

Chapter 3

Join the Incel Rebellion

Private (Recruit) Minassian Infantry 00010, wishing to speak to Sgt 4chan please. C23249161. The Incel Rebellion has already begun! We will overthrow all the Chads and Stacys! All hail the Supreme Gentleman Elliot Rodger! (Alek Minassian)

Incel or incel-related perpetrators such as Alek Minassian have become the public faces of the community. Their atrocities and the resulting media responses have provided them with notoriety and attention and contributed to raising the profile of incels beyond being a mere online subcultural group. Minassian's claim of an incel rebellion, actualising the idea that aggrieved men are rising up against their perceived oppressors in violent ways, is extremely unsettling and such a threat absolutely warrants counterterrorism attention. This notion of a supposed incel insurgency, however, did not originate with Minassian and continues within discussions in the networks today, but what exactly is this incel rebellion and is there active recruitment to the incel cause and community? Addressing these questions, this chapter focusses on the defining attributes of incels, what makes individuals self-identify as incel and motivations for joining incel communities. The themes in incel language and ideology, as well as the discourse of the wider manosphere, are also considered. Drawing on empirical research data, this chapter provides insight into how and why young men become incels and whether they are being drawn and effectively radicalised into a hate-fuelled ideology online. In addition, this chapter considers the main mechanisms and platforms that are being used, and the symbiotic nature of the relationship between men's activist groups and popular culture will be demonstrated. 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, ableist and racist rhetoric.

The Incel Rebellion: The Rise of the Manosphere and the Virtual War Against Women, 37–67
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Deconstructing Incel

Moderators of *incel.co*, one of the largest incel forums, released the results of a community poll in 2020, which had 665 respondents. The findings, though self-reported and unscientific, provide insight into the community and incel mindset. Predictably, the average incel, according to this poll, is a man, in his mid-20s, of average height, white and European or North American. He has never had a sexual relationship or kissed a woman. He is deeply unhappy, potentially depressed and has considered having (but has never had) aesthetic surgery. He believes his physical appearance is the most significant factor in this lack of romantic and sexual success, followed by his lack of social skills.

Incels are generally perceived to be young white men. The 10 interview participants were all young (between 18 and 35) white men, based in Europe, North America or Central America, aside from one who identified as black, and another who identified as Asian. The *incel.co* poll largely confirmed that profile too: 82% of respondents said they were between the ages of 18 and 30. The largest percentage (36%) was between the ages of 18 and 21. The second largest segment (30%) said they were between 22 and 25, followed by 18% aged 26–30. Most alarmingly, nearly 8% said they were younger than 17.

When asked to describe in their own words, what an incel is, there was a consensus amongst interview participants that there is a culture of blame against women and wider society, within the community. Along with this, men spoke self disparagingly, in terms that were derogatory, melancholic and despondent about the community they are part of or used to align themselves with:

An incel is a guy who is frustrated at his lack of success in dating, struggles with attracting women and subsequently develops a very bitter attitude towards society, women, attractive guys, pretty much everything else. Incels believe they themselves are sub-human. (Mike)

An incel is a guy/man who is involuntarily celibate. This means that he doesn't have sex and/or romantic relationships not for his own choice, but due to women's choice. (Ben)

This construction of choice is a reoccurring theme throughout the incel community, specifically that women having autonomy to decide who they wish to enter into sexual or romantic relationships with, be they men, other women or individuals who identify as non-gender binary, has impacted upon men's power to select partners of their choosing.

The incel interpretation of celibacy was explained by Ben, who excluded sex workers as authentic sexual partners and references sexual success rate as an important factor:

Despite celibate meaning that one never had sex, there are many guys on incel forums/sites (either American and European) that even if they're not virgin they still identify as incels because even if they had sex, their success rate with women (non-sex workers)

is low (too many efforts and too little reward) because they have a low LMS (looks, money, status). (Ben)

This notion that sex with sex workers does not constitute valid sexual experience was supported by Tom to a degree, but this was more in relation to the lack of an emotional connection rather than the sexual intercourse itself. Tom did recognise that he was not a virgin after having sex with a sex worker, despite including a qualifier to this:

I was an incel until I lost my virginity at 2017 but I lost it to a prostitute, however I did date somebody for a week, but it wasn't a good relationship and I initiated the break up. Then in recent years I visited a few escorts. Sex is easy to get as long as you have money, but I never experienced true love or intimacy or had a long term relationship with someone I truly enjoy. (Tom)

Tom, who referred to himself as a past incel, though he still interacted on the Reddit incel forums, also had a broader interpretation as to what, and indeed who, could be perceived as an incel, not just referring to men in his explanation:

An incel is a person mostly blames the opposite gender for their lack of sexual activities. They all agree on their opinion that the opposite gender are bad and instead of looking why, they decide to group together ... this causes them to spread hatred in hopes of bringing other people into the community who had a bad experience with a woman/man and feed them their 'knowings'. (Tom)

Yet, for Tom, as with the majority of the incel community, the default positions are heterosexual relationships and a binary description of gender. Nevertheless, he also recognised that the majority of incels are male:

It is mostly men, and they tend to have really bad attitude, self-awareness and many negative personalities. They think that the world owes them sex, so they don't try and improve themselves much in order to get a mate. (Tom)

Tom has attempted to place some distance between himself and the incel mindset, in his acknowledgement of male entitlement (to women's bodies) and the inability to look inward for self-improvement.

