

# “Embracing Girlmode”: Examining Claims of Agency for Incels in the *Transmaxxing Manifesto*

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Amidst a so-called ‘masculinity crisis,’ incels (involuntary celibates)—an online male supremacist group characterized by nihilism, anti-feminism, and violent misogyny—are responding to pressure to perform hegemonic masculinity in a new way: transitioning to women. As an offshoot of looksmaxxing, which outlines ways to ‘maximize’ one’s physical appearance, transmaxxing replaces attempts to perform hegemonic masculinity with calls for incels to undergo male-to-female gender transition for “personal gain.” In other words, transmaxxers are renouncing their masculinity to gain access to queer and feminine resources and communities without necessarily identifying as transgender women, effectively co-opting queer identities and experiences for personal power. This online community primarily functions via Discord, with the digitally published *Transmaxxing Manifesto* as its foundational text. Through transition guides, analyses of academic studies, and testimonials, the *Transmaxxing Manifesto* offers incels agency over their lives, social status, and sexuality. However, this appropriation of queer and feminine identities is also a means of reinforcing power over women and trans people. This manifesto aims to grant transmaxxers rhetorical and embodied agency by co-opting trans womanhood, prompting an investigation into how male supremacist groups like incels can manipulate and appropriate queer identities and experiences to (re)gain power over themselves and others.

Amidst a so-called ‘masculinity crisis,’ incels (involuntary celibates)—a male supremacist group characterized by nihilism, anti-feminism, and violent misogyny—are responding to pressure to perform hegemonic masculinity in a new way: transitioning to women. As an offshoot of looksmaxxing, which outlines various ways to ‘maximize’ one’s physical appearance (Held, 2023), transmaxxing replaces attempts to perform hegemonic masculinity with calls for incels to undergo male-to-female gender transition for “personal gain,” framing medical transition as a “body modification akin to ‘bodybuilding’” (Vintologi, 2024, p. 15). In other words, transmaxxers are incels who renounce their masculinity to gain access to queer and feminine resources and communities without necessarily identifying as transgender women. In doing so, transmaxxing is offered to incels as a way to (re)gain agency over their social status, sexual

experiences, and overall lives. However, this practice also co-opts queer and trans womanhood, framing transness not as a liberatory exploration of one's identity, but as a utilitarian means to individual gains and material ends. Collectively, male supremacist groups are a prime example of how extreme ideologies can spread and fragmentize within digital echo chambers (Habib et al., 2022), making transmaxxing an invaluable example of the growing abstraction and appropriation of marginalized identities within online supremacist spaces.

Here, I examine the *Transmaxxing Manifesto* (Vintologi, 2024), the digitally published and foundational transmaxxing document. This manifesto frames gender transition as a way to overcome the issues that incels attribute to women's seemingly unjust power and incels' perceived misalignment with hegemonic masculinity. Transmaxxing is positioned as a way out of incelism and "the cursed male gender straight jacket" (Vintologi, 2024, p. 46), where being a (trans) woman grants more power and agency than being a socially disenfranchised incel. Ultimately, I argue that transmaxxing's framing of gender transition as a utilitarian means to gaining agency rests on a male supremacist understanding of gender and sexuality that perpetuates gendered oppression and violence. Notably, this analysis comes at a time when the rights and safety of trans and gender non-conforming people are under attack, and, particularly in the wake of Charlie Kirk's assassination, bad-faith reporting on transmaxxing has been used to perpetuate transphobia and right-wing attacks (López & Street, 2025). In examining transmaxxing, I do not intend to perpetuate these same harms; rather, I hope to demonstrate how marginalized identities can be troubled, misunderstood, and co-opted within supremacist spaces, so that we are ultimately better equipped to combat said harms.

## The Manosphere, Incels, and "—Maxxing"

Transmaxxing's roots lie in the manosphere: a collection of digital subgroups dedicated to anti-feminism and male supremacy. Its activism began in the 1970s with the Men's Rights Movement, which was in response to the feminist movements of the era (Marwick & Caplan, 2018). Since then, anti-feminist organizing has proliferated online, with contemporary groups' ideologies and practices varying widely (Ging, 2019). The manosphere's subgroups are largely connected via anti-feminist ideologies and self-improvement practices, wherein the manosphere's "hatred for feminists stems from the belief that [women] are to blame for the flipped gender hierarchy (where men are oppressed by women)" (Jones et al., 2019, p. 1916). Much of the manosphere's self-improvement offers ways to overcome this flipped hierarchy so that men can maintain—or, from their perspective, *regain*—power in all aspects of society, but most prominently within relationships.

