Incel Movement and the appalling murders of Jack the Ripper. In order to help establish the link between them, this paper strives to expose the Victorian roots of the notion that women are the sexual property of men. It likewise aims to expose how misogynistic violence is not only a symptom of a broader patriarchal culture, but also a reaction to its perceived failure. To make my case, I will first examine the attitudes towards women and sexuality in the time of the Ripper murders and then underscore how the hostility towards female prostitutes—the chosen victims--was born of these respective views. I will then conclude by drawing the connection between the motivations of the Ripper and the Incel Movement in their murders: an anger towards the perceived deviation of women from their alleged sexual roles in society.

On April 23, 2018 a van driven by 25 year old Alek Minassian violently pierced through a crowd of people at a devastating speed of 40 miles per hour in Toronto, Canada, which had the horrific consequences of mass injury and a death count of ten. The event left many stunned by the brutality of its apparent randomness; one bystander, Ali Shaker described his experience as follows: "He just went on the sidewalk. He just starting hitting everybody...he hit every single person on that sidewalk. Anybody in his way he would hit" ("Van strikes" 2018). Of course, there was a target of the assault that day, that was not just 'anybody': it was women. Both media and the law enforcement, in a desperate frenzy to uncover the motive behind the attack, did not need to look further than the perpetrator's own Facebook account to "piece together" his underlying objective (Chavez 2018). A same day post by Minassian revealed a vengeful plot to "destroy" the females who had "rejected him" (Chavez 2018); an attitude that is ruthless in its self-entitlement. What's more disturbing, he was found to be a member of an organization that not only encouraged the attack, but delighted in its success: the Involuntary Celibates, or Incels (Beauchamp 2018).

Although we can recognize the Incel Movement to be one of many internet forums where this anti-female perspective is prevailing, it will be the focus of my analysis for the very reason it inspired this type of attack. The Incel Movement was first introduced to the public by Elliot Rodgers, who expressed this attitude in a similar vein to Minassian, when he entered one of his university's sorority houses, and shot and killed several of its members because he was deprived of sex by them (Tolentino 2018). Both Rodgers and Minassian acted on the core philosophy that bred the Incel movement online: that males are superior to females, who only exist for their sexual gratification. In other words, they view women as nothing more than sexual property (Tolentino 2018). This is precisely why we can understand the philosophical roots of the Incel Movement to be hegemonic masculinity, which refers to the traditional belief that not only do males belong at the top of any power structure, but that they can only hold that role if they conform to an ideal image of masculinity (Nagle 71, 2016).

In this paper, I aim to highlight the connection between the violence of the Incel Movement and the violence of the Victorian serial killer, Jack the Ripper. In order to establish the link between them, I will first explore the attitudes towards women

and their sexuality in the time period of the Ripper murders to show that they were considered sexual property. I will then turn to an analysis of the views towards female prostitutes, the Ripper's only victims, to show how those views motivated his actions. I will then make the ultimate argument that this violence shared between the Jack the Ripper and the Incel Movement is reactionary in nature; it is a product of a frustration with women to deviate from their intended roles and their efforts to gain rights.

### **Attitudes Towards Women and their Sexuality in the Age of the Ripper**

To highlight the relationship between the modern day 'crusaders' of the patriarchal agenda and the infamous serial killer, it is important to first understand from where their particular brand of misogyny stems. The notion of women as a sexual right certainly is one which is shared in both the modern and the Victorian period in which the serial killer operated. Marriage, in particular, was an institution which underscored male dominance and granted legitimacy to their authority over the female body. This, however, was not only enforced legally; its patriarchal triumph was situated in the state-wide mechanism which necessitated its function for its own welfare. The philosophy of "separate spheres" politically designated different social position for men and women to inhabit. Women, perceived as "weaker sex" were marked to serve only in domestic capacity (Hughes 2014); they were to be homemakers and child-rearers only. Men, on the other hand, were able to perform labour in factories, shops or offices (Hughes 2014). This mandated female dependency on the male industrial prerogative as they were barred from the money-making positions which would enable them to survive external of their familial or wedded confines. The institution of marriage, therefore, represented a blatant paradox of female agency and power—women were afforded significant influence in their society when they took the reigns as wives and mothers; however, it was bound by a system that is designed to subordinate them to their 'stronger' counterpart as a result. Therefore, one of the legal ramifications of marriage: that married women needed to surrender their properties (Combs 1031, 2005) mirrored the societal ramification: women only needed to their only politically profitable role: "The Angel in the House" (Kühl).