Self-identifying as Incel

Being an incel is undoubtedly a lonely existence, with seemingly little advantage aside from the community interaction and licence to be aggrieved with others for one's unhappiness. However, Tom suggested that isolation arising from being an incel can actually be a positive outcome as there are less opportunities to be bullied or ridiculed and so the adoption of the incel identity in this respect could be

viewed as a form of self-protection but still acknowledged that, for the most part, being an incel is a negative experience:

The benefit I see [of being an incel] is dealing with less conflicts because you don't really socialize much, but everything else about being an incel is negative. You deal with loneliness, depression, you feel like you have no place in life, lack of relationships with opposite gender, getting made fun of (whether it's being skinny, fat weird etc.) and more. (Tom)

Incels overwhelmingly appear to be educated, often to degree level, this information often volunteered on forums and through my direct interactions with them. It shows that they are keen to demonstrate intellectual ability, something which is undeniably positive and a major achievement, in opposition to the failure they otherwise present themselves as. But for incels, being smart cannot detract from being unattractive, looks will always trump intelligence. Therefore, such presentations of being intelligent are less to do with providing alternative favourable characteristics and potentially more to do with validating their world view and informing the studies they select to do so. There is a sense of righteous knowledge, bolstered by the redpill and blackpill philosophies, of having novel wisdom, yet this benefits from the support of conventional education. As Ben stated 'learning the blackpill made me feel edgy and cool because it was like I could see things in a way normies don't'.

Some incels resent media portrayals of incels that stereotype them as NEETS – young people who are no longer in the education system or in employment, the archetypal isolated internet user languishing in their bedroom or parent's basement:

I think that media tend to depict the worst side of incels and they do that intentionally because bad gossip profits more than good gossip. For example they tend to depict incel as NEETS but only a small part of incel members is NEET. (Alex)

Nevertheless, there is evidence to suggest that many incels have advanced computer skills and/or interests in this field, are programmers or coders and there is a crossover with gaming communities. By virtue of spending prolonged periods of time online, on certain social media and gaming platforms, individuals are more likely to encounter incels and the prevailing philosophies, which as discussed previously intersect through other internet communities. For example, Jason discussed how as a teenager he was an incel aligning with the aforementioned stereotype:

At age 16–17 I would identify myself as an incel because I was very shut in and didn't really talk to many women at all. I was very out of shape and only played video games with not much social life. (Jason)

Many of the interview participants stated that the first time they encountered the term incel was on Reddit, which then piqued their curiosity to learn more resulting in googling the term and being exposed to the wider communities within the manosphere and the redpill and blackpill ideologies.

For Carl, resonating with the blackpill and the redpill led him to continue engaging with incels and the wider manosphere online, which resulted in his indoctrination:

I heard about incels online first, although I knew more about blackpill and TRP before that. I related with some of their issues, then I went further down and before I knew it the manosphere's toxic ideas were deep ingrained in my mind. It's pretty easy to get exposed to this online. (Carl)

Ben also spoke about the lure of the manosphere and how he became converted to the blackpill, after his ex-girlfriend cheated on him:

After my ex-girlfriend cheated on me with a hotter guy. I realized that women monkey branch to other men, will never be loyal and will go on the cock-carousel. (Ben)

According to the Urban Dictionary, monkey branching is when a girl already has a boyfriend but gives her number to other guys and flirts as if she was single. Essentially, she is branching off from her boyfriend and establishing backups. The cock-carousel is a frequently used pejorative term to describe women's inability to be monogamous.

Being rejected as well as cheated upon led to Pete uncovering the blackpill and becoming an incel:

What made me identify as an incel was when I realized how much I struggled with dating and even forming friends with girls. I pretty much never had any female friends. When I finally got a girlfriend, she was manipulative and cheated on me, which made me distrustful of young women. I've also always been socially shy and reserved, which may have had an impact. When I discovered the blackpill I could relate to a lot what it said and hence I knew I was an incel. (Pete)

The blackpill has also impacted upon Mike and how he views women:

The blackpill is logic to me and I have embraced it. Reading blackpill topics made me start to hate women. I have learnt about women's nature by reading surveys, statistics and papers, and the more I hate women. (Mike)

Alex, though, is somewhat of an anomaly in the incel community, as he considers himself good-looking; however, what drew his attention to the blackpill was when he began researching about alopecia and balding and discovered incel forums discussing these topics. Being bald is one of the misfortunes that incels claim impacts upon one's chances of sexual success and so for someone seeking possible cures/remedies for balding, being presented with this fatalistic interpretation can be self-destructive:

I need to tell that before finding these forums I didn't hate women and the whole sex issue wasn't a concern of mine. Also, I wasn't interested in feminist issues. (Alex)

However, for Alex, the blackpill provided insight that enabled him to feel superior to his 'bluepill' friends, who were equally as unsuccessful with girls as he was, despite them confirming to society's expectations:

The blackpill made me see women in a completely new way. Society teaches you that women are beautiful, pure, innocent, and must be protected. It tells you that women are better than men because women don't hate, don't discriminate. It tells you that women aren't as superficial as men when it comes to dating. The blackpill destroyed all the beliefs imprinted by society in my mind. I couldn't see women in the same way I did before. Society gives women a beautiful veil of pureness but the blackpill tore that veil. I also hated women's hypocrisy in negating the fact that looks matter a lot and that often personality isn't enough when you are ugly. (Alex)

Alex refers to the impossible standards that women are expected to live up to, highlighting the problems with gendered stereotypes and expectations. The false narrative of the chaste perfect woman feeds into the dichotomy of women as either Madonnas or whores rather than nuanced human beings. Originating with Sigmund Freud's work, women are perceived as good, chaste and pure Madonnas or bad, promiscuous and seductive whores (Pomeroy, 1975). Freud (1905, 1912) theorised that the Madonna/whore complex inhibited heterosexual men's ability to view women as having both tender and sensual aspects to their sexuality. Men who suffer from this complex, therefore, can only become aroused when they degrade a female partner, and reduce her to a sex object, as respecting her would not equate with desiring her. The Madonna/whore dichotomy continues to resonate in contemporary society (Bareket, Kahalon, Shnabel, & Glick, 2018), in film (Paul, 2013), television (Tropp, 2006) and is particularly prevalent in the West (Faludi, 2009).