Particularly relevant here are incels, one of the most notorious manosphere subgroups. Although the term ‘incel’ was originally coined by a queer woman who created an online community to connect people struggling to find love (DeCook & Kelly, 2022), it was co-opted by male supremacists, and identifying as an incel is now synonymous with male supremacy rooted in nihilism and violence. Where the rest of the manosphere centers self-improvement as a means to (re)gain social status and overpower feminism’s influences, traditionally, many incels see their suffering and low social status as largely immutable (Vallerga & Zurbriggen, 2022). They understand their lives as being at the whim of those who are more attractive, marking their lack of access to sex an undesired and unavoidable consequence of their self-perceived unattractiveness. Many perpetrators of terror attacks motivated by male supremacism have identified or aligned closely with incelism (Baele et al., 2021; O’Malley et al., 2020). Though not all incels are physically violent themselves, digital incel communities are fraught with praising acts of violence and dehumanizing language about women and more masculine men (Baele et al., 2021).

Fundamentally, the manosphere is a crisis of masculinity and gender. Its subgroups offer answers and camaraderie in a world where men claim to feel increasingly lonely, mistreated, and forgotten. Valorizing hypermasculinity and demonizing women, feminism, and femininity provides a sense of relief because it is a simple explanation for complex social issues and dynamics. As women and queer people gain increased visibility (and rights), the manosphere reaches across nearly every online platform and creates spaces where it is okay to express anger and even fear about social changes. Of course, finding comfort in male supremacist groups does not excuse one’s participation, as most members of the manosphere are entitled, hateful, and violent, either rhetorically or physically. As Angela Chen (2020) argued, “Many people feel unattractive and undatable without believing that others owe them sex or resorting to murder. Still, it’s undeniable that the rage of incels is connected to cultural expectations around men and sex” (p. 41). Thus, while the manosphere reflects rising male supremacism and gendered violence, it also provides insight into how different digital communities conceptualize and cope with the so-called ‘masculinity crisis’ in increasingly unique ways.

Unsurprisingly, most people in the manosphere are heterosexual cisgender men, but there is evidence of gender and sexuality diversity beyond that. For example, anti-feminist women in the manosphere are largely motivated by distaste for current ‘hegemonic’ feminism that is supposedly damaging feminine values (Jarvis & Eddington, 2020). Additionally, Ewelina Prazmo (2024) found that incel terminology exists “to refer to female incels and incels of various sexes and sexual preferences” (p. 79). While misogyny is clearly prevalent in the manosphere, this does not universally translate to homophobia; rather,

some—but certainly not all—realms of the manosphere seem open to and even idolize gay men (Ging, 2019). Some incels and looksmaxxers have also admitted to having romantic and sexual encounters with other men (Osuna, 2023; Sousbois, 2025). Of course, misogyny, homophobia, and transphobia are still much more prevalent and openly expressed than feminine and queer identities in the manosphere. Queer women—particularly trans women—often face even higher misogynistic hostility in and outside of the manosphere, where “not only are they punished for being inherently subordinate to patriarchal masculinity, but they are also punished for failing to adequately conform to heterosexual feminine norms” (Czerwinsky, 2024, p. 164).