Naturally, given that the true ‘profit’ of this arrangement for women was to succeed as wives and mothers, this introduced a sexual component to the Victorian equation of male control. The two positions were distinct in title alone as they each required the submission of the female body to the male body in both the domestic and reproductive classification. Women may not have been considered physically superior to men, but they were viewed as morally distinct and purer (Hughes 2014). This translated to a cultural consensus that women were not and more importantly, could not be victims of the lustful appetites that could easily overtake men (Hughes 2014). Unmarried females, in an effort to mask this false belief, were expected to cast the illusion of its truth by following specific rules of courtship. They were not permitted to be too “forward” in their advances towards potential husbands (Hughes 2014), lest they shatter said illusion of not being “very much troubled” by “sexual feeling” of “any kind” (Hughes 2014) Furthermore, they were not allowed to venture outside their homes unaccompanied (Hughes 2014). It can be said then that Victorian courtship was a well-designed marketing trick: women advertised themselves in ways which demonstrated no affinity towards the intellectual pursuits culturally rationed as a masculine activity and impressed them instead with a ‘fairer’ talents, which included painting or embroidery (Hughes 2014). They flaunted nothing more than their beauty and their ethical restraint in seeking any type of pleasure, which effectively promoted an image of a desire for marriage, but not of desire itself.

The marital purchase of women’s non-existent sexuality, then, held dangerous implications for their domestic life. There was a tough negotiation between wives’ moral chastity and the allegedly insatiable sexual appetite of their husbands. The only sexuality that was promised ‘for better or for worse’ was one which elevated women to their socially-sanctioned roles. Because of this, female sexuality was recognized in terms of its purpose within its biological framework that ultimately alienated women from their own bodily autonomy. Whether they were tending to the sexual ‘needs’ of their husbands or producing children, there was no genital privileges awarded to their efforts. Another disturbing fact from that period is that the female orgasm was explicitly linked to impregnation, and its suppression was an early birth control technique (Cooper 14, 2001). This sent a distressful signal to women of that age, when finally understood to possess “the

overwhelming potential for sexual arousal” (Cooper 12, 2001), that its expression was only safe within their marriages. Women, alongside being a social and legal prisoner in the household, were then also psychologically imprisoned by this view that their bodies were biologically wired against them to seek a pleasure that was only welcomed when they properly fulfilled their domestic destiny.

### **Attitudes towards the Ripper’s Victim: The Female Prostitute**

In this section, I will examine how this view on women’s sexuality in the age of the Ripper facilitated an environment which encouraged violence towards women prostitutes. Jack the Ripper’s preferred victim, the female prostitute, is one who stood in stark contrast to the ideal model of a 19th century woman—she was uninhibited in her sexual expression. There is indeed, nothing ‘angelic’ about her—and that is precisely what prompts and justifies hostility towards her existence. A woman prostitute is described as one who makes a living by voluntarily surrendering her virtues (Acton 1, 1869). She is a “painted, dressy” woman, “flaunting along the streets”, who shall be a danger to “passers-by” that she willfully accosts (Acton viii, 1869). There is nothing politically or socially acceptable about her presence—she is a moral and medical hazard —as she presents the opportunity to “succumb to disease” and thereby is a health “distress” for all she comes in contact with (Cooper 32, 2001). The legal remedy to this potential ‘contamination’ of female prostitution were the Contagious Diseases Acts--passed between 1864 and 1867. This statute enabled police to arrest any woman suspected of prostitution and to subject them to a medical examination if proved to reveal infection, forced their hospitalization (Cooper 32, 2001).

The clear problem with this solution is that it was heavily gendered. Male prostitutes existed, as the late Oscar Wilde can certainly attest (Bristow 2018); however, they were not at risk of this same legal abuse. The doctors who performed these invasive procedures utilized “crude instruments” and were brutal in using their technique (Barry 93, 1995). Women were “outraged” by this public assault on their dignity; this was a “surgical examination” that occurred during the day with the blatant goal of shaming and “demeaning” them (Barry 93, 1995). The only beneficial outcome of these Acts was that it exposed the gross misogyny

of the Victorian system. This prompted a series of feminist movements to correct this injustice. Josephine Butler, in particular, was heralded as a crusader for the greater good of women, as she adamantly rallied against the discriminatory character of these legal sexual sanitation measures and called attention to their horrendous double standards (Cooper 32, 2001).

