Chapter 1

An Introduction to Incel

Humanity ... All of my suffering on this world has been at the hands of humanity. Particularly women. It has made me realize just how brutal and twisted humanity is as a species. All I ever wanted was to fit in and live a happy life amongst humanity, but I was cast out and rejected, forced to endure an existence of loneliness and insignificant, all because the females of the human species were incapable of seeing the value in me.

Twenty-two-year-old Elliot Rodger uploaded a 141-page manifesto online shortly before he stabbed and shot people in Isla Vista California 23 May 2014, killing six, and then himself. Rodger was a member of PUAHate (Pick Up Artists, PUAs) and ForeverAlone, online communities that actively espoused misogyny and promoted techniques to manipulate women into sex. ‘The girls don’t flock to the gentlemen. They flock to the alpha male’, Rodger wrote to support his violence. ‘Who’s the alpha male now, bitches?’ His attack spurred women to share their experiences of misogyny online via the hashtag #YesAllWomen and highlighted the lure of the men’s rights movement (MRM). Prior to Rodger, though, the term incel was relatively unknown in the wider public sphere, confined to spaces online within the so-called manosphere. The manosphere is comprised of disparate, conflicting and overlapping men’s groups, which share a hatred of women and antifeminism (Ging, 2017). After Rodger’s attack and subsequent acts of violence inspired by him (see in particular Parkland, 2018; Toronto, 2018, 2020), media attention has turned to incels, presenting them as violent and extremist misogynists. It is notable, however, that Rodger never used the term incel to describe himself, yet he has become an idol, a martyr for the incel cause, revered by many in the community.

Previously, these groups were able to operate relatively undetected or were dismissed as minority deviant fringe groups and subject to limited concern about the harmful impacts of their ideologies. Although there are now significant amounts of interest in online Men’s Rights Activists (MRAs) more broadly (Ging, 2017; Jaki et al., 2019; Marwick & Caplan, 2018; Nagle, 2017) due to concerns about

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their incitement of hatred and violence, particularly against women, there is little understanding about the evolution, formation and spread of incels.

Incel as a subculture is not an isolated phenomenon; it is part of larger backlash against feminism propelled by the manosphere, consisting of groups of men all connected by their belief that feminine values have corrupted society and men need to retaliate against this misandrist culture to preserve their very survival (Marwick & Caplan, 2018). Web 2.0 has facilitated an assortment of particularly toxic digital MRA spaces, what Massanari (2017, p. 329) terms 'toxic technocultures'. These are a loosely connected and amorphous hub for 'men's issues', noted for its virulent antifeminism, extreme misogyny and connections with the alt-right. The uniting ideological feature of the manosphere is an antipathy towards feminism and a pervading sense of (white) male victimisation. Groups within the manosphere involve MRAs, PUAs, Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW), Tradcons, NoFappers, Fathers for Justice, as well as incels. Although the main interests of each group may differ, their common language creates a unified identity. Although incel is receiving increased academic scrutiny, when undertaking the research for this book, there was limited engagement with those who self-identify as incel to understand their motivations and behaviours and their evolution and spread. Studies focussing on incels have been notoriously difficult to conduct, due to the evasive and hostile nature of those who are involuntarily celibate (Burgess, Donnelly, Dillar, & Davis, 2001). Research of the incel community is in its infancy but is a growing area of interest; to date, incel studies have examined the underlying misogynistic framework constructing the incel ideology (Baele, Brace, & Coan, 2019; O'Malley, Holt, & Holt, 2020; Witt, 2020); some have compared (Hoffman, Ware, & Shapiro, 2020) or contrasted (Cottee, 2020) what they perceive to be incel terrorism with Islamist and right-wing counterparts; others have done this alongside policy framework suggestions seeking to prevent future attacks by the radicalised (Tomkinson, Harper, & Attwell, 2020). There have also been notable analyses of the content of specific online forums frequented by incels (Ging, 2017) – demonstrating the world view therein (Baele et al., 2019), the presence of femmephobia and the hatred of hyper-femininity (Menzie, 2020) and, finally, misogyny, victimhood and fatalism (Cottee, 2020). There is also literature regarding incels written from a journalistic standpoint (see Beauchamp, 2019; Kim, 2014; Penny, 2014a, b; Tait, 2018; Williamson, 2018). This book, however, addresses the void within the current cannon relating to the examination of the culture and formation of incels and situates this within a criminological feminist framework.

