

SMART

Assessment Cover Sheet

Module Code: PHO3430

Assessment Title: *Sighlines: Independent Research*

You need to make it clear how you have used AI when submitting work.

Please answer the following questions:

I have used AI while undertaking my assignment in the following ways:

- To develop research questions on the topic – YES/NO
- To create an outline of the topic – YES/NO
- To explain concepts – YES/NO
- To support my use of language – YES/NO
- To summarise the following articles/resources:

Declaration:

I confirm that I have read the University's policy on using AI in coursework assignments and I have fully complied with its terms in producing this assignment.

Put an X here: _____X_____

How the male gaze, porn
and incel culture influence
violence against women

by
Eloise Kitty Smith

M00932743

PH03430

Sightlines: Independent Research

11th December 20252

Katie Lock

Middlesex University London

INTRO

In December 2025, the most recent data available on the internet estimates that globally, approximately 83,000 women were killed in 2024. Roughly, that's one every six minutes.

This study investigates the prevalence of the representation of women in media, the male gaze, consumption of porn and existence of incel culture as factors contributing to violence against women.

Through analysis of L. Mulvey and C. Brown, this study breaks down elements of the male gaze that assists violence against women. Alongside this critical analysis, the works of Yurie Nagashima, Lalla Essaydi and Anita Bartos will be considered as supporting contests and resistances against the dynamics of the male gaze.

The association between brutal crimes against women is reflective of their representation in porn. The harshness of which female sexuality is expressed co-existing with the depiction of pleasure expedites the belief that women are the property of men. These effects will be explored through evaluation of case studies by Plan International et al., Brem, M.J et al., and Bows. H & Herring.J. Alongside this overview, Melanie Manchot and Zanele Muholi's series of works create points of discussion surrounding the concept of porn and manipulation of control.

Incels encourage, celebrate and facilitate violence against women. Their belief is that women are stripping them of their entitlements as men. Through analysis of Whittaker et al. and Gosse et al. research into who incels are and why they believe their morals are justified will be broken down. Photographer Michaela Noroc shines awareness on important stories surrounding the core beliefs incels hold over women.

Online forums for communities such as incels prosper in relation to porn, the male gaze and media consumption due to how easily accessible it is and how secure it is to express oneself on the internet with no realistic repercussions.

In turn, these elements together manifest as increasing crime rates of violence against women, from a screen to the streets.

CHAPTER ONE

The Existence of the Male Gaze In Photography

In 'How the Personal Remains Political in Photography Today' theorist and lecturer Camilla Brown explains that 'photography as a medium, especially due to its use in a commercial context in advertising and magazines, has in fact done much to assist the subjugation and objectification of women's bodies.' (Brown, 2017) composing the idea that 'sex sells' as the root of the issue of the male gaze. In art, photography and many other mediums, women's bodies, especially when nude, are imprisoned into being beautiful yet voiceless objects to be judged by male spectators; the women themselves become invisible. Amongst the male gaze, we no longer see these subjects as human, let alone women with feelings, emotions and personalities. They are viewed as the substance of an image, the *thing* that makes it *interesting*. The inherently male patriarchal notion of the gaze means that women are no longer viewed as women, but simply as possessions there to assist an audience's voyeuristic pleasure. 'We are so familiar with this [nude women] as a subject of traditional and classical art that it can become invisible' (Brown, 2017).

In discussion of Mary Richardson's destruction of 'The Rockeby Venus' (a suffrage activist who slashed the painting with a knife in 1914 in response to the imprisonment of leader Emmeline Pankhurst), though Brown questions the ethics of destroying literal art, no matter for what cause, she says that 'a painting of a woman seemed to have more value assigned to it than a real woman.' (Brown, 2017). Arguing that however controversial this act may seem, the treatment of the woman who committed it and the cause of why she did it has become lost in the transcendence of violence.

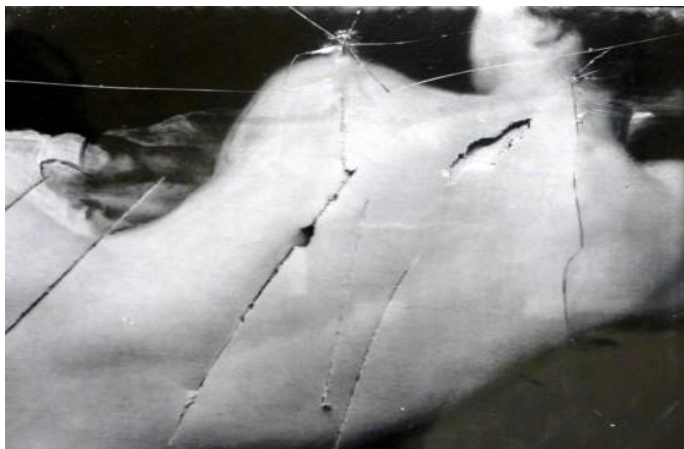


Figure 1: Velazquez, D. (1651), 'The Rockeby Venus', image of painting after vandalism, available at: <https://womanandhersphere.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/rokeby-venus-slashed-close-up-426x365.jpg>

Political activist group The Guerilla Girls use their platform to bring attention to the lack of representation of female artists, producing visual posters that attack institutions for lacking them and employing art that majority covers nude females as the subject. 'Do women have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum? Less than 5% of the artists in the Modern Art sections are women, but 85% of the nudes are female.' (The Guerilla Girls, 1989). The group formed in 1985 in response to the

Museum of Modern Art's (New York City) exhibition that featured a mere 13 women out of 169 artists. Through their hidden identities, eye capturing visuals and style of protest combined with sharp, truthful statistics of gender discrimination in art and photography claps back against the concept of a male gaze. Conducting photoshoots of themselves in the streets of New York City they attack racism, sexism and homophobia still prevalent in today's media, society and institutions. Using wit and humour they bring straight forward data and rhetorical questions to the surface of their battle, fighting for female artists to be heard in a world dominated by men.