## **Uncovering the Link Between the Violence of Jack the Ripper and the Incel Movement**

There are then three common factors which summarize the misogyny of the Victorian era and the misogyny of present day. The first and most blaring factor, is the legal view that subjected women to the status of male property by virtue of an assumed natural superiority. The second, in accordance with this belief, is that female sexuality and any pleasure are not women's own, but rather exist only as instruments to benefit men. The third is the political assertion that women are responsible—even sometimes should be held fully accountable—for the sexual and moral transgressions of men. At this point in the analysis I shift towards an in-depth discussion of each of these factors and illustrate how to connect the crimes committed by Jack the Ripper to those of the Incel movement by setting them against their respective political backdrops.

Interestingly, both the rise of Jack the Ripper and the Incel movement follow on the heels of major societal pushes for women's rights. In the 19th century, there was a movement to abolish the prostitution laws which unfairly targeted women. In addition, women and female activists appealed to regain certain property rights. Until 1870, English Common law stated that women did not have the right to retain their "feme sole" property once they were married; it was to be "vested in the husband absolutely" (Combs 1031, 2005). This property, labeled "movable property" (Combs 1031, 2005), included all that was arguably essential to their livelihood and that would make them successfully 'moveable' from their husband's control: money, livestock, stocks and furniture (Combs 1031, 2005). The "immovable" property that she was not forced to forfeit, such as land, could not be financially beneficial to her either because it could not be sold, rented or mortgaged off without being 'moved' by her "husband's consent" (Combs 1032, 2005). The implementation of the 1870 Married Woman's Property Act legally ensured women to keep her earnings from any trade or job outside of her

husband's work, to control her personal property if it was invested in a bank savings account or public stock and funds and gave her ownership of land and up to 200 pounds worth of money inherited by a will (Combs 1033, 2005). In 1883, an amended version of this Act further enhanced woman's legal capacity to retain their personal property that they "possessed or were entitled to" before and after marriage (Combs 1033, 2005). In addition, the spread and advancement of birth contraception in the late 19th century better afforded women more control over another and more important form of property: their bodies (Cooper 28, 2001). Although this contraceptive was not accessible for purchase by all women, particularly those in the poorer classes, it still served as a symbol to them of their right to sexual expression and better treatment.

While it is difficult to precisely pinpoint the date when the Incel Organization was established, their recognition by mass media coincides with a timeframe in which the #MeToo movement has boosted into the political spotlight. And indeed, spotlight is apt as it is a movement dedicated to draw attention to sexual harassment and abuse, predominantly against women, that has long been detected but underestimated on the legal radar. The difference in this case was that the "powerful individuals" (MacKinnon 2018) who once ignored this call to action, are now taking heed to the voices of these women (MacKinnon 2018). It is thanks to #MeToo that those men well-privileged by their respective positions in society have been penalized for engaging in this criminal behavior. Harvey Weinstein, a formally celebrated Hollywood producer, is a notorious figure whose career success was devastated by hefty sexual allegations from famous female actresses prompted by this movement (Dockterman 2018). Another popular example is celebrity icon Bill Cosby, whose star finally burned out as a result of this same pressure (Dockterman 2018). The #MeToo movement's objective echoes the Victorian feminist agenda by underscoring women's right to their immediate property--their bodies--over the authority of men. Harvey Weinstein and Bill Cosby were esteemed men sitting on distinctively powerful 'couches': one of Hollywood casting and one of family television, and both were dethroned from their reputation and status. Although there is still room left to legally exonerate these men (Dockterman 2018), the key triumph of the movement is that it publicly exposes and shames them for their actions.

## Jack the Ripper, the Incels and the Harmful Effects of the 'Male Gaze'

Concerning the resemblances between the political and social contexts, the violence by Jack the Ripper and the Incel Organization may be framed as a reactionary type of violence born out of hostility towards the progression of women's rights in their societies and the resultant experience of powerlessness men face as a consequence of this progression.

