Photo of the Day | Student life



Two students working at a picnic table on the Great Lawn. The Ultimate Sacrifice Memorial is located on the Great Lawn. PHOTO BY AKIRA GUNAWAN, GRAB PHOTOGRAPHER/THE DAILY CAMPUS

LINGUISTICSMAXXING:

WHY YOU SHOULD BE CAREFUL USING 'GEN-Z' SLANG

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Content Warning:
The following article contains discussions related to sexism, sexual assault, rape, murder and other misogynistic and violent themes.

I, like nearly every person my age, spend a disgusting amount of time on the internet. My screen time of roughly eight hours a day leads me to discover a lot of colorful new slang terms, most notably the suffixes "–maxxing" and "–pilled." But where did these terms pop up from? Linguist Adam Aleksic sums it up nicely — "Your words are either coming from Black people or [they're] coming from incels online."

So, what is an incel exactly?

"Incel" is a portmanteau of involuntary celibate; simply put, a person frustrated by their perceived lack of sexual experience. The term was created by a Canadian woman named Alana in 1997 as part of her website, the Involuntary Celibate Project, hoping to discuss her status as a "late bloomer" and connect with other people struggling in their dating lives.

Today, her invention has taken on a new life. A more extreme group of users from the Involuntary Celibate site broke off and created their own forums, especially on the anonymous message board website 4chan. In 2026, the term "incel" is now used to describe a man that blames women for his lack of sexual experience.

The ideologies of the incel community are outright dangerous — and they aren't just limited to confined internet spaces. In May 2014, Elliot Rodger killed six people in a shooting-stabbing spree near the University of California, Santa Barbara before turning the gun on himself. In his 141-page manifesto written before his death, he spoke of himself as "the ideal magnificent gentleman" who planned to "exact revenge on the society" that "denied" him sex. He chose the sorority Alpha Phi as a target, citing the women as "the kind of girls [he'd] desired but was never able to have". Rodger's ideals made him famous among the online incel community. You can find fan videos, t-shirts and merch of this murderer. Other attacks have credited him, most famously the deadly Toronto attack by Alek Minassian, which killed 10.

The incel community is not isolated — it is part of the greater circle online known as the "manosphere," an umbrella term for the loose network of internet communities that promote discussion of what it means to be a man, often weaving in the narrative that feminist movements come at the cost of men's rights as a whole.

The online suffix "-pilled" comes from the manosphere's co-opting of the red pill and blue pill from the 1999 movie "The Matrix." In the movie, the character Neo is given two options: take the blue pill, which will let him remain oblivious, or take the red pill, and wake up to the truth of their world. In the manosphere, the definition of being "redpilled" is extremely specific. It refers to the "80/20 rule," which states that 80% of women are attracted to just 20% of men.

Taking the red pill in these communities "wakes you up" to the 80/20 ideals and the notion that feminism gives women far too much power. Taking the red pill is a call to action for the manosphere.

But the red pill isn't the only pill you can take in the manosphere. You have the option of taking the "black pill," which refers to realizing that the system cannot be changed. Taking the black pill doesn't leave you with a lot of options. You can give up, you can commit suicide, or you can "go ER" — a reference to Elliot Rodger's spree killing.

Other manosphere communities include the looksmaxxing community, a community dedicated to maximizing one's physical attractiveness. The common suffix "-maxxing," which I used in the title of this article, descends from looksmaxxing. Looksmaxxing came from 2010s incel forums purporting the idea that physical attractiveness is king (as women apparently cannot care about much else) and to achieve peak physical condition, one must "transform" their appearance according to pre-set criteria.

Looksmaxxing has almost completely broken containment. If you ask someone on the street here at UConn about looksmaxxing, they'd likely be able to tell you exactly what it is and about its most prominent influencer, Clavicular (real name Braden Peters). It is unlikely, however, that they'd be able to tell you the word's origins in communities dedicated to the hatred of women. Peters himself has been charged with the rape and drugging of a then-16-year-old girl in his Cape Cod home; he allegedly got her drunk on vodka while streaming on Twitch and then raped her.

You cannot separate these slang terms from their origins when they continue to perpetuate violence against women. Using these words leads to legitimization of these manosphere communities in the greater online space, allowing their ideals to leak into the public consciousness even further.

Look into the fun, new slang term you're picking up. Its creator might hate women.



A person texting on their smartphone. The incel community developed online in the late 1990's and now has varied connotations on internet forums and social media. PHOTO BY ANNA SHVETS/PEXELS.COM