The purpose of this book is to provide an informed and cultural understanding into incel and more broadly the scope and nature of the manosphere. Although this book explores the rhetoric and ideology espoused within the manosphere and the sorts of groups encompassed within these online spaces, the particular focus is on those who identify as involuntary celibates. This book will consider the historical origins of the MRM pre-internet and how it evolved, including its change in perspective from initially supporting feminism to viewing it as problematic and the cause of men's emasculation and wider societal failings; to show how the emergence of incel aligned with this ideology.

The link between the alt-right, incel and the larger manosphere has been debated (Beauchamp, 2019; Nagle, 2017; Ribeiro et al., 2020; Stokel-Walker, 2021; Young, 2019). Consisting of people on the political right who have established their own movement distinct from the mainstream Republican establishment, the alt-right relates to white nationalists, white supremacists and race realists, as well as neo-nazis or neo fascists. Incels deny any connections with the alt-right or, indeed, having a political purpose; however, there are overlapping ideologies, which will be addressed in this book.

I also consider the role digital technologies play in propagating violence and hatred against women, particularly the ways in which anti-feminist rhetoric and ideology on platforms such as YouTube, Reddit and 4chan appears to be deliberately targeted towards young men and boys and presented as harmless or satirical media in the forms of images, videos and memes. Reddit, in particular, was a key location for this research. A social news platform enabling users to discuss and vote on content submitted by users, Reddit originated from the United States and is one of the most widely used platforms globally with 430 million active users monthly worldwide.¹ Comprising myriad topics, including niche information undiscoverable elsewhere, Reddit is a hotbed of satire and memes birthing cultural trends, hence it is extremely popular with younger people. While there is some moderation, there is abundant inappropriate content including pornography, violent material, suicide tips and hate speech, thus providing the natural environment for incel to flourish.

The central argument of this book is that although incels are an extreme manifestation of misogyny, their problematic attitudes are not contained to the online spaces they frequent, rather they are symbolic of structural misogyny and patriarchal systems of socialisation. Moreover, the ideology espoused within incel communities is interwoven with the wider socio-political climate. This type of extremist behaviour is not confined to online spaces but is exacerbated by digital technologies. Providing significant implications for research, policy and practice in regard to new forms and representations of hatred and extremism, this book is of interest to a broad range of practitioners, law enforcement and scholars across criminology, sociology, terrorism studies, gender, media and cultural studies, politics, as well as expanding the field of cybercrime research and beyond.

The growth of a misogynistic ideology manifested in incel has discreetly grown more ubiquitous leading to the emergence of what has been termed a domestic terrorism threat (Hoffman et al., 2020). It is difficult to ascertain the exact numbers of incels worldwide; however, users and visits to incel sites indicate that members are in the tens of thousands, while the media has emphasised an apparent significant following in North America and Europe. Although only a small minority of those ascribing to the incel ideology mobilise to actual physical violence, incels are presenting a major challenge for law enforcement and security services focussed on countering terrorism and extremist violence, with fears about

¹<https://www.statista.com/topics/5672/reddit/#dossierSummary>

incel and male supremacist radicalisation and ideological grooming amongst the cacophony of misogynistic and hate-fuelled bile on incel spaces.