Although many incels discuss the problems they have conversing with others and, in particular, face-to-face interactions, others reject the representation of incels as being socially awkward, reframing the issue to focus on women and their

discriminatory behaviours when it comes to sexual partners, as what the media should ideally be focussing on:

I don't like that the media tends to describe incels as socially inept guys either explicitly or implicitly. For sure there are a lot of incels that haven't developed social skills or even lost them because of depression due to their condition, but it's unfair that despite all the studies and statistics about women being more selective than men in choosing a partner, young women having more sex than men, they put all the blame on men and never on women. (Alex)

It is also thought-provoking that Alex talks about being incel in terms of a medical affliction, a 'condition' which causes depression, hinders the advancement of social skills or even removes social abilities. This aligns with the blackpill perception that being incel is inescapable, that people are just naturally incel due to their aesthetics, and not even wealth or class can elevate them from this existence. Incel as a condition is worth exploring in regard to the association with incels and neurodiversity, which is receiving more attention, especially in light of Alek Minassian's attempted defence, but is an area that is lacking in academic research. Minassian's lawyers claimed that his being autistic meant that he was unable to appreciate the wrongness of his actions in driving into and killing pedestrians. This assertion had significant implications not only for those on the autistic spectrum but for how others perceive such individuals, who are already stigmatised. According to Masataka (2018, p. 1):

neurodiversity refers to the notion that seemingly 'impaired' cognitive as well as emotional features characteristic of developmental disorders such as (ASD) fall into normal human behavioural variations that should enjoy some selective advantages.

The American Psychiatric Association (2013)¹ regards autism as a spectrum of developmental disorders characterised by social communicative difficulties and restricted behaviour and interests. Autism, in particular, has risen in prevalence, and alongside a growing awareness, the disorder is developing what Jurecic (2007, p. 422) describes as an 'increasingly powerful cultural resonance'. This involves the term autism being used to casually insult others, that is, 'don't be autistic!' implying apprehension and misunderstanding towards neurological difference. Further, this distorted perception of what it means to have autism takes the form of a metaphor for the 'postmodern self, disengaged from the world and from others' (Jurecic, 2007, p. 422), which could also describe the stereotypical incel. The indication is that many incels are neurodiverse, whether this has been officially diagnosed or self-diagnosed, with members self-disclosing this in forum discussions:

Alek Minassian was radicalised by the incel boards and the incel subreddit /r/incels before it got banned. I don't condone his or

¹<https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/autism/what-is-autism-spectrum-disorder>

Elliot Rodger's actions. In one aspect I feel sorry for them because they both have autism, which hinders their social ability to attract women. Many men on the autism spectrum struggle to find a girlfriend, so I do feel sorry for them. (Alex)

This link with neurodiversity was also acknowledged in the interviews with Carl referring to 'mentalcel's', incels who state that they are unable to attract girls due to being autistic. This adds an almost contradictory dimension to the emphasis on looks, whereby it is noted that attractiveness in itself is not enough to gain a partner, as personality and behaviour are also important factors. Hence, those who are neurodiverse, who might struggle in social interactions, could view themselves as not having the right temperament or skills, which would therefore affect their chances of being successful romantically and sexually. This interpretation could also be based off others responding negatively to them. According to the blackpill, women are shallow and superficial and only interested in men's looks, wealth and status, so this concern about character from mentalcel's undermines this depiction.

Alek Minassian, who killed 10 and injured 16 others when he drove a van into pedestrians in Toronto, in his trial for murder, denied that he was criminally responsible because he was not mentally capable of understanding the wrongness of his actions due to having autism spectrum disorder (ASD).² Minassian's defence lawyer had argued that his client's disorder had left him unable to develop empathy; therefore, he was unaware of how horrific his actions were to his victims, his family and the community. This prompted outrage from autism advocacy groups, concerned about the potential of further stigmatisation of those with this disorder in being labelled criminals. Were this defence upheld, it would have had significant repercussions on the Canadian criminal justice in absolving those with ASD from being able to undertake rational decisions and appreciate the wrongness of their actions. However, on 3 March 2021, Alek Minassian was held criminally responsible and found guilty of 10 counts of first-degree murder and 16 counts of attempted murder.³ Rendering her decision, Justice Anne Molloy said that his attack was

the act of a reasoning mind ... he freely chose the option that was morally wrong, knowing what the consequences would be for himself, and for everybody else ... it does not matter that he does not have remorse, nor empathize with the victims.

In addition, this case also highlights the influence of misogynistic and supremacist rhetoric, as well as the need to understand how and why Minassian came to view other people as mere objects, such that he had no qualms in taking their lives, which is not a default position of being autistic. Neither are all incels neurodiverse, however, the online community, the unnuanced world views and the

²<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/dec/23/toronto-van-killer-autism-defence-alek-minassian>

³<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/minassian-trial-decision-1.5933687>

ability to provide reasons for issues that are otherwise unfathomable, means that incel is more appealing to those who are neurodiverse.