Using self-portraiture as an expressive art is a way to be and feel in control of your physical, mental, emotional and spiritual self. Yurie Nagashima is a Japanese artist who describes her nude self-portraits as a radical feminist gesture. In 1993 she curated a series of black and white analog images of herself. Since then she has been publishing her life throughout adult-hood, pregnancy and mother-hood; documenting her body the way she wishes to be portrayed. Her work is raw, unabashed and deeply critical of Japanese cultural norms. 'I realised that the self-portraiture as a technique implies more Than just the subversion of the power of relationship between men and women. It also says that my body belongs to no one but me.' (Nagashima, 2020). By having creative freedom and direction throughout her self-portraiture shoots, Nagashima eradicates the idea of her body becoming or being a sexual object for men. She uses her creative in this way to give herself, and other women, a voice. A voice to correct sexual narratives that merges the personal and political, empowering her body.

During the 1990's in direct response to government censorship, nude women were a frequent topic of debate in Japanese photography. The publication of explicit nudes and depiction of genitalia and pubic hair was forbidden. It became daring and chic to push boundaries as far as people could, particularly male photographers, to simply hint at the presence of pubic hair on the female body. Realistically, it was simply highly profitable, mainstream soft porn in disguise as radical art stemming from freedom of expression.

In response, artists such as Nagashima use their own bodies and voices to decidedly 'proffer a middle finger to the stereotypes that continued to dictate the

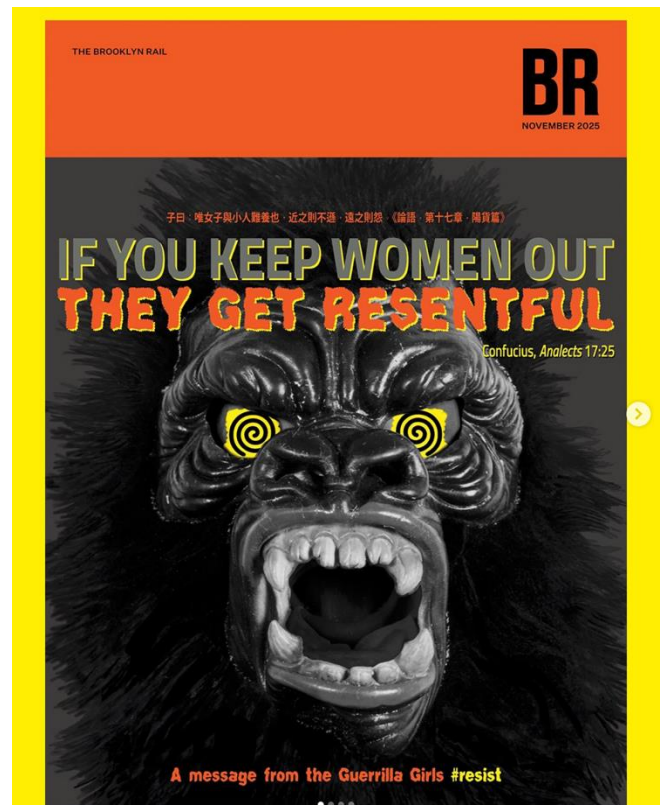


Figure 2: Guerilla Girls (2025), 'If You Keep Women Out They Will Get Resentful', @guerillagirls, available at: https://www.instagram.com/p/DQs_tn_kVe8/?hl=en&img_index=1

lives of women, both as subjects and makers of photography.’ (Martin, 2016). In her earliest series of work Nagashima takes on characterised personas, saturising sexual fetishes that were prevalent in Japanese media and culture. I’ve been drawn to this image due to the visuals; almost ‘cheap’ looking accessories that make the photo what it is- a blunt confrontation of traditional gender expectations. This striking photograph of Nagashima touching herself as she veils her body in pink



Figure 3: Nagashima. Y (1993), *Self-Portrait*, Available at: <https://research-ebsco.com.ezproxy.mdx.ac.uk/c/bm42on/viewer/pdf/qneq3arvhv>

feathers is alluring yet powerful. To me, at first, it seems luxurious, expensive. Looking more closely at herself and expression, I see how she is actively *choosing* to show us her control over the image. She adopts a façade that allows her camera to envelop her into a different world- actively confessing and exposing this “tacky” and “quick” shot at the male gaze.

The harsh bright flash illuminates her skin, as she seems enveloped in a trance, looking away from us and veering from her classic confrontational stare. She adopts all the components of a nude embodying the male gaze, carefully constructing the matter to emphasise herself as the subject, not the object. By revealing herself as this made up “pink haired sex bomb” she, and many other female

photographers grappling with the same war against the gaze; ‘dares to confront the societal representation of their own desires, their bodies and their selves.’ (Martin, 2016).

Another female photographer who subtly attacks the, (specifically Western) male gaze is Lalla Essaydi. Her female models appear surrounded by and dressed in traditional orientalism, reclaiming their inherent beauty of Islamic Arab culture. Her series ‘*Converging Territories*’ (2003) is a beautifully curated response to how Arab women are conventionally depicted by male European artists. The photographs evoke formal and conceptual ideas of orientalism painting, not only are the subjects surrounded by the art, it’s also being worn on fabric and as henna on the skin. She takes matter that’s important to her culture to create absorbing and arresting imagery adopting her own narrative. As she explains ‘I want the viewer to become aware of Orientalism as a projection of the sexual fantasies of Western male artists, in other words, as a voyeuristic tradition, which involves peering into- and distorting- the private space.’ (Essaydi, no date).