Although incels traditionally have seen self-improvement efforts as futile (Vallerga & Zurbriggen, 2022), some have begun exploring ways to ‘maximize’ one’s physical appearance, demonstrating a notable shift from incels lamenting about having no control (or accountability) over their lives to undertaking tangible efforts to improve themselves. Incels engaging in this practice are recognizing that they *do* have agency over their lives, even if such efforts to change are rooted in becoming more attractive, not personally fulfilled. These self-improvement efforts are termed *looksmaxxing*, which includes a range of practices generally categorized as *softmaxxing*, referring to relatively mild practices like dieting, grooming habits, and working out, or *hardmaxxing*, referring to more extreme practices like plastic surgery, skin bleaching, or bone reconstruction (Pražmo, 2024). Such efforts are undertaken to become conventionally attractive and perform hegemonic masculinity ‘correctly,’ enabling them to attract women and ascend out of incelhood (Haplin et al., 2025; Held, 2023). Importantly, looksmaxxing is community-based, and individuals often seek evaluations and advice from others to guide their body modification (Sousbois, 2025). Perhaps unsurprisingly, incels’ understanding of attractiveness centers hypermasculinity and whiteness, as demonstrated in the popular *Just Be White* theory and whitemaxxing, which both essentialize race and understand whiteness as inherently desirable (Gheorghe, 2024). Looksmaxxing itself is relatively understudied, but even less attention has been paid to transmaxxing. As of writing, academic scholarship contains only brief mentions of “trannymaxxing” (Andersen, 2022; Pražmo, 2024; Temel, 2023), which Pražmo defined as “an attempt to change to another gender in order to improve one’s dating chances” (p. 78).

## (Re)gaining Agency via Transmaxxing

Transmaxxing (as outlined in the *Transmaxxing Manifesto*, at least) was created by the online user Vintologi, who, notably, does not identify as transgender and has not pursued medical transition. Vintologi’s offline identity is unknown, but investigative journalists describe him as a “Swedish, eugenicist,

pro-life, anti-vaxxer, [and] former (maybe) incel” (Agar et al., 2023, 19:34). His eugenic beliefs heavily influence his approach to incels and transmaxxing, as he believes the world would benefit from the removal of incels, and transmaxxing is a way to address the ‘incel problem.’

The transmaxxing community largely gathers in a Discord server, and although there is also a transmaxxing forum and subreddit, the *Transmaxxing Manifesto* provides the most detailed (and open-access) insight into the ideologies and practices central to transmaxxing. In particular, it emphasizes how transmaxxing will provide happiness, physical attractiveness, and a better sex life, all of which are of the utmost importance within incel culture. Importantly, the *Transmaxxing Manifesto* is a persuasive document, as it makes explicit appeals to incel ideology and content to convince them to transition. Here, I examine how the *Transmaxxing Manifesto* claims transitioning will offer incels agency, and, subsequently, satisfaction.

## Agency Over Social Status

Like much of the manosphere, incels’ worldview is based on lookism, which argues that physically attractive people have more power in dating and broader society (Solea & Sugiura, 2023). Though hyper-masculine men are seen as powerful in incels’ social hierarchy, men are also ultimately at the whims of hyper-attractive women because of the seemingly unjust power feminism has granted them (Menzie, 2022). Thus, even as incels try to move up the social hierarchy, a more masculine status is still below that of attractive women. However, transmaxxing is framed as freeing oneself from the constraints of the masculinity hierarchy altogether by presenting and living as women. Incels no longer have to suffer because of their inability to perform hegemonic masculinity because transmaxxing calls for them to abandon it. An unattributed testimonial in the *Transmaxxing Manifesto* explains: “As a woman, I don’t have to worry about looking tough anymore or anyone treating me less than if I don’t appear sufficiently masculine” (Vintologi, 2024, p. 46). Thus, the *Transmaxxing Manifesto* offers transness as a way to ‘game the system’ and get around seemingly insurmountable expectations of masculinity.

Beyond being free from masculinity’s constraints, transmaxxing also allegedly grants higher social status solely by virtue of being a woman. The manosphere is united by the idea that women have unjust power in society (Jones et al., 2019), which the *Transmaxxing Manifesto* uses to argue that living as a woman will grant the same status. Importantly, the manifesto also claims that more traditional masculine-based self-improvement efforts are often unreliable and ineffective, ultimately arguing that “there is no escaping the rat-race without actually changing your sex” (Vintologi, 2024, p. 68).

Beyond a very utilitarian understanding of gender transitioning, transmaxxing also relies on a misogynistic understanding of womanhood, claiming that it is a carefree life of pleasure, in which one has no responsibilities or desires beyond being a sex object. Such framing of (trans) womanhood is obvious glorification and fetishization that completely ignores the genuine dangers, violence, and discrimination that trans women face, and instead assumes that life as a woman will be infinitely easier than as an incel.