Motivations for Joining Incel Communities

Interview participants provided a variety of reasons for why individuals start engaging with incel communities and begin to self-identify as an incel; these explanations are inextricably centred around the themes of entitlement, rejection and failure to adhere to perceived societal expectations. There is a sense that these men feel excluded and are missing out by not having sex and romantic relationships, especially as this is something they came to expect would automatically happen for them, given the importance society places on such experiences:

I believe most incels in the community are simply frustrated by not being able to find a girlfriend. (Tom)

They feel left out while everyone else around them is enjoying someone. They go quite some time failing at dating over time becoming bitter. (Ian)

I feel pressured to get a girlfriend by society and feel like a failure. I was lied to by my parents, TV, movies ... about finding love and relationships. (Sam)

O'Malley et al. (2020) state that incel rhetoric may include normal anxieties of young men transitioning into adulthood. Certainly, many of the narratives presented online about the age where men were romantically rejected – turning them to the path of incelism, feature exceptionally young ages – often in the early teens – 14 or 15 years old. It is doubtful, however, that they would have much experience to draw on as young teenagers and seems rather premature to predicate the rest of their world view on. This also suggests something rather entitled about the expectations of certain boys in regard to accessing girls, and how girls [should] be responsive to them, even from a young age. Incels are not unique when it comes to experiencing rejection at some point in their lives, and almost no one is immune to romantic failure, and the resulting craving, depression, fear and rage being rebuffed can cause (Baumeister & Dhavale, 2001). However, for incels what is viewed as a (albeit painful) normal rite of passage, engrosses them, instilling a need to seek out both internal and external explanations for their rejection:

This disappointment shaped my life experience in a bad way. I thought I was cursed, didnt know its a natural experience, every man get rejected. I have became [*sic.*] numb of the Incel pain. (Sam)

The indication is that some boys and men are unprepared for disappointment and rejection, such that the pain of it occurring is overwhelming such that it has momentarily shaped the rest of their lives. The perception that they are unique

that other boys and men do not experience it is striking and raises questions as to why and what led them to feel that way and what part did broader societal attitudes towards men and women play in this process.

For incels, the blackpill provides enticing reasons, presented with a veneer of validity under the guise of social and evolutionary theory, attractive to those raw from the misery of unrequited love. However, often incel narratives are less about finding love and a partner, rather anger and frustration are displayed in response to being denied sex, as this online post demonstrates:

I didn't start being hateful with them. Why would I? I don't give a shit how foids behave or who they fuck, as long as they give me love too. But they won't. If I could find a girlfriend just by treating her nicely, do you think I would hate them? If women gave me sex the same as they give it to Chad, do you think I'd hate them? But they won't. That's why I hate them with passion. (Incel.co user)

In explaining the journey to becoming incel, interview participants too spoke about being rejected by girls; however, they were keen to impress the significance of romantic intimacy rather than sexual relationships. This focus on affection rather than sex may have been influenced, in part, by speaking with a female researcher, and aiming to appear more sympathetic, although it should be noted that if this was indeed the case in this instance, such self-awareness was not applied in other discussions, where there were plenty of 'no-holds barred' comments made about their opinions of women. Alternatively, participants might have wanted to provide a different presentation of self (Goffman, 1959) other than the 'sex-obsessed' entitled incel stereotype:

What made me identify as an incel was when I realised how much I struggled with dating and even forming friends with girls. I pretty much never had any female friends in my life. (Ben)

Being an incel is a lone battle. It has been a cycle of rejection from girls. Sometimes, it is because you are not smart, or you lack the social skills for courting. (Alex)

Sex and intimacy go hand in hand It's very important factor in pair bonding with the other person in a relationship. Intimacy is the feeling great from your partner. It often involves cuddling, holding hands, trust, and support. Intimacy is where you enjoy your partner and create good memories with your partner. I feel it's essential, and it needs to go both ways meaning both partners need to feel intimate about each other. (Carl)

In the above description of intimacy, the importance of reciprocity is acknowledged, which implies that both parties should have autonomy. However, discussions within incel communities suggest that there is an issue with women not

automatically feeling this way. Therefore, incels want women to reciprocate their affections and when they don't this frustrates them and leads them to engage in hyperbolic conversations about removing women's ability to choose their romantic and sexual partners. Yet, this outcome would still be unsatisfying for them even if society were to degenerate into a *Handmaid's Tale*-type situation, as the interchange would be forced rather than mutually reached. Women's agency in being able to choose who they date and who they have sex with is often relied upon by incels to explain their lack of sexual success. Assuming a marginalised role, they view women as oppressors because their right to refuse sex has resulted in them feeling powerless, which weakens their position as men, who require and are entitled to sex (Anderson, 2005; Kimmel, 2010). Incels consistently reaffirm the perspective that women owe men sex, and refusal to provide this is in direct conflict to a man's feeling of masculinity (Anderson, 2005; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Kimmel, 2010).

Sex redistribution, as avowed by Valizadeh (more commonly known in the online sphere as Pick Up Artist (PUA) Roosh V), is viewed as a means to prevent incels from engaging in violence by meeting their sexual needs. However, if incel violence can completely be explained and even justified by incels acting out due to not having sex, this would absolve incel killers as due to their lack of romantic or sexual success with women their actions would simply be attempts at gaining attention, and hence, they would not be responsible for them (Jaki et al., 2019). The rationalisation of sexual deprivation for mass murder can be understood with Sykes and Matza's (1957) techniques of neutralization, whereby responsibility is denied through the perpetrator being a victim of their circumstance and forced into a situation beyond their control. Furthermore, denial of victim also applies, whereby the victim status has been appropriated from those who were the actual victims, by the perpetrator. In this instance, there is the implication that the victims deserved what happened to them, as they were mere collateral in the incel fight back against a society which (they claim) created them, appealing to higher loyalties as per Sykes and Matza's (1957) concept.

