

Fringe 2024 – The Cabaret of Dangerous Ideas: Alphas, Betas and Chads!

The Cabaret of Dangerous Ideas is a series of talks taking place monthly at The Stand. During Fringe 2024, however, we're getting a bumper serving, with a grand total of forty-seven challenging topics on offer.

The CoDI was originally developed twelve years ago by Edinburgh's four universities, Fair Pley Productions, comedian Susan Morrison and The Stand itself, but it now attracts academics from all over Scotland and beyond. The idea is that speakers get 20-30 minutes in which to talk about their subject – but before you turn away, here's the important bit; IT'S NOT BORING! They have to make it accessible and fun. And yes, from what I've seen they achieve this in spades. Some of the speakers are regulars, others, like our star today, psychologist Dr David Smith of RGU Aberdeen, are newbies. (Don't worry David, it didn't show.)

'We lure them out of their ivory towers and into the daylight by laying a paper trail of funding proposals; it works every time.'

Susan Morrison

The title of today's talk is **Alphas, Betas and Chads!** I only found out last week what Chad means, though it's apparently been a viral meme (whatever that may be...) since 2010. Here's

what Wikipedia has to say,

'In modern internet slang, Chad refers to a heterosexual White male, usually blond-haired, who is gainfully employed, athletic, sexually active, and well-endowed.'

Smith's research looks at incel (voluntary incelibate) groups. You've probably heard of them. If the term leads you to imagine angry men glaring at computer screens in their bedrooms, to a certain extent you'd be right, but as with most things there's more to it than that. Dr Smith is here to tell us what he's found out.

Incel groups meet on websites used by "men who think they are unf**kable". This makes them cross, miserable, and sometimes dangerous. Smith wants to know why men join these groups *and* why they stay in them.

He asks audience members to think back to the first time they had sex. How did they feel afterwards? Happy? Relieved? Disappointed? Losing one's virginity is seen as a milestone in life. Men who use incel sites are obsessed with their inability to reach this goal. When they're not banging on about football or dousing themselves in Lynx, teenage boys in particular brag constantly (though probably untruthfully) about how much sex they've had. Less "active" boys believe them and worry about their lack of success. All sorts of awful men have sex ('even Hitler!') so, they ask themselves, why can't we?

And as time passes and group members enjoy a collective wallow, guess who they blame for everything? Feminists of course! Though they're not mad on successful men either. In fact they don't like anybody much.

The argument goes thus. Before feminism, the 10/10 alpha male, 'Chad', slept with the alpha girl 'Stacey.' (Morrison "But Stacey was a Poundland Barbie!") Incels both pity and envy

Chad. They see him as emotionally shallow but they envy the way he can hang out with Stacey. In the past, however, help was at hand – Becky (6/10) would still be prepared to sleep with beta males like them. But then along came evil feminists, who (allegedly) told Becky she too was worthy of Chad. So lucky old Chad gets Stacey *and* Becky, and Mr 6/10 is left to his own devices. (Personally I think I'd rather be Zoe, who watches *Real Housewives* with a glass in one hand and a bar of chocolate in the other...but Chad seems to find fertile hunting grounds somewhere.)

How then do incels explain the many non-Chads who *do* have female partners? Aha – they have an answer for that one! These innocent babies are being economically exploited by women who, unable to get it on with Chad, turn to non-Chads purely for their money,

*'When they can't get alpha f**ks, they take beta bucks!'*

So, incels conclude, they themselves can never be happy.

Women! We've got a lot to answer for.

For his research Smith has spoken to many men who have now left incel groups. Most group members are aged 18-30, though one was just 12 years old. Although the public tends to associate these groups with white supremacists, only 55% of the men involved are white. Most are in North America or the UK. Deprivation is a major factor. They usually live rurally and have low paid jobs. 85% still live with their parents. Perhaps surprisingly, some identify as left wing – one was even a Bernie Sanders campaigner – but most are apolitical; they just hate everyone.

'It's a social problem too, a function of regional inequality. Men have internalised incel philosophy while struggling to earn £7 per hour.'

Smith reads a few quotes from interviews he's conducted with former group members, some of whom now belong to ex-incel sites. Many said they'd never before spoken to a non-incel about their problems. They were keen to chat, though kept their cameras off,

'No one had ever been attracted to me...it became my truth...women just did this to me, it wasn't my fault.'