Drawing on extensive research involving analysis of various types of online data and interviews with incels, this book provides original and timely insight into this subcultural group, the development of the ‘Manosphere’, how and why people join these communities and self-identify as incels and the extent to which the influence and philosophy of incel and the incelsphere draws on and is penetrating mainstream culture and political discourse, as well as the harmful impacts. This book also explores the assumption that it is ordinarily young white Western males who not only appear to populate the majority of such groups but who are also targeted by the men’s rights discourse and propaganda disseminated on social media platforms. Discussions within this book will highlight the many contradictions present in incel ideology, arguments and behaviours and to question whether these are deliberate – in order to confuse outsiders, or if these are unrecognised or ignored within the incel community, obscured by a greater purpose of adhering to incel culture. There is a great deal of content within incel communities, designed to troll or snare outsiders, who can then be accused of cherry-picking content. It is fundamental to be critical of the material available, and I have attempted to parse out what is bona fide incel subject matter or representative of incel philosophies, informed by the individuals I directly spoke with.

Incel

The term incel is a portmanteau of the words involuntary and celibate, those who adopt the name view themselves as unsuccessful in obtaining sex and romantic relationships, with those they desire. The etymology of the term can be traced to a queer female student – Alana Boltwood – in 1993, who in seeking support from like-minded others, on her website, described incel as ‘anybody of any gender who was lonely, had never had sex or who hadn’t had a relationship in a long time’. From its original virtuous intentions, incel has since been appropriated (foremost by men) and has come to represent a community solidified in its hatred towards women. This is in contrast to the gender inclusive community formerly envisaged.

In much of the academic literature, incel has been described as a movement (Conley, 2020; Hoffman et al., 2020; Menzie, 2020; Palma, 2019; Papadamou et al., 2020; Salojärvi, Rantanen, Nieminen, Juote, & Hanhela, 2020; Tomkinson et al., 2020; van der Veer, 2020; Witt, 2020). The incel wiki, however, describes incel as ‘a life circumstance not a movement/community’ – thus rejecting the notion of incels being members of anything. Regardless, the position of this book is that community is a more accurate term to describe how incels operate. This is not to say that there are no attempts to change or develop society (in their favour) and certainly there are definite efforts to influence their perspectives upon others, to disseminate the ‘blackpill’ – the overarching incel philosophy – and understand the ‘truth’ about not only incel’s existence but how and why the world is unfairly structured for women and good-looking men. What draws men into incelism, however,

and to self-ascribe the incel moniker, is the sharing of the common attitudes and interests that have brought together many who are lonely, vulnerable and seeking solidarity, as well as an explanation for their problems. Further, there is an element of revelling in superior clandestine knowledge, which contradicts the notion of attempts by the community to embed incel in the mainstream (although this is occurring nevertheless). How and why young men are becoming and remaining incels is explored further in Chapters 3 and 4, in terms of the appealing mechanisms (Chapter 3) and the responses that validate and perpetuate individuals to continue their incel journey (Chapter 4). Also, in the latter, interestingly ex-incels, those who have ascended – were able to leave the community – speak of feeling as if they were part of a cult. This is an interesting and concerning claim, and although I do not explore incel as a cult in depth, there is scope to describe it in this manner, albeit with further research.

I adopt the position incel as a community – as per Rheingold's (1993) 'virtual community' – incels are a form of social aggregation that have emerged online from sufficient amounts of people interacting and conducting in public discussions, sharing alliances and forming bonds, which are also grounded in their everyday physical worlds. It is not my intention, however, to present incels as one homogeneous community devoid of individual thought or behaviours. Due to the many different spaces utilised by incels online, there are differing incel communities, which demonstrate some variation in the content they post (and the levels of hate they present) depending on what platform is being used. Nor, am I suggesting that there are different incel communities in accordance with different platforms or websites that they frequent, as that is simply not the case. Many incels engage with a variety of different online spaces – those who are completely dedicated to incel as well as more mainstream social media and may post as an incel or pertaining to other aspects of their identity. Regardless, the term community will often be used throughout this book rather than the plural communities; however, the term should be noted as incorporating these recognised distinctions. There are diverse members, interpretations and applications of the ideologies encompassed within the umbrella identity of 'incel'.

Incels like to present themselves as countercultural to the mainstream (Chang, 2020) and are recognised as a subcultural group (O'Malley et al., 2020). Here though, Rheingold's (1993) insight into the workings of virtual communities is helpful to appreciate the subtleties involved in what on the surface appears to be a homogeneity of misogynistic attitudes and behaviours, 'there is no such thing as a single, monolithic, online subculture; it's more like an ecosystem of subcultures, some frivolous, others serious' (p. 3).