The argument behind sex redistribution is that the state should provide sex workers (though they are not referred to in such terms within the manosphere, rather they are reduced to whores) to incels. Training would be provided to ensure incels receive specialist treatment and are made to feel 'handsome', 'powerful' and 'confident'. Incels have suggested that the funding for this programme should come from single women paying tax upon birth control products. As sex workers are already a marginalised group vulnerable to abuse presenting them as a solution for misogynist and lonely men further dehumanises them. Moreover, this 'solution' contradicts the incel world view, sex workers do not even meet the subhuman category of women and sex with them is considered invalid such that an interviewee still claimed they were a virgin after a sexual encounter with a sex worker and as highlighted in the following quotation from Mike below:

Many believe (also me) that having sex with a sex worker or a woman who is attracted mostly by your money isn't true sex because there isn't genuine attraction. So if you had sex only with sex workers then you're still virgin. (Mike)

The process of identifying as incel involves continued engagement with the incel community. It is not the case that individuals stumble across incels and the blackpill ideology online and then automatically realise that the answer to their unhappiness and/or other problems is that they are an incel. This might occur in some instances, but more often than not, it is a prolonged development with the growing recognition and awareness of identifying with the community and the ideology such that it pervades a person's sense of who they are and their core values. As per Rheingold's (1993) conceptualisation of virtual communities, the sense of being with like-minded others, those who have shared (negative) experiences, and being understood, is paramount:

You find a community who would understand your frustrations and give you some sense of belonging, as well as something to tell you what to do. This is what I felt when I discovered not only the blackpill but all of the manosphere. You find like minded guys who have also experienced what you do. (Carl)

The Language and Ideology of Incels

For an extensive list of words used within the incel community, please see the Incel Vocabulary at the front of this book.

As already noted, incels have established their own unique vocabulary, some of which is shared by other groups in the manosphere as well as by the alt-right and alt-left. For example, the term 'cuck' emanating from cuckold, where a man (knowingly or unknowingly) is being cheated on by his female partner, is regularly employed as a slur through discussions on Reddit, 4chan and 8chan by all such alternative groups. Cuckold is a genre of pornography where a husband/boyfriend observes whilst their wife/girlfriend has sex with another man. Sometimes, the husband/boyfriend is an eager voyeur who has encouraged their wife/girlfriend to engage in this extra-marital/relationship activity, but generally, there is the implication of humiliation, with the man's property (the woman) being defiled by another (usually more sexually satisfying) man. There are also racial connotations, with the couple often being white and the other man being black, fuelling the trope of black men and white women. Although 'Cuck' is used throughout the manosphere and beyond to refer to situations where men are being cheated on, the term is also employed to castigate men who are sympathetic to women, in a healthy relationship (or entering into a new relationship) with a woman, or – the unthinkable – a feminist. In previous work with Alessia Tranchese (Tranchese & Sugiura, 2021), we explored the commonalities of the language of pornography with the language of incels and found that both pornography and incels are contrasting manifestations of the same entrenched societal misogyny, facilitated and exacerbated by contemporary digital technologies. It was not our claim that sexist or indeed misogynistic language was created by modern pornography or by incels, rather that both have drawn on and supplemented the repertoire of sexist language accessible to them. Yet, the harms arising from the language of pornography and the language of incels are significant because they expand and

permeate back through mainstream society, further normalising men's violence and hatred towards women (MacKinnon, 1984). Incels use language and imagery, a 'script' (Tranchese & Sugiura, 2021), to convey their hate and resentment, and this also provides them with innovative means to disseminate hatred against women, beyond their group, both online and offline (Jane, 2016). However, this pronouncement of hatred does not just build a community/ies, but it also serves to act as a warning for women, a sign that they are not welcome in certain spaces and for them to be silenced. What Lewis, Rowe, Wiper (2017, p. 1464) describe as a 'territorial exclusivity', which defines the perimeters of what women can and cannot do, and where they can inhabit both online and offline.

Academics who have studied incel spaces have attempted to provide a cohesive explanation for their belief system. Zimmerman et al. (2018) describe incels' views as a political ideology grounded in both male supremacy and white supremacy and based on the notion that feminism has destroyed society. Baele et al. (2019) refer to the incel world view structure as rigid and impermeable, a characteristic of singular extremist beliefs. The ideological beliefs underpinning inceldom are extensive and often bizarre, with many ideas rooted in other parts of the manosphere and then extended. For example, the redpill contends that feminism has corrupted society such that women are unfairly advantaged. Incels expand upon this, claiming that the empowerment of women has led to the subjugation of men resulting from what they term 'sexual hegemony' – where most women are only interested in the top 20% of attractive men (Zimmerman et al., 2018). A common perspective readily found on incel sites, presented in various yet similar iterations, is 'Women are extremely shallow, selfish, and vile creatures who won't look past physical features'. An adulteration of Pareto's 80/20 rule is often referred to, incels allege that 80% of women desire and compete for the top 20% of men, and conversely, the bottom 80% of men are competing for the bottom 20% of women.