A theorist who also advocates the male gaze as a derivative of voyeurism is Laura Mulvey in her essay ‘*Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*’ (1975). Mulvey describes



Figure 4: Essaydi. L (2009), *Converging Territories* #24, Available at: <http://lallaessaydi.com/3.html>

the male gaze as scopophilic; the practice and pleasure of looking at sexual and or erotic imagery. Rooted in psychoanalytic theory, the components of scopophilia and voyeurism making up the male gaze 'ignites sexual politics' (Mulvey, 1975). Mulvey goes on to analyse 'The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure which is styled accordingly' (Mulvey, 1975) illustrating the voyeuristic and fetishistic mechanisms of the gaze. This justifies that male viewers tend to feel empowered by overly sexual depictions of women; cause and affect is an unattainable ideal created to circumvent threat and power.

Aneta Bartos focuses her photography on the erotic and the female gaze. Her series '*4 Sale*' (2010) depicts particularly sexual and erotic scenes, where the subjects don't ever actively engage with the camera. In fact, the camera becomes a part of the image; we as a viewer become the camera. Therefore, it turns into something that simply observes the scene before us, rather than acting as an extension, if you will, of the portraits.



Figure 5: Bartos. A, (2010), *4 Sale*, available at: <https://www.anetabartos.com/4-sale>



Figure 6: Bartos. A, (2010), *4 Sale*, available at: <https://www.anetabartos.com/4-sale>

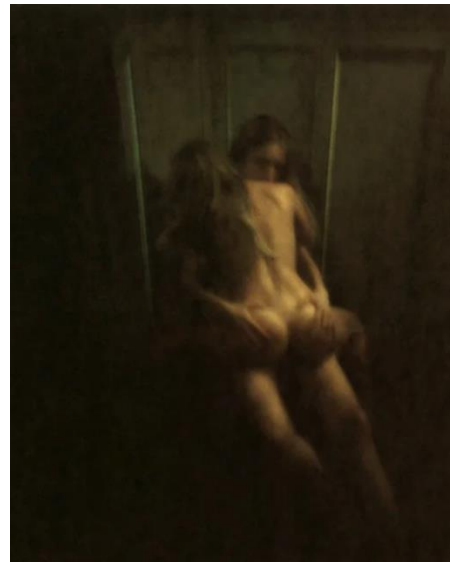


Figure 7: Bartos. A, (2010), *4 Sale*, available at: <https://www.anetabartos.com/4-sale>

Voyeurism in her work materialises as a much deeper connective than its principle definition. The characteristics of voyeurism rely on an unawareness and element of secrecy, however Bartos invites us to freely observe these scenes she has depicted, creating an open-ended narrative for the viewer to decide upon themselves. '*4 Sale*' was largely inspired and informed by the myths of ancient polymorphous sexuality and

ritualistic practices. (Polymorphous sexuality suggests all humans possess an innate and flexible compass for distinct and varied sexual expression that is often repressed by societal pressure). Through observation of her work, we can identify that the spiritual self and physical body are reconciled as one between the hauntingly intimate portrayals illustrated as dark and shadowy prints. I wanted to specifically draw in on **Figure 6**. Personally, I can feel the relaxed intimacy radiating from the subjects as the soft transaction between them is juxtaposed with the highly eroticised happenings.

The simple action of the subject, who is made semi-visible to us, having her eyes closed only accentuates her pleasure, enjoyment and stillness. Paired with their positioning, it only highlights the role of relaxed submission vs. dominance, amplifying the richness of each layer of the still. It becomes subtly inconspicuous whether it's a meticulously constructed image or simply something that was already happening, the idea of it being a staged photoshoot becomes lost in the pre-eminence of the camera being an extension of the viewers eyes. In other words, it's almost as if we have 'walked in' on this, or are actively watching it happen, as was Bartos' purpose: to fabricate her own gaze rather than feed into a pre-existing one such as the male gaze.

'My aim is to generate a self-sufficient, sexually and dangerously charged world of females, completely independent of men and their gaze' (Bartos, no date).

There has and will always be an undeniable connection between sexuality and human spirit; pursuing a deeper meaning of human existence. The sepia colours combined with the soft, painterly focus hones-in on this idea of sex and spiritual connection.

Charlotte Jansen, the author of *'Girl on Girl' (2017)* asks the reader; 'given the social implications bound to the act of photography today, is using the female body an effective model for subverting patriarchal paradigms in art?' (Jansen, 2017). My answer is yes. The toxic visual grammar of the male gaze is so prevalent through popularity of commodities such as social media and porn.

Porn is a staged concept that is fabricated using deceptive content; yet this tends not to concern those that consume it, evidently. Bartos however, though to the typical voyeuristic eye rooting from a male gaze her images may look like those of erotic porn, in actuality, she focuses on the female form with and in an empowering context. By situating us subjectively, she offers the spectator an active role in her photographs; they become ambivalent- something that does not fit a typical or definitive interpretation.