Much of what occurs within incel spaces is deliberately provocative and shocking, a form of shitposting and ironic humour. Yet, this does not dismiss how the encouragement and incitement of hatred and violence propagated by some incels could also be viewed as a movement to strike back at feminism and women's increased rights. Posts with the phrase 'going ER', meaning to go Elliot Rodger, or even describing the mass murderer as 'saint Elliot' are worryingly plentiful on incel forums. Whether this is a genuine desire to enact violence or an attempt at warped humour, though the intentions may differ, symbolically they form part of

a call to arms to engage in a virtual war against women, that has very real and very harmful offline consequences. As Powell, Stratton, and Cameron (2018) note in their book *Digital Criminology*, this type of extremist behaviour is not limited to online spaces and is exacerbated by digital technologies, which is embedded within our everyday lives as a result of the symbiotic relationship between society and technology.

The incel community that is recognisable today has developed online since the mid-2000s and has particularly gained traction since 2015. Although there has been an emphasis on frustrated virgins, some incels have had sex, but have since been rejected, been single for a long time or slept with a sex worker (which in the incel community doesn't count). The emphasis is on heteronormative partnerships, and generally incels are men who are unable to attract [the] women [they want]. There is a mass of contradiction amongst incel beliefs. First, the adoption of the name itself, involuntary implies that this is something which they have no choice in, but there is indeed an element of choice in self-identifying as an incel as it is not a term ascribed by others. Certainly, the labelling process (Becker, 1963) and resulting negativity applies, but this is only after the individual establishes themselves in those terms. Furthermore, the application of the term celibate is also problematic, as already highlighted, sometimes it is not the fact that such men are unable to attract women, rather it is more that it is not the type of women they think they deserve. This is even acknowledged by incels who adopt volceldom – whereby some choose to be voluntarily celibate; however, the distinction between inceldom and volceldom is undeniably blurred. This leads to another conundrum, incels view themselves as zeta males, the lowest of the low. If this is indeed the case, then according to the incel attractiveness scale, they would not be able to appeal to the more aesthetically beautiful woman, nor should they believe they should. The way they present themselves is that they are unattractive to any women but also they in turn don't find all women attractive, for example, they are quick to call overweight women 'landwhales' and emphasise how they would not want to be intimate with them. The significance placed on looks is also antithetical to the criticisms levelled at women for being uniquely superficial and shallow. In selecting to become an incel, there is a conscientious rejection of women and sexual and romantic relationships with women, which ironically then causes bitterness and resentment as these are the very things that such individuals are craving.

There are some small numbers of women who identify as incel; however, they are less conspicuous and not entirely welcomed within the communities, certainly with the levels of hatred that are directed towards women in these spaces. These are men who have very little, if any, interaction with women, and so the irony is that they are barring women who can empathise with their issues of loneliness and rejection. Women who identify as incel are known as femcels. Femcels' legitimacy is generally rejected by incels, who believe that women will always be able to procure sex, irrespective of their looks or circumstances, as men have higher sex drives and so are willing to perform sexually with all and any women (again contradictory to the ethos of incel as described previously). Femcels have been described as 'entitled women who play the victim to get sympathy and attention

from men but refuse to lower their standards'.² The notion that it is necessary for men to have sex whilst women just submit to it is deeply entrenched. Due to the fact that the majority of incels are indeed men, and to date, there have been no issues or concerns regarding female incels in terms of espousing hatred against others or violent enactments, this work is focussed on male incels, and where gender is not explicitly mentioned when the term incel is presented, the default position is that male incels are being referred to.