In order to highlight how women are solely concerned with looks, Alex discussed and shared studies with me that showed young men are having much less sex than young women, in the United States and Finland.⁴ Although he noted that some of the explanations provided in an article from the *Washington Post*⁵ did contribute to young men's lack of sex, such as residing with parents, rising unemployment, excessive use of technology, he questioned why it is only men who are having less sex, whilst the rate for women barely changed. He was critical of the media never introducing the possibility that men are having less sex, whilst women have more, because women's socio-economic statuses have risen so too have their standards, and since they don't need someone to support them financially, they place greater emphasis on physical beauty. 'But no for mass media and the public

⁴<https://ifstudies.org/blog/who-are-the-men-without-sex> <https://incels.co/threads/finnish-study-confirms-that-18-24-women-are-having-more-sex-than-same-age-men.88377/>

⁵<https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.washingtonpost.com/business/2019/03/29/share-americans-not-having-sex-has-reached-record-high/%3foutputType=amp>

(especially feminists), it's always because incels are socially inept, misogynist or play video games 24h a day' (Alex).

Alex was keen to stress that this is not a theory concocted by himself or other incels, rather it came from evolutionary psychologists like Drivers, Buss and Schmitt. Here topics such as evolved mate preferences and sexual strategies theory are referred to. These are peer-reviewed scientific studies, with pertinent points to understand sexual attraction; however, they do not make generalised assertions about all people in all contexts, whilst the incel application is to do just that, particularly with women. Also, this completely negates the subjectivity in what physical qualities people find attractive.

Ian was dismissive of feminists, claiming that their perception of incels was distorted and that they had disregarded the problem of male sexlessness or viewed it as an entirely male problem. He told me that he had lurked on feminist Facebook groups and when the statistics about young men not having sex were released, members of the feminist sites suggested that men were having much less heterosexual sex because they were becoming gay or because women were becoming lesbian. This was a preposterous explanation to him as it was completely at odds with his heteronormative world view:

How much delusional do you have to be to think that this is the cause of the problem? It's like a Nazi, that after visiting Auschwitz and listening to Holocaust survivors' stories, still negates that the Holocaust happened.

Drawing on the feminazi slur: 'I started to think (and I still think) that women are the real Nazis' (Ian).

Incels manipulate scientific logic and claim that women are biologically wired to find the best DNA to 'breed' with and therefore aim to reproduce with men who have 'good genes', a concept they refer to as 'female hypergamy'. Incels draw on the halo effect (Thorndike, 1920) to supplement their position that men who look good are perceived better than men who don't. Incels argue that women are willing to endure abuse in order to achieve this and, in fact, consider it a 'sign' that they have baited a dominant male. This rhetoric is prevalent through incel forums, providing incels with licence to victim-blame and apportion responsibility upon women for their experiences of domestic abuse, further denying the reality of misogyny.

Others in the 'manosphere' and 'lookism' circles subscribe to the redpill and believe that by becoming aware of their reality, their situation can change (e.g. by going to the gym – 'gymmaxxing', having aesthetic surgery or practising 'pick up' skills). However, by taking the blackpill, incels are awakened to the immutability of reality and consider it impossible to escape the social hierarchy that excludes them. Incels also conceptualise a 'total hypergamy', which they refer to as the 'crisis situation' resulting from evolution accelerated by technological progress. Within 'total hypergamy', female hypergamy has supposedly reached its zenith, Western civilisation is doomed and the complete emasculation of men is inevitable. For those who ascribe to the redpill though, there is a belief that by learning what they call 'the game' (essentially PUA strategies), they can manipulate women

to having sex with them and in doing so become strong alpha males, regaining their masculinity. Further to this, ‘lookism’, which is a central feature of the redpill philosophy (Papadamou et al., 2020), is the overarching logic of all social interactions, to overcome the problem of women purely seeking Chads or alphas as partners. Increased competition means more pressure for betas to look fit and so ‘lookism’ is the solution. The PUA community, for example, exchanges tips on how to improve their appearance by ‘looksmaxxing’ to boost their chances of sexual success. For incels, who differ in their nihilistic belief that it is impossible to improve one’s situation, this results in their further marginalisation.

The incel world view also incorporates ‘radical dualism’, which highlights the contradictory nature of incels – they are simultaneously both superior in intellect and values yet are also subhuman and worthless due their ugliness. As the ‘in-group’, incels are smarter, hold pro-social values and in being romantic and seeking true love, and not guided by sex or looks, are positioned firmly on the moral high ground over women who are considered to be the polar opposite, Chads – who because of their fortune in being born attractive and being able to sexually attract women are complacent and stupid, betas – are wasting their time attempting to change themselves, and cucks – in supporting women are sustaining the systemic oppression of incels. As such, everyone else is the ‘out-group’, with women being top of the hated list. Women are dehumanised, referred to as ‘femoids’, ‘foids’ or ‘roasties’, deemed to have only simple emotions such as sexual desire, and drawing on tired old sexist tropes, are guided by antisocial values, such as cheating, gold digging and leeching the welfare state. Radical dualism is characteristic of many extremist groups (Abbas & Awan, 2015; Rip, Vallerand, & Lafrenière, 2012; Taylor, 1998) and also lends itself to a propensity for violence.

Incels believe that, by protecting women’s bodily autonomy, feminists have ruined the natural order of society, which requires heterosexual monogamous relationships, and as a result, physically attractive young women – the ‘Stacys’ – only choose to sleep with the most attractive men – ‘Chads’.

Genetics is a fundamental and a very important ideology of the blackpill and incels believe that unless you’re born with the right genes you have no chance of dating or being attractive. We strongly believe that looks are the only reason men have sex. Incels are frustrated that we don’t have the right looks and that women are selfish because they only date Chads. (Lee)

Incels place looks on a numerical scale from 1 to 10 (with 10 being the greatest value) in order to rate and compare the innate value of an individual, framing discussions such as ‘any 5/10 woman can land a 6/10 or 7/10 boyfriend and/or husband’.