## Agency Over Relationships

One of the biggest topics in the *Transmaxxing Manifesto* is sexual experiences after transitioning. The document includes several pornographic and fantastical descriptions of sexual encounters while taking hormone replacement therapy, along with emphasizing how much more pleasurable sex as a woman is. Though there is obviously much more to life (and womanhood) than sex, for incels, this supposedly ample access is a major appeal. The incel community gathers around a lack of access to sex, and, consequently, the *Transmaxxing Manifesto* argues that trans women can have as much sex as they want: “Having to compete to get sex... [is] not really a thing among trans girls, then [*sic*] instead loads of males are going to outdo each other trying to get into your pants” (Vintologi, 2024, p. 34). It furthers that not only will incels be attractive, but they will also be ‘exotic,’ given the supposedly rampant fetishization of trans women.

Interestingly, the manifesto assumes that once presenting as a woman, incels will automatically become attracted to dominant men. This assumption alone maintains heteropatriarchy and hegemonic masculinity, but the manifesto also offers a lot of relationship advice that is largely framed around how to attract hyper-masculine partners. It calls for acting submissive, presenting hyper-feminine, and faking a personality—anything to make oneself seem like a sex object and, therefore, desirable. Such advice is rooted in the manosphere’s digital and misogynistic echo chamber, criticizing women even when trying to convince men to present and identify as women themselves. In doing so, the *Transmaxxing Manifesto* calls for self-sexualization and fetishization not for one’s happiness or liberation, but instead for the attention and pleasure of cisgender dominant men. Though this frames womanhood as a constant state of submission, the manifesto argues that said submission is more freedom and agency than incels would have otherwise, because it grants them access to sex. In other words, the *Transmaxxing Manifesto* distorts the ‘choice’ of being a sex object for the male gaze into a means of enacting agency.

Such agency is largely wrought from the supposed material gains one can “extract” from their partners. The *Transmaxxing Manifesto* calls for transmaxxers to manipulate men into giving them gifts or money, which then further

increases their social standing. As the manifesto argues, “By successfully extracting resources for [*sic*] men you will end up with more freedom when it comes to selecting [another] sexual partner” (Vintologi, 2024, p. 60). Said differently, by improving one’s monetary and social status, they can continue climbing the social hierarchy and partner with even more attractive and wealthy men. Such directives clearly mimic the misogynistic assumption that women only sleep with men for monetary gain, essentially calling for individuals to not only fall into but *enact* these same stereotypes. Thus, transmaxxers’ obsession with feminine sexuality reflects ideologies central to the manosphere writ large, illustrating the contagion of harmful ideas between online subgroups.

## Agency Over Oneself

Altogether, the *Transmaxxing Manifesto* argues that transitioning provides incels agency over their lives. Incel ideology places undue emphasis on physical attractiveness and social standing, which this online community understands as impacting every aspect of their lives’ worth. Thus, by arguing that one can become physically attractive, gain a higher social status, and have many sexual encounters, transmaxxing is framed as a way to bring agency over and meaning to one’s life. The manifesto argues that after transitioning, incels will be able to have any partner they want, instantly become physically attractive and desirable, and all of their misery will vanish. Such claims perpetuate harmful conceptualizations of feminine and trans experiences, but they also set unrealistic expectations for individuals who buy into transmaxxing as it is outlined in the manifesto. It downplays the amount of time transitioning takes, instead assuming that everyone will become attractive immediately. It also argues that all of one’s mental health problems will dissipate, essentially framing transitioning as a one-size-fits-all treatment for any mental health concerns. In doing so, the *Transmaxxing Manifesto* offers a glorified and dramatized version of trans womanhood, in which every problem vanishes after transitioning.