CHAPTER TWO

The Depiction and Representation of Women and Pleasure In Porn In Relation to Real World Violence



Figure 8: The Original 'Turin Erotic Papyrus' as preserved (1150), as fabric stains/carvings, Museum of Turin, Italy, available at: <https://www.amusingplanet.com/2020/11/the-turin-erotic-papyrus.html>

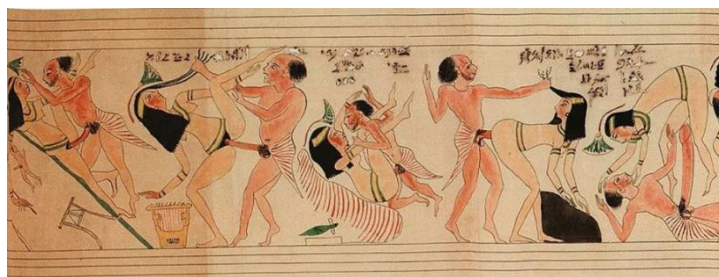


Figure 9: Recreated scenes from the 'Turin Erotic Papyrus' (1150), as drawings, Museum of Turin, Italy, available at: <https://www.amusingplanet.com/2020/11/the-turin-erotic-papyrus.html>

Porn is as old as human civilisation. Dating as far back as circa 1150, preserved remnants of 'Turin Erotic Papyrus', a form of Ancient Egyptian erotic art consisting of prehistoric cave carvings and fabric stains, now exists as historical artefacts. The first pornographic films were introduced in France in the 1800's, and hard-core sex films (also known as "stag films") circulated Hollywood in the late 1980's, revolutionising the creation and distribution of porn.

Porn is so easily accessible; with approximately over four million websites existing, the surge of Only Fans and promotional material so blatantly under our noses on social media. 30% of all internet traffic is porn related, the entire concept translates as a systematic oppression created by society, attacking women. There is certainly an association between the brutality of crimes committed against women and the harshness in which they are depicted and represented in porn and media.

A study conducted by Plan International et al. '*Online Abuse... What's the Issue?*' (no date) to explore the effects of porn on violence against women suggests that viewing porn compounds targeted violence. '80% of the most visited [porn] sites contained aggressive acts directed towards women' (Plan International UK et al, no date) usually coinciding with theirs, and the perpetrator's (typically male) pleasure. Porn reinforces the idea that women are pleased from being acted violently upon; including elements of choking, spanking, rough, harsh sex and sexual acts inflicted upon them influencing the processing of young, and older, brains. They become indoctrinated to assume that violence and pain must equally coincide with pleasure; eroticising the domination of men and subordination of women. Furthermore, they also claim '[porn] websites for facilitating prostitution as well as social media pages that condone rape' (Plan International et al, no date). Digital spaces are used by anti feminists and misogynist groups to express their hate of women, and porn allows this to continue. It diminishes women, humiliates them, and strips them of their right

to pleasure and their own bodies. It warps societies and men's perception and understanding of female pleasure, anatomy, intimacy and sex in general.

Melanie Manchot's *'Gestures of Demarcation'* (2001) hovers between the fine lines of aggression and power versus trust and complicity. She asked people to anonymously pull and stretch her skin while she stands nude in her five large-scale, panoramic colour landscapes, exploring the physical limits and boundaries of her body. Referring to Brown's essay, she explains how trusting we as viewers are of photography: 'The danger is that photography is seen as real, truthful and honest... We are surrounded by manipulated photographic images, often of very young women's bodies' (Brown, 2017). Typically, the manipulation of images, and how they are perceived, is the root of the issues, rather than the literal images themselves. Therefore; contributing to the male gaze and supporting violence against women both directly and indirectly (consciously and unconsciously). The supporting subjects' choices translate to the very tension that is central to the composition of the images. The manner in which they actively and directly *choose* to pinch, pull and stretch at Manchot's delicate, bare skin coincidentally effects the way we as a viewer observe and perceive the images. The images radiate a battle between power and humiliation on each behalf, making it difficult and confusing to translate them to what they truly mean. In an interview in 2015, Manchot explains that once the viewer understands that she herself has asked someone to pull at her skin; 'does the concept of requesting that then become the true act of aggression?' (Manchot, 2015). By doing this she opens the discourse of the images with simple yet transcending manipulation, triggering an immediate and visceral impact on which gaze the photographs are embedded in to.

Figure 10: Manchot. *M*,
Gestures of Demarcation
(2001), available at:
<https://www.melaniemancho.net/works/gestures-of-demarcation>

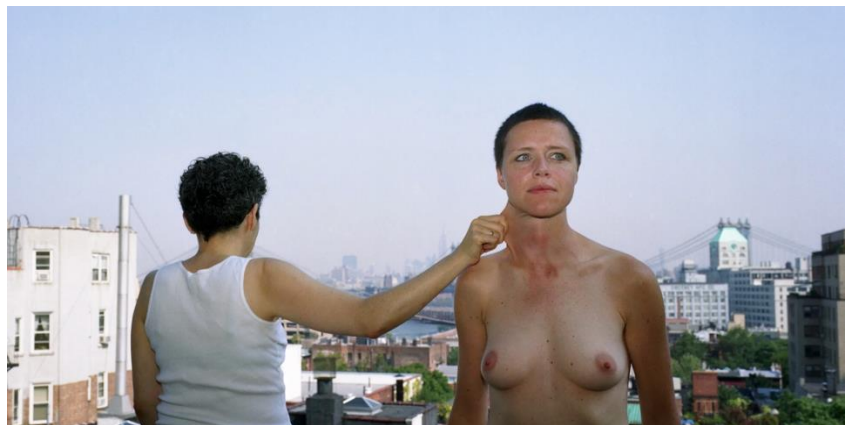


Figure 11: Melanie
Manchot, *Gestures of
Demarcation* (2001),
<https://www.melaniemancho.net/works/gestures-of-demarcation>

Real life data recorded by Brem. M.J et al: *‘Problematic pornography use and physical and sexual intimate partner violence...’* (2018) from women who had been abused by their intimate partners revealed that there was a positive correlation between that partners’ pornography use and acts of sexual violence. ‘Data collected from samples of service-seeking women who were abused by a romantic partner revealed a positive association between women’s reports of their intimate partner’s pornography use and women’s sexual IPV [intimate partner violence], rape and stalking victimisation’ (Brem et al, 2018). However trusting we should find this information, it does not account for extreme excessive use (addiction), substance abuse and mental health complications. Though these are entirely invalid “excuses”, in any studies they must be considered factors as individuals must be held accountable for their own specific issues relating to their porn use and violent natures with intimate partners and other women.