An OkCupid study⁶ on the differences in how women rate the attractiveness of men’s dating profile photos and vice versa was also highlighted to me as part of the blackpill (Alex – ‘This is just one of the blackpill studies that made me change

⁶<https://archive.is/ZJymw>

my view about women’). The study found that men rated women’s pictures, on a scale from 0 to 5, with women as likely to be considered extremely beautiful as extremely ugly, with the majority of women rated *medium*. The female equivalent of the chart showed that women rated 80% of men’s profile pictures as worse looking than medium, which is used as evidence of women’s shallowness, although people are, of course, free to decide who they deem attractive or not. What the study also addresses, however, and what incels who rely on it to inform their blackpill perspective, overlook, is that irrespective of being seemingly more generous in their aesthetic judgements, the men tend to only reach out to the women they consider the *most attractive*, whilst women, who although were harsher in assessing looks, messaged men who they considered *less attractive* or *medium* anyway. Therefore, in actual fact, what this study illustrates is how much more important a woman’s looks are than a man’s.

Another aspect of the blackpill is sexual racism, the alternative of just be white (JBW), which is the perspective that women will always favour white (attractive/rich) men for their sexual partners; hence, incels who are also non-white automatically face further discrimination due to the colour of their skin. Although there is certainly a truism in the marginalisation of persons due to not being white and discriminations can and indeed do intersect as per Crenshaw’s (1990) concept, in this context, the label of discrimination has been applied by incels themselves rather than them being a recognised marginalised group. In the incel-sphere, there is racial hierarchy when it comes to dating, white men are at the top – with the Chads reigning supreme, then due to stereotypes about their sexual prowess – black men are next – the Tyrones, in terms of the attractiveness scale only white and black men exist on this before the betas and incels who are comprised of the ugly white and black men – other ethnicities are not deemed attractive – then rated lowest there are the Asian incels – the currycels and the ricecels. For Pete, the study that made him go ‘full blackpill’ was the Asian Sexual Gender Gap,⁷ which he claims shows that Asian men are rated as the least attractive men by women of all races, even by Asian women.

Due to not meeting hegemonic masculine standards and feeling that women are unfairly favoured in society, incels view themselves as the oppressed. An example they provide is in regard to the body positivity movement, which in their view, is promoting ‘fat-acceptance’ for women, but overlook how men are absent from these conversations. Incels also draw comparisons between negative responses to body size and height to emphasise what they see as double standards. In their view, short men are susceptible to public ridicule, which is not problematised the same way that commentary about overweight women is. Incels also highlight how weight can be lost (many conversations consider people to be overweight as a result of being lazy) whilst a short incel cannot change their height.

Incels believe that before the 1960s ‘sexual revolution’, every man had equal access to women, though they provide no evidence for this. Further, they see the

⁷<https://medium.com/a-m-awaken-your-inner-asian/an-executive-summary-on-the-intermarriage-in-the-asian-community-5852043e684a>

shift towards female empowerment as a profound injustice because society has failed to give men access to what they are entitled to (women's bodies):

A normal healthy relationship is becoming more difficult to achieve due to the price of pussy. (/r/incels user)

Incels are therefore frustrated at a world that they believe is denying them power and sexual control and view feminism as an oppressive ideology that must be fought against, in order to reclaim a type of 'manhood' that only honours white male superiority. An argument propagated within incel communities is because incels did not exist in the past when gender roles were more rigidly enforced and women had fewer rights, this negates feminists' explanation for incels being caused by the patriarchy or 'toxic masculinity'. However, this dispute is inherently flawed as it only further signifies that incels are a reaction to societal progression and gender equality. Moreover, the contribution of a digital society (Powell et al., 2018) enabling communities to assimilate together on and offline in a union of hatred and violence has been overlooked. Incels do not exist and do not solely occur within an online vacuum; their world view has roots in and is validated by broader society, from the subtle instances of sexism to the blatant discriminations espoused within respected figures in politics and the media, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5. Although it is noted that if were not for the internet, incels would not have formed in the mass and manner they have. Internet culture is at the core of the incel community, as seen in their idiosyncratic language, and were it not for the global reach and communicative properties of being online, incels as a distinguishable group, and certainly using this name, would not prevail. The digital self is still very much part of the physical, however because of the understanding of the perceptions towards incels, that part of one's identity is carefully managed offline (Goffman, 1963). It is not as though incels are one person online and then another offline, rather that part of their persona is kept hidden in face-to-face interactions because they are aware of how they will be treated otherwise:

I have only identified as an incel only online, it's better to keep it separate from my personal life offline. I feel there's a stigma against incels being mistaken as potentially dangerous people by the media. (Ian)

My IRL friends just knew that I browsed those forums but I never engaged in a deep speech with anyone IRL. (Mike)

However, Tom described how in confiding in his (offline) friends, they helped him to renounce the incel label and understand how other reasons were affecting him, helping him to communicate with women and therefore see them from a different un-blackpilled perspective:

I opened up to it for a few of my friends but they knew I wasn't 100% incel, they knew I was just very socially awkward due to my

anxiety and I didn't have many interactions with women but they helped me fix it. (Tom)

This experience suggests that there is an opportunity for individuals to receive a positive outcome by trusting others outside of the incel community, with the knowledge of them being an incel/identifying with incel ideology. Individuals may get the support they need and be turned away from a potentially damaging trajectory.