Incels often suffer from mental health problems, particularly body dysmorphia, depression and anxiety. 30% self-identify as neurodiverse. Almost half contemplate self-harm of some sort on a *daily* basis. Suicide is a frequent topic of discussion. For the sad fact is, these men hate themselves as much as they hate women. And although it's maybe good that these sites allow men to talk about mental health, they are definitely not support groups, in fact they encourage suicide. They are somewhere that men can express sexist views and egg one another on to believe that nothing is ever their fault. Eventually members start to feel so miserable and powerless that their sadness turns to anger and their anger leads, potentially, to violence. They are in a downward spiral and see no way of changing things. They feel humiliated by the world,

'Their mantra becomes "Lay down and rot" '

Fantasises around rape, and of forming militias to 'take out chads on the street', are common.

'There is no creature more evil and depraved than the human woman! I will destroy them.'

An incel mass shooter, who killed six people before taking his own life, is celebrated annually on his 'day of retribution.'

Talking to so many ex-incels has given Smith a picture of why

they leave the groups. Many remain virgins and still have mental health issues, but they have gained a level of accountability and become a bit less misogynistic. How does this happen? Does it give us any clues as to how others can be helped?

Some just grew out of it – they became much older than the other members so had less in common with them. Others may have moved out of the family home, graduated from college, moved from the countryside to the city, or found a better job. Any and all of these things improve their self esteem and help them to find real life friends, to become less isolated.

Smith is concerned, though, that the cost of living crisis and housing shortages may exacerbate the problem. Men will be stuck in their bedrooms staring at the screen, competing with other incels to be the most miserable, shortest, baldest, least well-endowed guy in the world. Some spend 6 hours a day on these sites. Incels, says Smith, don't even like one another, they're not making new friends this way, they're simply having all their negative views confirmed and validated.

Why, asks Morrison, don't they just spend less time on websites and more time getting out and meeting people? Because, Smith explains, they are fundamentally anxious, scared of women and terrified of one-to-one conversations.



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Celibacy, says a member of the audience, has always been a thing, so why has the concept of it changed so much? Smith sees the internet as a major driver; social media are great in many ways, but they allow people to build their entire identity around their grievances. The increasing sexualisation of young women does not help, and dating apps – although they also have positives – cause problems. 70% of people using these apps are men, and incels' negative thoughts can so easily be fuelled by a lack of 'swipes.'

When convicted sex traffickers have in the past been allowed to present themselves as alpha males on mainstream shows and TikTok, and some still have a huge social media presence, it's inevitable that incels will try to emulate them, then feel an even greater sense of failure when they still can't attract a partner.

If incels want sex, can they not pay for it? asks another audience member. Predictably perhaps, this will not do. These guys see any woman who's had multiple partners as 'tarnished'; they might just accept someone who's had fewer partners than they have (which on the whole is none), but what they really want is – surprise! – a virgin. They also have some bizarre ideas about what sex does to a woman's vagina (they won't be wanting anyone who's ever given birth then...)

Inceldom becomes, says Smith, a form of radicalisation, and although incidents of violence are rare, the incel movement needs to be countered both for the sake of its victims and for the sake of the incels themselves. He urges us to show compassion for these lonely, misguided men, who are fundamentally asking a very human question,

'Is anyone ever going to love me?'

A system like democratic socialism would. Smith suggests, give people a sense of security, and could potentially help them to stop blaming others for everything. More economic security would lead to greater self esteem; it would also allow incels to move out of their parents' houses, and give them the means to pay for dating ('it's not cheap!') As with so many of our current problems, it's social deprivation that really needs to be addressed.

Someone points out that when behaviours formerly seen as 'deviant' have been reclassified as mental health disorders, more help has been made available to sufferers. Should incelism be treated in the same way? Yes! says Smith, it most definitely should, but incels tend to reject the idea of therapy; they see therapists as wealthy chads. He suggests two potentially useful approaches; school sex education should include advice about handling dating apps and rejection, and online group therapies such as CBT should be targeted at incels; this would help to remove the 'affluent chad' stigma. Former incel recovery groups are particularly helpful; incels can access them from home, their 'safe place', and hear from men who used to be like them but now have an alternative world view.



Dr David Smith

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This was another very interesting event from CoDI. Despite huge competition for festival audiences, these sessions are regularly packed out; people are still keen to discuss current issues in person, and Dr Smith's talk certainly gave them plenty to discuss. One of the great things about the CoDI is that, at a time when none of us really knows if anything we see on our screens is real, they're given by people who know their stuff. Even when controversial, it's still reliable, fact-based information. And who knew academics could be so entertaining? It must be brilliant being a student these days.

There are still shows to come in *The Cabaret of Dangerous Ideas* Fringe series. For more information visit The Stand's website [here](#) – but be warned, at least two sessions are already sold out. You can also book on the Fringe website and app.

The Cabaret of Dangerous Ideas resumes its normal schedule on 25th October.

Susan Morrison is also offering her Fringe event ***Susan Morrison is Walking Funny (walking tour)*** at 3pm every day