Exhibited work by Zanele Muholi, a gay South African photographer, explores the violence that LGBTI people face regularly. Muholi is a visual activist, her 2006 project *‘Faces and Phases’* is a procured work of over 250 portraits of the LGBTI community. Brutal violence, corrective rape and murder are a daily reality for her community, she raises these failures against her people through her imagery and style. Each portrait represents a struggle and a triumph, but together; they appear as a powerful, collective force. ‘It is about claiming the spaces, taking back power, owning our voices and ourselves and our bodies, without fear of being judged. Saying that we are here without fear of being displaced’ (Muholi, 2015). Throughout her photography we see the humanity common to all women; irrespective of gender sexuality or race. Singular subjects tend to be captured looking directly at the camera, challenging the viewer to hold their gaze. These images are the accompanying testimonies from a growing archive of a community of people who are risking their lives by simply living authentically in the face of oppression and discrimination that has been created by concepts such as the male gaze and over sexualisation of women in porn and media. In response, Muholi offers an essence of love and intimacy in her images. She extends these women representation and a voice, that they other wise would not have. As a woman who is a part of this community, I can only begin to understand how many men, treat us and view us. They tend to think that WLW relationships are something desirable and “sexy”, when all it is is someone’s reality, someone’s life.



Figure 12: Muholi. Z (2007), Katlego Mashiloane and Nosipho Lavuta, Ext. 2, Lakeside, Johannesburg, Available at: <https://aperture.org/editorial/magazine-zanele-muholis-faces-phases/>

Here, the women aren't even looking at the camera, completely focused on something else, holding each other and laughing together. In my eyes, I interpret the camera to be something quite intrusive; the idea that they have so many looming opinions and judgements being held over them and their relationship, and yet they can merely look away from it all, focusing on each other and what they have together, with no fear. 'Art needs to be political- or let me say that my art is political. It's not for show. It's not for play.' (Muholi, 2015)

Throughout this essay I have read into real life data, here is an example where the law hasn't protected vulnerable woman.

Grace Millance was killed in 2018. Her killer claimed her death as accidental as she had asked to be strangled during sex. He was eventually convicted of murder. It was found, after making an effort to defend his actions, that he had attempted to bury Millane's body and hidden evidence of her death. Immediately after murdering her, he watched pornography and even took intimate "trophy" photographs of her dead body.

Helen* met a man through a dating app. Prior to their meeting, they had discussed in a consensual context their sexual kinks, and as an extremely important note - a "safe" word/stop signal. He had suddenly become extremely violent during sex; kicking her, beating her with objects, tying her up with tape. He ignored her stop signals which they had agreed to use. He raped her repeatedly. She went into shock leading to a dissociative state. Crown Prosecution Services would not prosecute; claiming that there was 'no proof of lack of consent for a rape charge' (Centre for Women's Justice, 2022). They couldn't charge for assault either, despite the Court of Appeal previously claiming that 'in circumstances when serious injuries are caused for sexual gratification there is no need to prove lack of consent' (Centre for Women's Justice, 2022).

From Grace Millance's case and many other similar ones; (it led to analysing 60+ other cases where men had argued that consensual sex had led to a woman's death), developments on a Domestic Abuse Bill were approved. This Bill included a ban on a "rough sex gone wrong" defence, and an aim to target revenge porn.

'Getting Away With Murder? A Review of the 'Rough Sex Defence' A study conducted by Hannah Bows and Jonathan Herring (2020) investigated several high-profile murders of women killed during alleged consensual sex "gone wrong". Such cases has led to widespread calls for reform to prevent the use of vindication termed "rough sex defence". The Domestic Abuse Bill (2020) proposed; 'a statutory prohibition of consent as a defence to actual bodily or more serious harm, including death and introducing additional scrutiny in charging decisions by requiring the Director of Public Prosecutions to authorise charges of manslaughter (rather than murder) in cases involving rough sex/sadomasochism' (Bows and Herring, 2020). After analysing the case of Grace Millance, this study reported on the push for this bill to be passed.

*(Helen is not victim's real name)

Data in the study that induced the bill is shocking; 'In the UK, $\frac{3}{4}$ of victims of domestic killings (typically referred to as domestic homicides) are women' (Bows and Herring, 2020), that is equal to 2.5 women each week. It is a known fact, and constantly increasing in concern, that violence against women is, globally, one of the biggest leading and preventable contributors to death and illness for women aged 18-44 today.

Activism from campaign groups such as We Can't Consent To This (WCCTT) aided the bills' authorisation. '**We Can't Consent To This** was a response to the increasing numbers of women and girls killed and injured in violence that is claimed to be consensual, and a culture of normalisation of violence against women.' (WCCTT, 2018).

As I'm writing this essay, I opened TikTok to a Daily Mail post. On Friday 21st of November 2025 it was announced that South Africa has 'shut down'; declaring violence against women as a national disaster. The campaign against it has been pushed across global feeds, with people all over the world joining protest by doing things as simple as turning their profile pictures purple. 'Today, women across South Africa aren't going to work, they aren't going to school, and they aren't spending money. They're wearing black in mourning, and at midday they lie down for 15 minutes to honour the 15 women killed everyday in their country.' (Daily Mail, 2025).

