

## **GENDER IDENTITIES IN THE STORM: EMBODYING OPPRESSION OR IDIOM OF RESISTANCE?**

Discussant:

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**Background:** Since the Industrial Revolution, gender has been a key category to support the growth of western societies. According to social sex roles, men were responsible for the production of wealth in the public sphere and women were dedicated to reproduction in the private realm. The dichotomous division between masculinity and femininity, justified by biological sexual differences, powerfully shapes behaviours, emotions and the subject's bodily experiences. This social gender prescription (re)produces social inequalities and cognitive bias that are a source of oppression and social polarisation which can lead to violence and resistances through which gender is reinvented.

**Aim:** This symposium aims to interrogate the role played by the traditional concept of gender and the resistance to the associated oppression in the (re)production of social polarization leading to violent extremism or social transformation.

**Method:** This symposium is based on qualitative research projects which interrogate gender on a macro and micro sociological levels and under three specific perspectives: international public policy, clinical intervention and social and legal response.

**Results:** The three proposed communications converge in showing how mainstream conceptualization of gender produces identity construction which may generate exclusion and oppress and marginalize certain bodies. The results thus suggest that gender can be understood as an embodied oppression. However, individuals can subvert this oppression by questioning, challenging, and resisting the construct. These changes may be experienced as threatening and evoke violent reactions or lead to a creative (re)definition of gender relations.

**Discussions|Implications:** Gender has to be (re)conceptualized beyond its dichotomous form to avoid discrimination and marginalization of subjects who are constrained and oppressed by its present social operationalization. Social transformations around gender identities are a source of social turmoil. They may ultimately help to protect the rights and wellbeing of many and transform our perceptions of therapeutic and interpersonal relationships.

### **Learning Objectives**

At the conclusion of this presentation, participants will be able to:

1. Recognize that gender can be used as an idiom of resistance to cope with its embodied oppression form.
2. Critique the mainstream notion of gender when used in public policies, clinical intervention and interpersonal relationships.

## **“We are not terrorists, we are ugly”: Ugliness as the core of the “true” masculine Incel identity**

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**Background:** “Incel” stands for involuntary celibate and is used to describe the members of an online community originally created with the goal of supporting individuals experiencing considerable difficulty in developing personal and romantic relationships. Since 2014, an anti-feminist, misogynistic branch has been associated with the deaths of 24 individuals. As a result of such incidents, this branch is considered a terrorist organization and starting to be treated as such in the criminal justice systems of Canada and the UK. However, members of others branches openly condemned those tragic events and reject the terrorist label. They do not recognize their authors as members of the Incel community on the basis of their physical appearance: they were not enough ugly to be one.

**Aim:** This communication shows the complexity of Incel communities and illustrates how some members use the presumed ugliness of their body to (re)construct the “true” Incel identity.

**Method:** To understand how Incel members position themselves in relationship to the terrorist label and how they conceive the Incel identity, we use topic modeling analysis to investigate how Incels discuss those themes within forum discussions on Reddit.

**Results:** Among those Incels participating in discussion forums, ugliness is the core of the Incel identity. Ugliness is used 1) to distinguish and separate themselves from the authors of tragic attacks and the terrorist label 2) as a coping strategy for their involuntary celibate status 3) feed a dystopian vision that causes anxiety and personal violence.

**Discussion:** The terrorist label has to be used with caution. Its associated sensationalism can obscure the deep inner pain incel individuals experience. In order to inform intervention strategies, the complex nature of this community needs to be unpacked and the amalgamation of concepts regarding sexuality, gender, distress, mental health, identity, personal and interpersonal violence needs to be disentangled.

### Full List of Authors

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### Learning Objectives

At the conclusion of this presentation, participants will be able to:

1. Recognize the complexities of the Incel community
2. Identify the risks and consequences of using labels to classify and manage vulnerable populations

## **“Gender Mainstreaming” and Violent Radicalization**

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**Background:** Gender and identity are critical factors in violent radicalization (VR) and influence the motivations, radicalization, and participation of individuals in extremist action. Until recently, gender analysis of VR has been limited, with the majority of VR intervention programs and policies either ignoring gender or informed by gender stereotypes that prevent a more accurate understanding of this issue.

**Aim:** The aim of this presentation is to provide an overview of four approaches to understanding the relationship between gender and VR, and how these approaches are operationalized in current international policies and programming related to preventing and countering VR, using work undertaken in the United Nations Office of Counter Terrorism (UNOCT) as a case example.

**Method:** We conduct a discourse analysis of UNOCT policy and programming documents related to gender and prevention of VR produced since the inception of the UNOCT in 2017.

**Results:** The UNOCT has overwhelmingly utilized a “gender-as-a-variable” approach to understanding the relationship between gender and VR, with an emphasis on differences in gender composition of attitudes towards VR and engagement in violent action. More recently, policies and programs have shifted to address gendered motivations and roles within extremist groups and also the position of gender in prevention of VR.

**Discussion/Implications:** Gender-blind VR programs and policies run the risk of being not only ineffective in countering VR, but also harmful. At the same time, simply quantifying gender and relying on stereotypical masculinities and femininities to inform our understanding of VR is equally dangerous. Conference participants are invited to imagine ways in which gender can be appropriately woven into macro to micro level work related to countering VR.

### Learning Objectives

At the conclusion of this presentation, participants will be able to:

1. Identify four analytic approaches to understanding the relationship between gender and VR
2. Describe the importance of integrating a gender analysis in programs to prevent and counter VR

## **The Gender of Hate**

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### Background:

Rebels in ancient times would have fit the modern definition of “terrorists”. They were depreciated by the narrator of the time: Flavius Josephus. He defined them as violent, effeminate crossdressers and homosexuals. While the wars of ancient Greece are long over, the use of gender continues to be at the forefront of cultural wars, social polarization and creating echoes in clinical settings.

### Issues of focus

This presentation will: first situate sexuality and gender in the battlefield of political polarizations, secondly describe some psychological consequences of these polarizations, and lastly present interventions where gender can be a space of dialogue, contradictions, desires, and embodied pleasures.

### Method

Critical phenomenological analysis is used to understand the importance of gender in regimes of inclusion/ exclusion. This draws from research on gender and violence combined with clinical practice with gender creative people and sexual minorities.

### Results

Gender appears as a subjective uncertainty trapped by imposed truths and hegemonic narratives. Therefore, social polarization of gender targets minorities. These processes have consequently existential effects for gender creative peoples and for society at large.

### Discussion

Gender has been used as a metaphor for division, control, and violence. A shift is needed to move towards seeing gender as a potential field of exploration, affirmation, and connection. In other words, resisting hegemonic narratives by allowing subjective uprising and resistance in clinical practices.

### Learning Objectives

At the conclusion of this presentation, participants will be able to:

1. Describe in what way gender is used in war and state propaganda.
2. Recognize gender as a creative field for dialogue in healing.