A misconception of incels is that they are predominantly all angry white Western young men. In a survey conducted of incels by incels on the incel.co site around half of the members stated that they were white. However, there is an increased focus on white young male incels, mainly originating from North America and Europe in the media and academia, perhaps in part due to those who have engaged in violent attacks (though it is noted that Elliot Rodger was Asian American and Alek Minassian is Armenian, although they could be described as 'white presenting'). Moreover, there does appear to be an increased presence of white, English-speaking men on incel forums, which could be explained in terms of privilege and access, as well as English being the dominant language of the internet. However, incel communities also include specific groups of incels based on ethnicity, who, as a result of not being white, face further rejection from women. As many incel communities are English speaking, such non-white individuals may face further discriminations in not being confident to engage in many conversations due to not being fully articulate in the English language, and so it is not necessarily the case that there is a lack of representation from incels of different ethnic backgrounds but that they are not at the forefront of incel activity. The different intersections between gender, ethnicity, class and ableism in the representation of incels will be explored further in this book, as well as how homosexual sexual orientation, as well as transgenderism are disregarded as they have no place within the incel world view.

The link between incels and those who are neurodiverse has received increased attention following the trial of Alek Minassian in which he attempted to use this as a defence. Many incels are thought to be on the autistic spectrum, demonstrating characteristics such as problems in socially interacting with others and having unusual and prolonged emotional reactions. It could well be the case that those with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) are more vulnerable to the lure of the ideas espoused within the incel community; however similar to the stereotyping of all hackers as autistic (Borgan, Mosca, McLean, & Rusconi, 2016; Seigfried-Spellar, O'Quinn, & Treadway, 2015), making such connections as an explanation for deviance or criminality leads to stigmatisation and alienation. Moreover, with significant numbers of people believed to be neurodiverse worldwide, for example, in the United Kingdom, 1 in 100 people are on the autism spectrum, with around 700,000 adults and children,³ the odds are likely that there will be incels with this condition, especially because online they may be more comfortable interacting

²<https://melmagazine.com/en-us/story/femcels-vs-incels-meaning-reddit-discord>

³<https://www.autism.org.uk/>

and often frequent the web spaces where they may be exposed to incel ideology and, not least, may identify more with what the incel philosophy presents them about a world which they may find difficult to understand.

The Blackpill

Incels ascribe to a nihilistic ideology named the blackpill, which cements the realisation of being an incel. The blackpill is comprised of commonly held beliefs, such as hypergamy, the 'just be white' (JBW) theory, the 80/20 rule of dating, lookism, the halo effect and sexual racism that rely on pseudoscience – where incels seek evidence to support to their claims, rather than a scientific approach, which would strive to prove a claim by seeking evidence, which may prove that claim to be false, amid uncritical interpretations of evolutionary biology and psychology studies, as well as studies undertaken by dating sites. At the core, feminism is viewed as the scourge of all men's, but especially, incels' problems, obstacles that are due to genetics, cannot be overcome. Deconstructed, the blackpill involves the accumulation of statistics used to validate their perspectives, along with images and memes used to describe and visualise incel thoughts and feelings, which are usually bleak and denigrating women for being egocentric, cruel and shallow.

In becoming 'blackpilled' incels accept their lot in life – that they are the zeta males who will never attract the women they want, and so turn their backs upon women and societal values regarding relationships and equality, which often manifests as hatred. It is important to note that often frustration is exerted about the type of women incels believe they should be entitled to, which appears contradictory when incels also present themselves as the lowest status of male. It is not necessarily the case that incels are unable to obtain sexual or romantic relationships with women, rather it is not the women they believe they should be with nor is it on the terms they want to determine. This suggests that choice in partners is something that only men should benefit from, and so when men are affected by past experiences where women have refused their advances, the blackpill provides an appealing explanation for their rejections external to themselves. Instead of viewing disinterest from some women as natural and to be expected, rejection is something that most people will encounter; it has devastating impacts whereby it shapes an individual's identity making them susceptible to this ideology, which provides them with the reasons for such failures. Incels are eager to validate their ideas and rely on various pseudoscientific studies and research, which they claim substantiates their blackpill ideology. Incels accuse others, who don't share their viewpoint, of not engaging with or not being open to such research, and therefore disregard dissenting opinion as being uninformed and unworthy of consideration. Though the incitement of hatred is not explicitly part of the blackpill philosophy, the deprecation of women and progressiveness is unmistakable to see. Therefore, to incels, misogyny is a natural outcome of being blackpilled; this is reinforced by broader structures that denigrate women and support the violence that is conducted on an endemic scale against them. Hence, though violence isn't necessarily sanctioned by the incel world view, it is undeniably attractive to those who are that way inclined as well as presenting some