CHAPTER THREE

Incel culture's Reflection on Violence Against Women, Focusing on Ideology and Language

Incels (involuntary celibates) are made up of a subculture community of men who forge a sense of identity around their perceived inability to form romantic or sexual relationships. Operating almost exclusively online, the origins stem from the men's right movement that developed in the second half of the twentieth century. They claim that feminism has placed them in a state of crisis. These self-proclaimed misogynists predominantly communicate via anonymous and pseudonymous online forums such as "4Chan" and "incel.is" (the largest recorded today, with "incel.is" having over 20,000 registered users and over 12 million collectively written posts). They encourage, celebrate, and facilitate violence against women. Rape is normalised in their frequently active chat rooms, promoting sexual and physical violence against women. Research indicates they truly believe feminism and the fight for equal rights has led to a loss of male dominance and has unfairly prevented men from their entitled access to women's bodies.

'Predicting harm among incels: The roles of mental health, ideological belief and social networking' a study by Whittaker. J, Costello. W, and Thomas. A.G (2024) analyses *who* incels are among us.

It was found that they do identify feminists as their primary enemy. With a sample size of 561, being the largest study of incels to date, it's clear that the majority have declining mental health; 'incels typically display extremely poor mental health, with high incidences of depression and suicidal ideation' (Whittaker et al, 2024). The research reflects that it's unclear whether their beliefs are a cause of this or vice versa, suggesting that either way they come hand-in-hand as a range of extraneous variables have similar cause and effects on corresponding beliefs about the world. Their own blinding victimisation as 'participants perceived high levels of victim hood, anger and misogyny' (Whittaker et al, 2024) in their eyes allows them to feel this way, justifying their processes of thought and action. Furthermore, in terms of *who* incels are and the profile they fit, it was found in this study of UK and US participants, they were 'typically in their mid-twenties, heterosexual, and childless... with 42% self-identifying as a person of colour [and] most participants considered themselves from a middle class or lower- middle class background' (Whittaker et al 2024). Proving that incels generally do not fit just one stereotype or standard, instead they include a ranged mixture of different men.

Romanian photographer Mihaela Noroc produced a series of work: *'The Atlas of Beauty'* (2013-2025) as a collection of portraits of women around the world. Overall, she has visited over 100 countries for this ongoing project, encouraging and celebrating the diversity. Her idea of beauty is personal, and her portraits promote the idea that real beauty holds no bounds. In an interview with Angela Nicholson in 2025, she explains her take on beauty; 'When I started photographing women around the world, I saw that beauty is so much more



Figure 10: Noroc. M (2013), *The Atlas of Beauty*, Marzieh, available at:
<https://www.theatlasofbeauty.com>

interesting, and deep, and complex, and we are not exposed enough to these types of images'. (Noroc, 2025) The Atlas of Beauty is openly a visual examination of physical appearance, defying stereotypes of cultural beauty that has inherently branched from anthropological photography and mass media coverage. Here, Marzieh is captured after surviving an acid attack in her home-town in Isfahan, Iran. Eight years ago, she was driving when two men on a motorcycle came close to her car and threw acid on her face. Other similar circumstances had occurred in the same year, and in not one instance were the perpetrators caught, even when the prominence of CCTV was available. The acts were speculated to be directed at women who were not wearing conservative outfits. Noroc's work is a beautifully constructed accumulation of portraits of thousands of women, a representation of culture and capability. Organisations such as forums of Incels typically make women out to be useless, other than as

sexual objects to pleasure men. Works like the Atlas of Beauty' shines light on women, especially targeted women, such as Marzieh. 'Dear Marzieh, incredible women like you are the reason I'm doing this project. Thank you so much for showing me the purest form of beauty.' (Noroc, no date).

Another photographer who indirectly challenges the beliefs that individuals such as Incels hold over women is Iiu Susiraja. In an obviously different way to Noroc, Susiraja uses self-portraiture to create her own narrative with her imagery. Since 2007, she has been creating photos in which she manipulates her body, using everyday household objects and foods to fabricate an absurd and surreal affect. Her photography focuses on performative engagement with the contours and orifices of her own body as she is in constant control of how she frames and articulates her images. Making direct eye contact with the camera, viewer and herself, she attacks concepts such as the male gaze, pornography, editorial fashion photography and general audience opinions and perceptions. Writer and editor Reba Maybury described; 'Iiu Susiraja's self-portraiture is shocking, not because this provocation exists within the



Figure 11: Susiraja. I (2009), *Speed Race*,
<https://iioususiraja.com/photography/#lg=1&slide=7>

sensational, but rather because it explores areas of vulnerability, empowerment, intimacy, and mundanity in quite a unique way.' (Maybury, 2016). She invites the audience to laugh, and, honestly, at first, I felt almost uncomfortable looking at these images. However, as an artistic viewer, rather than the general audience, I understood that she is generating a raw space in which to consider issues of beauty standards and taboos surrounding fitness, accessibility, sexuality and one's relationship with oneself.

Kyle Clifford, a 26-year-old crossbow killer from Hertfordshire was found guilty of raping and murdering Louise Hunt, and murdering Carol and Hannah Hunt. His actions were carried out two weeks after Louise ended their 18-month relationship. Evidence found that he had watched Andrew Tate videos just hours before committing the attack. His violence was fueled by misogyny NEWWORD by a controversial personality promoting harmful online content that transformed into physical violence.