Jack the Ripper's criminal debut on the East End of London in 1888 is punctuated by the death of Mary Ann Nichols, a prostitute whose body is discovered in a shockingly mutilated state. Her throat is sliced in "two gashes" and a "horrible hole" is formed by a cut between her ears on her neck (Begg, 116). This signature style of killing is one which only progressively increases in its gruesomeness as the reign of terror continues. The Ripper's last victim, Mary Jane Kelly, is marked by injury "too harrowing to be described" (Begg 300, 2013). Her body is discovered naked with its limbs clearly contorted against her will; her face is "hacked beyond recognition" (Begg 300, 2013), and her breasts and uterus--having been viciously removed--are randomly situated, glaring in their deadly display (Begg 300, 2013). It is apparent then, that these attacks are intended to attract attention—to shock and alarm—and that they certainly do. Jack the Ripper's ghost haunts London even centuries after 'his' murder spree concludes, which is a testament to this victory. And yet the message broadcast by the killer cannot and should not be merely interpreted as a warning that the city streets are never supposed to be safe for women (Walkowitz 544, 1982) because of a prevailing misogynistic agenda. These women were not simply exterminated as though they were part of a species of pest or vermin; their bodies were manipulated and fashioned to serve the Ripper's cruel will. They were subjected to the male gaze. The male gaze refers to unique kind of subjugation women endure at the narrative helm of a heterosexual male. Its terminology was first exercised by a woman film critic, Laura Mulvey, as a feminist nod to the problem that women were often cast as sexual objects in the cinematic lens by male directors and writers of movies (Well, 2017). It is understood today to be profoundly psychological in its impact on women, who are bombarded with media of all varieties which are fixated on their bodies (Well 2017). This too has its historical roots in the Victorian era,

where theater performance was a highly valued form of entertainment. The "She-tragedy" genre, popular in the 18th century, emphasized the patriarchal image of a woman's vulnerability as her desirability; thereby abolishing her potential for her "heroism" because of its representation of her "active volition" as the "rationale for her suffering" (Mowry 230-1, 2012). This theatrical framing of a woman who is only harmed by her own agency generated a male audience who were only willing to applaud women who inspired their "pity" without it (Mowry 231, 2012). Women's theatrical bodies, as the ultimate consequence, became symbolic of the oppressive Victorian stance that "national virtue" was sustained through "women's chastity" (Mowry 231, 2012).

Thus, the notion that the female body is a spectacle for society to culturally and even morally appraise, can be observed through the way the Ripper staged his victims' bodies. These prostitutes were often deprived of their identities by 'his' cuts and in some cases, as with Mary Kelly, deprived of their female 'essence'--the sexual organs of her uterus and breasts treated as almost decorative ornaments. Although it is true that the male gaze is conceptually tethered to the creative and entertainment industries, there is also entertainment value of Victorian news reporting in the midst of Ripper murderers. The subject was given considerable text length in papers and was highlighted to be eye-catching. The Pall Mall Gazette utilized strong language in its descriptions such as "revolting character" ("The Terrible Murder", 1888) to refer to the attacks. The Morning Post citing one as a "barbarous murder" ("Another Woman" 1888) and the Illustrated Police News shockingly sketched the before and after pictures of one victim, Annie Chapman ("Details of White Chapel" 1888). The media infatuation with the mystery of the Ripper's identity translated to a mass infatuation with the otherwise 'disposable' victims that were both of a poorer class and who were prostitutes. The Ripper and those females 'he' claimed were sensationalized in the cultural imagination. Whether or not all these bodies' pictures were actually exposed to the public gaze, their image was already framed and filtered under the 'male gaze' of Ripper, who dictated their appearance before their discovery.

The modern world hosts a plethora of entertainment vehicles beyond stage and print, that affords a wider cultural area for the male gaze to reach. The internet, social media, and video games

all are potential avenues for the female form to be scrutinized and its representation altered. The online culture welcomes misogynists to--in a spirit befitting of Jack the Ripper--slice and hack their image digitally to be consumed by the masses. Photoshop, in particular, is an example of a present-day computer program which enables digital manipulation of images and has been harnessed by mass media to the detriment of women. Most well-known fashion magazines have embraced the power to enhance the 'beauty' of their models by digitally slimming them down for their covers (Day 2017). Likewise, the Incel Community and others of its kind have embraced the power to frame women in a manner to suit their agenda. Their forums are plastered with images of females to degrade and humiliate them; one captioning a heavier-set woman's before and after pictures of weight loss as going from an "landwhale" to a "Stacey" ("From landwhale")--an unattractive individual to the epitome of sexuality. They also include posts which show these 'Stacies' without makeup and accuse them of false advertising ("Stacies actually have). Although in a technologically-savvy generation that these false representations in magazines and forums can be discerned by the public eye, the truth remains undetected (Day 2017). And even worse--it results in the psychological torment (Day 2017) and in the case of Alek Minassian--the physical torment of women.