rather mixed messages about needing to retaliate against women and the society that has supposedly privileged them over men. Moreover, though there are the odd members (that usually get removed for doing so) that criticise the aggression and violent attitudes towards women, the majority of the incel community do not openly condemn the violence, instead presenting what seems like approval masked with irony.

Although the blackpill is formulated and spread via online incel communities, it did not occur within a vacuum, and its origins can be traced offline through the emergence of historical MRA groups. It also crosses over with the redpill ideology permeating other groups within the manosphere and the alt-right. The redpill draws on the film *The Matrix*, whereby the protagonist, Neo, is presented with a choice about taking the redpill or the bluepill. If he takes the bluepill, he can continue to live blissfully unaware of the façade he is currently living in, whereas if he takes the redpill, he will know the truth about the world. The narrative of the film is so well known that it's not a spoiler to say that the film proceeds with Neo taking the redpill.

In the manosphere, the redpill is a rejection of the bluepill – whereby the conventional media sources (what incels refer to as ‘normie fakesteam media’ – source incel wiki) and banalities about romantic relationships are unquestionably accepted. Incels consider the vast majority of the population to be bluepillled and criticise bluepillers for their lack of original thought and adhering to comforting well-versed tropes supporting common world view. Hence, the redpill represents a counterculture challenging prevailing social norms, focussing on physical attraction and sexual success. To the PUAs, the redpill represents the game required for men to improve their confidence and become sexually attractive to women. To the MRAs, the redpill is the understanding that society is gynocentric, discriminating against men rather than women. The redpill is also understood in political terms, particularly in alt-right communities, relating to self-identified reactionary right wing/conservatives. Whilst the use of the political sense of the term usually implies belief in the PUA and the MRA application of the term, belief in the PUA or the MRA sense of the redpill does not necessarily mean support for the political sense of the term. It is worth noting that the redpill has never been applied to left-wing politics in any context, although misogyny does occur within those domains too. According to the incel wiki, not all redpillers are incels and not all incels are redpillers; however, the majority of incels are blackpillled, which is essentially the fatalistic version of the redpill. The outcome of the blackpill is cynicism and hopelessness, whilst with the redpill aspiration remains, as this presents the notion that it is still possible to game the system if you know how to.

As ideology is integral to analyses of incels, it is therefore necessary to define the term. In basic terms, ideology is a set of beliefs and values held by an individual or group, which act as a lens through which individuals or groups interpret or understand the world. Feminist critical discourse scholar, Michelle Lazar (2007, p. 146) describes ideologies as ‘group-based sociocognitive, representations of practices in the service of power’. Meanwhile, Žižek (1989) draws attention to the concept of false consciousness within ideologies – the various processes through which certain groups are made to accept the inherent inequality and

unfairness of the status quo. However, rather than constructing ideology simply as false consciousness, Žižek (1989) views ideology as being supported by false consciousness. This is understood to mean that the pseudo-scientific theories, social Darwinism and biological and psychological essentialism relied on by incels are not themselves ideology, rather they are elements of the false consciousness supporting the ideologies of incel communities.

Aim of the Research

The research presented in this book was driven by the aim to study the development of online incel communities and its impacts, with the primary objective of ascertaining the individual aspects and group dynamics of incel communities and exploring how and why people join them. Specific secondary objectives were:

- To identify the defining attributes of an incel.
- To determine incel ideology and how this aligns with the broader MRAs and the alt-right.
- To explore platforms used to spread the incel ideology.
- To understand why people self-identify as incel and the experiences that have led them to this realisation.
- To understand what motivates people to join incel communities.
- To explore how these communities operate and whether there is evidence of grooming and recruitment to the movement.
- To examine forms of hatred and extremism evident in these communities and how they are inciting violence, blurring on and offline behaviours.