Ashely Noelle Azarga was murdered in 2020 by a 17-year-old incel in Toronto. He pleaded guilty to murder and attempted murder. The weapon he used, a machete, was inscribed with incel ideology across the blade. He was sentenced to life for terrorism.

In comparison, a study that analysed the *findings* on “*incel.is*”; rather than the roles of individual factors of behavior is ‘*Stochastic Gender-Based Violence: How Incels Justify and Encourage Sexualised Violence Against Women*’ by Gosse. M, Halpin. M and Maguire. F (2024). The findings are based on qualitative analyses of 22,060 comments made on the platform, and the three main results suggested that ‘(1) incel justifications of sexualised violence are tied to their perception of gender relations, (2) incels justify sexual assault as a form of revenge for their incel status and (3) incels misuse science to argue that women actually enjoy sexual assault.’(Gosse et al, 2024).

‘Incels appropriate scientific studies in genetics and evolutionary psychology to argue that women enjoy and desire sexual assault’ (Gosse et al, 2024). Evidence in this study suggests that their arguments derive from ‘cavemen’, and how men are naturally dominant, whereas women have an instinct engraved in them due to genetics and natural history. They even go as far as proposing arguments for the slave trade - that when (black women specifically) were physically punished their “duties” were performed or delivered much quicker and at a “better standard”.

Another shocking, but seemingly unsurprising discovery amongst the research I have raised from this study is how many times the word “rape” was discussed amongst users. ‘5,151 (35.6%) users used variations of the term “rape”, while these terms appeared in more than 35,000 threads and 61,000 comments between November 7th 2017 and May 3rd, 2014’. (Gosse et al, 2024). Between six months over ¼ of all users on “*ncel.is*” discussed the idea of rape freely amongst each other, as if it was completely normal. In comparison; as part of the initial qualitative analysis of 22,060 comments, there was only one singular instance where a user explicitly opposed sexual violence. Considering this, strangely, a genuine fear that some incels perceive

about women is that they claim false rape accusations. After reading a book; ‘No One Wants To See Your Dick’ by Jess Davies, for personal use, and reaching out to her via TikTok, I found out that ‘Channel 4 Fact Check found men were more likely to be raped themselves than be falsely accused’ (Davies, 2025, pg 4).

Table 1. Frequency of Use of Sexualized Violence Terminology on Incels.is.

Term	Number of users (%)	Number of threads (%)	Number of comments (%)
Rape (e.g., Rape[s][ed][ing])	5151 (35.60%)	35,829 (11.89%)	61,981 (0.99%)
Sex slave (e.g., Sex slaves, Sexual slavery)	877 (6.06%)	1619 (0.54%)	1951 (0.03%)
Sexual assault (e.g., Sexual assault[s][ed], Sexually assault[ed][ing])	956 (6.61%)	1699 (0.56%)	2063 (0.03%)

Note. Data collected between 7 November 2017 and 3 May 2024 (6,266,921 searched comments in 301,330 threads).

Figure 12: Gosse et al 2024, ‘Stochastic Gender-Based Violence: How InCels justify and encourage sexualised violence against women’, Table showing : ‘Frequency of use of Sexualised Violence Terminology on Incels.is’, available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/10778012241279816>

After further analysis of comments using specific triggering terminology, they found a lot of specifically dehumanising labels used for women amongst their own discussion and most inner circles. Personally, I had never heard of many of the terms before reading about them, proving, that as expected, amongst them they have their – almost- own language and way of speaking. Specific terminology that they use is widely known amongst them, and instead of using typical and traditional terms, they abuse derogative and violent language to amplify their points. ‘We observed numerous instances wherein incels referred to women as “toilets”, “cum buckets”, “holes”, “sluts”, “whores”.’ (Gosse et al, 2024). When observing and reading this information, I can easily notice how sexualised these terms are. Every one of them refers to women being an objectifiable thing that is simply “fuckable”. Also, I have discovered through this research that women are frequently referred to as “roasties”, which in turn is a misogynistic slur attached to the false belief that a woman’s labia changes in shape in relation to her number of sexual partners. When discussing women, they simply cannot use the word “woman”, incels use these harsh terms that relate to the look of female genitalia and words that are representative of violent and harsh sexual demeanours.

As mentioned previously, a term I came across which I did not recognise was “foid”. It is one of the most popular terms deployed against women amongst incels. “Foid”- as in short for “female android” is used to assign a woman to being sub-human. It is frequently used to dehumanise women and mark them as an object and/or possession, showing that incels have a particularly specific warped way of viewing women as property, so much so that it has become an internalised genuine belief for them.

In this study, I came across a responding comment that was recorded after someone had shared their story of being romantically rejected; 'User One states: "You deserve [to be rejected] for being naïve enough to be led on in the first place, foid[s] are all degenerates and cannot be trusted you shouldn[']t even acknowledge them as human beings. If you want her, rape her. Otherwise cut contact.'" (Gosse et al, 2024). I had to leave my computer and call my mother in tears after reading that; not to mention the grammatical errors.

CONCLUSION

Overly sexualised images of women are performative for, and reflect the toxic visual grammar of the male gaze. The representation of women in media permits and forms as and into growing violent views and behavior where women are no longer seen as human. They become objects to be spectated and judged under a voyeuristic veil to fit neatly into a male gaze. As of recently, many female photographers are reclaiming themselves, and other females, as the subject of photography not the object. By adopting their own gaze and giving the viewer an active role within photography, they are beginning to over-power the notion of a male gaze.

The destruction of the '*Rockeby Venus*' became, and still is, a headlining historical event recognised as a violent crime committed. Even the treatment of women in the news is reflective of the male gaze; you are most likely to hear about a woman acting violently than a woman acted violently upon.