The literal and digital manipulation of women's forms by both the Ripper and the Incel Community can be fairly interpreted as a desperate attempt to relinquish authority over their bodies. When examining the structural misogyny of the Victorian era predating both the Ripper and the establishment of the Incel organization, there are two modes of male power which stand out: courtship rules and the economic class system. As previously highlighted, Victorian courtship was a necessary mechanism for ensuring the survival of women in their society; the heavy burden of its success placed squarely on their 'delicate' shoulders. This was accomplished by setting a code of conduct by which they were forced to abide in order to be triumphant in its endeavor. The females were to be of "passive voice" (Phegley 31, 2012) in the affair and yet paradoxically, they were also to be active in influencing its outcome by "putting on "little dresses", doing their "hair", and "batting their eyelashes" (Phegley 32, 2012). Essentially, it was the "ladies" who did "the courting" (Phegley 34)--not the men. When this is compared to Jack

the Ripper's hunt for women, there is a connection between this tension of their passive and active voice that is unfortunately ultimately silenced by 'his' hands. All of the Ripper's victims were also victims of the "working class" level of poverty (Walkowitz 546, 1982), that were conceivably forced to resort to prostitution as a way to make ends meet. Prostitution, as with marriage, requires a specific courtship; they must 'woo' the men into becoming their clientele. The Ripper targeted each of these women and therefore 'selected' them in a way that paralleled the tradition 19th conception of marriage--one where these women could, unfortunately, 'bat their eyelashes' no more.

The Incel Movement, as a result of the frustration with an unsuccessful male courtship, is one which would revel in the idea of it being the major responsibility of the female. The Victorian economic system was designed to force women into marriage; and hence, they could not afford to be too particular in picking a mate. Today's society, however, does boast more career opportunities for women--one which does seemingly thwart this potential--and yet, its unequal payment of the sexes (Smith 2017) calls into question whether this system is truly outdated. Even so, it is important to recognize the role a hierarchy of classes plays in both the violence of the Ripper and the violence of the Incels, given its significant impact on that era's courtship (Phegley 35, 2012). The Victorian state was undoubtedly "class society", with even gendered distinctions in status characteristics, such as gentility (Davidoff 88, 1979); however, East End London, the site of the Ripper murders, was also the symbolic site in the late 19th century of an obsessive wealthier classes' fear that its foundation was crumbling (Walkowitz 544, 1982). The entrance of the Ripper on the criminal scene marked the validation of these fears as it generated "sexual scandals" that transcended class distinction (Walkowitz 545, 1982). In this sense, the Ripper's actions were a call to mobilize against this developing rebellion that upset the necessary balance of the classes (Walkowitz 545, 1982).

Likewise, an Incel class system exists and it is one which is based on physical appearance. The Incels, who view themselves as biologically inferior in their appearance, acknowledge their status as the lowest class on this hierarchy (Beauchamp 2018). They are encouraged in their culture to "looksmax" or "statusmax"; either, improve their attractiveness or make more money to attract women (Tolentino 2018). At the top of this hierarchy are the "Chads" and "Stacies" who are the biologically superior

breed due to their good looks (Beauchamp 2018). All not unappealing enough to warrant the label 'Incel', but still too unappealing to earn the title of "Chad" or "Stacey" fall into the middle class. The demand, therefore, of the Incels for government-mandated sexual partners (Beauchamp 2018) is one which is derived from a backlash against the failure to acknowledge the reality of this aesthetic class hierarchy and the negative effects it has on its lowest ranking members.

## Concluding Remarks

In the end, the misogyny of the Victorian era and the misogyny of the modern age share a common structural framework: the core view that women are sexual property. The Jack the Ripper murders and the Incel-inspired murders of Alek Minassian are reflective of this underlying truth; a truth which is every bit as ugly as the violence it inspires. Both attacks, when historically framed in the political context of a growing apprehension about women's rights, can then logically be seen as reactionary; and it is this type of violence that unites them and calls us to pay heed to their warning—because while we may never be able to catch the Ripper, we do still have a chance at 'Ripping' out the roots of this injustice.

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