These claims are exemplified in Figure 12.1: a remix of the Virgin vs. Chad meme, one of the most well-known incel memes (Held, 2023), in which an incel-type figure is typically contrasted with a hyper-masculine Chad figure. In this case, Chad is replaced with “Stacy Transitioner,” referencing the manosphere’s classification of hyper-attractive women as Stacys (Menzie, 2022). This meme encapsulates the arguments made throughout the *Transmaxxing Manifesto*, in which the Stacy Transitioner is “living in a sexual fantasy 24/7,” “can sleep with men whenever she wants,” and is “actually special and worth remembering” (p. 25). Both the manifesto and this meme go beyond arguing that transmaxxing will make someone more attractive and provide access to sex; it will also bring meaning, purpose, and fulfillment to one’s life, which incels often lack.



Figure 12.1. *Virgin Antidepressant User versus Stacy Transitioner meme from the Transmaxxing Manifesto illustrating the supposed differences between incels and transmaxxers (Vintologi, 2024, p. 25)*

## Transmaxxing’s Scope and Significance

Transmaxxers are a small group that is not reflective of or equivalent to incels or trans women. The transmaxxing Discord server has approximately 1,800 members, though even fewer seem to be active participants (Agar et al., 2023). While we can draw conclusions about this group based on documents like the *Transmaxxing Manifesto*, it is difficult and incorrect to attribute these beliefs to every member of that community. Liv Agar and colleagues (2023) found that the members who do embrace the transmaxxing label often define it differently than how Vintologi, the self-proclaimed founder of the transmaxxing movement, originally intended. Rather than transmaxxers solely being incels who transition for sex and power, they instead seem to be trans women emphasizing personal gains wrought from transitioning. While access to this community is limited, a documentary followed self-identified transmaxxer Sammy, who said that they began transitioning “in order to have a better quality of life [and] to be treated better by people” (Channel 4 Documentaries, 2024, 9:44). Thus, rather than being a widespread movement made by incels for incels, in practice, transmaxxing may just be a framework people use to rationalize their desire to transition, particularly in the early stages before they are comfortable truly exploring their gender identity (Agar et al., 2023).

However, regardless of its scale, the ideology and practice as described in the *Transmaxxing Manifesto* is a valuable case study of how male supremacy can warp individual and broader understandings of

masculinity, queerness, and transness. By exploring this group, I do not intend to perpetuate harmful conceptions of transness or draw the line for where someone stops ‘counting’ as trans. Instead, I use transmaxxing as a necessary early investigation into how hate-based groups like the manosphere can make room for and rationalize transness. The manifesto’s framing of transitioning as a means of (re)gaining agency shows how oppressive groups can co-opt marginalized identities for their own purposes, along with exposing just how warped their understanding of said identities is. Incels have become a notorious example of online-bred extremism and supremacist ideology (DeCook & Kelly, 2022), making it vital to examine their fracturing and evolution into newer (and stranger) online subgroups with growing offline impacts. Importantly, though the manosphere, incels, and transmaxxers are interesting examples of misogynistic violence, male supremacist ideology is far from unique to just these spaces, and assuming so risks ignoring the various forms male supremacy takes (DeCook & Kelly, 2022).

## Conclusion

The common thread across digital male supremacist communities like incels and transmaxxers is power, particularly the perceived lack thereof due to a ‘failure’ in performing hegemonic masculinity. By relying on extreme and unrealistic expectations of gender, the manosphere has created a fantastical worldview that becomes increasingly limited as members get more involved in these digital spaces. Though tied to queer and trans practices, transmaxxing’s rejection of ‘traditional’ gender and masculinity rests not on a world where people are treated equally and able to challenge cisgender heteropatriarchy. Instead, it maintains the very same limiting and unequal power dynamics. Rather than being an avenue for us to recognize and subvert current understandings of gender, transmaxxing instead is a mere extension of oppression and the dominant tensions surrounding hypermasculinity and misogyny disguised as a form of individual agency. In disguising this oppression as agency, transmaxxing not only perpetuates the mistreatment and misunderstanding of trans and gender non-conforming folks (along with furthering essentialist conceptions of gender that harm cisgender people, too); it also lays the groundwork for continued violence. Especially in a period of rapidly escalating attacks on queer and trans people, we—as rhetoric, composition, and writing studies scholars—must pay attention to how the co-opting, appropriation, and misrepresentation of marginalized identities perpetuates oppression in increasingly novel and dangerous ways, now, more than ever.

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