Methodology

The methodology utilised in this research was twofold. First, in order to explore how online cultures and networks are enabling misogynistic extremist and violent behaviours, an online ethnographic approach, Netnography (Kozinets, 2015, 2019), was utilised. The methods involved non-participant observation and thematic analysis of publicly available discussions and videos, comments on social media platforms during 2017–2021 – Reddit, 4chan, Twitter, YouTube, incels.co/is, incel.net – frequented by incels and MRAs. For this part of the study, there was no direct interaction with users/posters, but rather time was spent on the sites, and the author did not need to become a member of any communities to access data. Relevant posts were collected via manual means – copying and pasting, analysing memes and videos on YouTube chosen by starting with search terms such as ‘blackpill’ and then using the recommended feature to explore how the platform’s algorithms promote such content and technical means using NodeXL,⁴ which obtains tweets over the previous seven days. The online observations equated to more than 100 hours, with 10,264 pieces of data analysed.

⁴<https://www.smrfoundation.org/nodexl/>

Data were excluded from analysis if they were clear that the poster did not identify as an incel and was blatantly an outsider to the community, for example, posts from users who criticise incels and their belief systems.

Second, the research involved 10 qualitative semi-structured interviews with self-identified incels ($n = 7$) and those who identify as ex-incels ($n = 3$) online during 2019. To the best of my knowledge, I was the first academic to have conducted direct interviews with persons from the incel community, although it is acknowledged that journalists did so before me, and digital culture expert, Kaitlyn Regehr (2020), engaged in interviews with incels supported by a UK television network. My participants were identified from snowball and convenience sampling and were all men. As noted previously, there are some women who identify as incel, and the advertisement recruiting for the research did not specifically request men; however, it was only men who came forward to be interviewed. It is worth noting that this might be due to the spaces in which I was targeting, being less welcoming to female incels, as well as the potential reluctance of female incels to be interviewed.

Before commencing this research project, I was contacted via my university email by incels of their own accord, who had seen me quoted in a national newspaper story about them (Tait, 2018). By wanting to provide their voices and experiences, they already indicated their willingness to take part in research and so when this research was decided, I already had some interview participants. Other participants were contacted via Reddit *r/exredpill*, *r/incelswithouthate* and by searching Reddit for phrases like 'I am/ I used to be an incel' and were messaged via Reddit's messaging service to invite them to interview. These forums were chosen with my safety in mind and were deemed to be less hostile than other incel spaces. Interviews were conducted online via email or private messages on Reddit. Although interviewees were offered the option of telephone or Skype interviews, none took up these modes of interview, preferring instead to remain within the online spaces they usually inhabit. Highlighting the significance of interacting with participants in the places they usually frequent and are comfortable in and of them being able to preserve their anonymity. For those who undertook email interviews, there is the suggestion that they were less concerned about anonymity than those who wanted to remain on Reddit and talk there. Those interviewees on email were happy to divulge what seemed to be their actual first names, as opposed to those on Reddit who remained masked by their Reddit usernames. Ethical approval was obtained from the University Faculty Ethics Committee, with particular regard to the sensitivity of the topic, the usual ethical considerations of obtaining informed consent from the interview participants and protection of confidentiality and anonymity, as well as issues specific to online research regarding the use of publicly available data. I have replaced the usernames of interview participants with pseudonyms in order to protect their identities and ensure that they are untraceable online, especially as incels tend to reuse the same name across different platforms. The pseudonyms I applied are notably different to the majority of usernames within incel spaces, which often consist of the term 'cel' at the end to signify being an incel or are descriptions or references to their appearance, situation or manga/anime/science fiction related. In attempting

to protect those who engaged in my research, I have instead used generic male names that in no way bear any significance as to the individual or the username within the incel community or are part of the incel vocabulary.