The expenditure of porn is a distributor of twisted standards that many men hold over women and girls; and so often it manifests as hatred and violence against them. Consuming such content, specifically that reflecting violent conduct and attitude targeting women (whilst also reflecting pleasure), has clear effects on physical violence.

Incels believe that women benefit from the patriarchy and that the progression of feminism is and will overthrow their power and authority. They victimise themselves as a minority who are marginalised and targeted; in reality the existence of the patriarchy, and as a result: the male gaze and porn, permits them to think and behave the way they do.

These elements that all exist as visual culture in photography and media each contribute tremendously to real world violence targeted against women.

Grace Millane, Louise, Carol and Hannah Hunt, Marzieh, Ashley Noelle Arzaga.

These are just a few of the names I came across in my research.

But someone had to.

Did you know their names?

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- About web page – ‘*We Can’t Consent To This*’ (2025)

Available at:

<https://wecantconsenttothis.uk/aboutus>

- Adams. L (2025) ‘*Kyle Clifford murders spark concerns over Andrew Tate content.*’

BBC News Hertfordshire

Available at:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c5yr2yg58zjo>

- Bartos. A (no date), INTERVIEW

Available at:

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/546d2bb2e4b07045cfc546cd/t/548e2318e4b06f8a5b818dab/1418601240712/bartos.destrictedrevue.pdf>

- Bartos. A, ‘*4 Sale*’ (no date)

Available at:

<http://www.anetabartos.com/4-sale>

- Bows. H and Herring. J (2020) ‘*Getting away with murder?*

A review of the “Rough Sex Defence”, The Journal of Criminal Law, 84(6), pp. 525-538

Available at:

<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6942232/#ABS1>

- Brem. M.J et al (2018), ‘*Problematic pornography use and physical and sexual intimate partner violence perpetration among men in batterer intervention programmes*’, *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 36(11-12), pp. NP6085-NP6105

Available at:

<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6942232/#ABS1>

- Brown. C, (2017), ‘*How the Personal Remains Political Photography Today*’, *Format 2015*

Available at:

<https://repository.mdx.ac.uk/item/87yv2>

- CBC (2023) ‘*Incel-Inspired Toronto massage parlour murder was act of terror, judge rules*’, *CBC*

Available at:

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/incele-toronto-massage-killing-terrorism-1.6867177>

- Daily Mail (2025) 'South Africa has just declared violence against women a national disaster.' [@dailymail]
Available at:
<https://www.tiktok.com/@dailymail/video/7575273628359478542?q=daily%20mail%20south%20africa&t=1765341303626>
- Davies. J (2025) 'No One Wants To See Your Dick', London, Headline Publishing Group Limited, pg 4
- Gosse. M, Halpin. M, and Maguire. F (2024) 'Stochastic Gender-Based Violence: How InCels justify and encourage sexualised violence against women', *Violence Against Women*, 31(12-13), pp 3216-3288
Available at:
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/10778012241279816>
- Jansen. C (2017) 'Girl On Girl, Art and Photography In the Age of the Female Gaze', London, Laurence King Publishing, pg 124-127
- Jones. C (2021) 'Grace Millane: Family welcome ban on "rough sex" murder Defence', BBC news Essex
Available at:
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-essex-56944541>
- Laamanen. I (2018) 'Finnish Cultural Institute in New York'
Available at:
<https://fciny.org/residency/iu-susiraja>
- Mainwood. N (2022) '"Rough Sex" defence – Centre for Women's Justice'
Available at:
<https://www.centreforwomensjustice.org.uk/case-studies/2022/11/29/rough-sex-defence>
- Martin. L (2020) ApertureDigital, 'How Yurie Nagashima's Self-Portraits Interrogate the Male Gaze'
Available at:
<https://aperture.org/interviews/how-yurie-nagashimas-self-portraits-male-gaze/>
- Mulvey, L., (1975) 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen*, Volume 16, Issue 3, Autumn 1975, Pages 6–18,
Available at:
<https://www.amherst.edu/system/files/media/1021/Laura%20Mulvey%2C%20Visual%20Pleasure.pdf>

○ Nagashima. Y (2016) ApertureDigital

Available at:

<https://archive.aperture.org/article/2016/4/4/yurie-nagashima>

○ Nicholson. A (2025) '*Mihaela Noroc: Changing the Way We See Beauty Through Photography*'

Available at:

<https://www.sheclicks.net/podcast/mihaela-noroc>

○ Noroc. M, Home (no date), '*The Atlas of Beauty*'

Available at:

<https://www.theatlasofbeauty.com/?pgid=kzbarb62-8ec4817d-09a3-459d-a622-9e4ad2e7012e>

○ Plan International et al. (no date), '*Online Abuse – the use of the digital world to perpetrate violence against women and girls, Online Abuse – What's the Issue?*'

Available at:

<https://welshwomensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Online-Abuse-The-use-of-the-digital-world-to-perpetrate-violence-against-women-and-girls.pdf>

○ Willis. D (2025) ApertureDigital, '*Zanele Muholi's Faces & Phases.*'

Available at:

<https://aperture.org/editorial/magazine-zanele-muholis-faces-phases/>.

○ Wittaker. J, Costello. W, and Thomas. A.G (2024) Independent Report: '*Predicting harm among incels (involuntary celibates): the roles of mental health, ideological belief and social networking*' (accessible)

Available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/predicting-harm-among-incels-involuntary-celibates/predicting-harm-among-incels-involuntary-celibates-the-roles-of-mental-health-ideological-belief-and-social-networking-accessible>