Additionally, the irony in my being a woman speaking with self-confessed woman-haters did not escape me, and through the process, I continually engaged in self-reflection, and extra care and attention was taken with my questions and responses during the interviews. I was also careful about what information was publicly available about myself so as to mitigate any negative preconceptions about me that could impact upon the research. Nevertheless, online I was open about my being a feminist, which could have been a 'red-flag' to some, but which was not directly challenged, although there were indications that some participants were aware of this aspect of my identity. I address this and other ethical tensions in conducting this research, in previous publications (Lavorigna & Sugiura, 2020; Sugiura 2021). Upon conducting the interviews, I was surprised to discover the ease in which incels opened up to me, indicating that they are willing to speak to anyone who is willing to listen to them. The suggestion was that they do not feel that people want to pay attention to them or hear what they have to say. A critical reflexive perspective is integrated throughout this book, with self-reflections underpinning my analyses and interpretations presented where relevant.

The concepts of hegemonic masculinities (Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) and aggrieved entitlement (Kimmel, 2008) are employed to understand the correlation between violence and crime and reflect the socially approved standards against which subordinate masculinities are measured (particularly pertinent for incels who view themselves as 'zeta' males). The notion of masculinity in crisis is also explored – a claim purported within the manosphere, particularly in relation to the growth in women's equality and feminism (Faludi, 1991) along with feminist concepts such as Dianne Herman's (1989) rape culture, Liz Kelly's (1987) continuum of sexual violence and Elizabeth (Betsy) Stanko's (1990) everyday violence and intimate intrusions. Elements of my previously established theoretical framework, 'Respectable deviance' (Sugiura, 2018), will also be utilised to inform the incel narratives, such as the construction of deviance (Becker, 1963), techniques of neutralization (Sykes & Matza, 1957) – especially denial of victim (particularly where the assumption of victim status is undertaken by incels) and denial of responsibility – and presentation of self (Goffman, 1959).

The rest of this book is structured accordingly, with Chapters 2–5 substantiated with empirical research data: Chapter 2 considers the emergence and development of the manosphere in order to situate the historical context of incel and address why it is seemingly young, white males who not only appear to populate the majority of such groups but who are targeted by the discourse and propaganda propagated on various social media platforms; Chapter 3 titled 'Join the Incel Rebellion' utilises masculinity theories and explores whether young men are being recruited, groomed and effectively radicalised into a hate-fuelled ideology online. Chapter 4 – 'Weirdos or Extremists?' – then explores the problems in pathologising incels as deviant 'others' and draws on the sociology of deviance, subcultural, gender and feminist theory to understand the lure of the manosphere and the appeal of rejecting progressive social values. This chapter considers the main

mechanisms and platforms being used to show how messages and symbolism in mainstream media are appropriated by such online communities to promote their beliefs; whilst their language is increasingly infiltrating common vocabulary, reinforcing misogynistic, homophobic and racist rhetoric, drawing parallels with the alt-right; whilst Chapter 5 looks at the legitimisation of misogyny and the impact of leaders such as Jordan B. Peterson, Roosh V, Paul Elam, Milo Yiannopoulos and Donald Trump when they espouse the same right-wing rhetoric as that propagated by incels, MRAs and the alt-right, yet are protected by a veneer of respectability, albeit a respectability eschewed on power and privilege. Finally, the conclusion reiterates the central argument of this book, that the ideology espoused by groups such as incels in the manosphere is linked with the wider sociopolitical climate, and this type of extremist behaviour is not confined to online spaces. It pre-existed the internet and continues to co-exist alongside it but is exacerbated and enabled by digital technologies. Wider rhetorical questions around gender expectations and entitlement, and legal redress and responsibility of social media platforms, arising from the research findings are also presented, as well as the threat from such ideology to societal progression and equality.

Incels bond through the denigration of women; this provides them with the power that they think they lack. They are seeking dominance, which ends up being counterintuitive to the emotional and physical intimacy they desire. From the perspective of some incels (and parts of the wider manosphere), women have won the war; they have made men into an oppressed class, and now they need to be prepared for men to retaliate and fight back. This book will address the reality of the incel 'rebellion' and the broader 'virtual' war against women, which, in reality, is not just confined online.