This was also the case with John:

I was never open about it offline, except with my best friend with whom I shared that I follow TRP and also believe blackpill. He made me pull out of it and I'm very thankful to him for that. I have never met anyone in real life who is an incel. (John)

For John, offline equates with real life, as per the classic internet abbreviation IRL, interactions with incels online were not viewed as occurring in person. A distinction is made between the online and offline. Indeed, supplementing this, there is no indication that incels ever meet up offline or are aware of others in their existing social circles who also identify as incel, such communication generally transpires and is contained online. This may well be to do with the fact that many incels struggle in social situations and are more confident interacting virtually and so would not seek to meet up with others in person:

As a former incel myself it's rather difficult for me to spot incels in real life, but usually they are socially awkward or isolated. (Tom)

Also, the creation of an offline version does not appear to be the purpose of the incel community, who just appear to be content to remain online. Regardless the offline impacts are noted, in this particularly disconcerting quotation from Carl:

Offline, you won't know who is a part of this toxic cult or not but as I mentioned incels lack social skills and self confidence. Who knows that quiet guy at your workplace or your apartment/house next door secretly hates you. (Carl)

However, Mike spoke about how he keeps in contact with other incels on a one-to-one basis via WhatsApp and Telegram and claimed knowledge of some offline incel meetings. However, he personally had not attended them due to distance issues but also because he did not want to reveal his actual identity, for fear of the potential repercussions and stigmatisation that could ensue as noted earlier, if another incel were to contact his friends and family and expose him as an incel and actively participating in incel communities. The affordance of being anonymous online is a double-edged sword for incels; on the one hand, this allows them to protect their real identity, while, on the other hand, it also means that they do not know if others are actually who they say they are and therefore cannot be trusted.

This notion of incels betraying one another is evidenced in the following example discussed by Sam. The motivation appears less about harm and more about undertaking a prank:

It didn't happen to me but to an incel guy who lost his job after getting doxed by some incels who contacted his employer. They did it because they thought it was funny and probably they didn't realise the gravity of their actions, but still they did a mess. (Sam)

Although, there are obvious ways to evoke the wrath of other incels, making 'cucked' statements supporting women and feminism is an obvious example, but it is unclear as to what behaviour inspires incels to engage in harassment (irrespective of whether they view it that way) against others in the community.

A further reason to protect one's identity whilst engaging in incel communities is to do with the possibility that there are also people pretending to be incels:

Also some members of incel communities aren't really incels but feminists (either male or female) who mask themselves as incels to infiltrate online incel communities (Facebook groups or forums) to gather information on them and they can use that information in a toxic way. I know this because I've been doxed by feminists and I discovered their private and secret anti-incel Facebook groups infiltrating them with a fake name. So it's not safe to reveal your identity in incel communities because you can be betrayed by incels themselves but also from spies. (Alex)

It doesn't escape me that this revelation has connotations for my own role in this study as well as wider research and how researchers access online communities and interpret the conversations and activities within those spaces. Certainly, where information is readily available in the public domain, there is a tendency within academic research to view this as fair game data, bypassing the usual requirement of informed consent, with little to no consideration of the thoughts and feelings of those providing that information. This is especially problematic when the research focus is on particular groups and behaviours. However, there is a distinction between joining an online community and deliberately deceiving the other members, in order to access conversations and observing discussions on a public forum that does not require membership to do so (Sugiura, Wiles, & Pope, 2017).

Feminists as the enemy are also emphasised in the above quotation, with the notion that they are actively seeking to penetrate incel spaces to harm them. This plays into the blackpill philosophy that feminism is threatening the very survival of men, especially those who are aware of the damage it is inflicting, and so it makes sense that clandestine feminists would be attempting to dismantle the incel community in this instance. Here again, incels are assuming the victim status. Notwithstanding the dedicated accounts on other platforms such as Twitter, which do repost some of the most extreme and concerning incel posts that Alex refers

to, and threads such as *r/incel*tears, which mocks incel posts. Others, however, who make what incels would deem to be ‘bluepilled’ comments also get accused of being covert feminists and are pursuing the downfall of the community.

In considering the emergence of incels as an online phenomenon, undoubtedly, there were individuals prior to incels and even the internet, who experienced loneliness and rejection, but they were not presented with such a countercultural captivating explanation that they could engage with whilst simultaneously continuing with the rest of their life. People can self-identify as an incel and participate in online incel communities, without others such as their friends and families knowing. In effect, incels can keep their offline and online personas separate, although the same cannot be said of their perspectives and world view, which does become all consuming. If incels were an offline group such as one of the Men’s Rights Movement (MRM) communities discussed in Chapter 2, this would be far difficult to conceal, and they would also not be permitted to engage in the overt misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, racism and ableism that they do online, as the excuse of such behaviour being ironic or satire would unlikely be upheld.

Another provocative issue widely discussed by incels is the vindication of sex with underage girls. As women who have had previous sexual partners are vilified by incels and described in various derogatory and dehumanising ways, the notion of younger girls, who in being chaste and virginal, is infinitely more appealing to incels. On the now defunct */r/incels* statutory rape was challenged as a crime and described as ‘attractive teenage girls at their peak’. On a survey on *incels.co*, a quarter of the sample – 25.9% of the respondents – stated the preference for their ‘dream hook-up or gf’ was ‘under 16 super pedo level’. Although the language used could indicate that this response is meant to be shocking and jokey, nevertheless, there is also something particularly quixotic about this, providing insight into incel desires. For incels, who feel repressed by women, age also equates with greater or less submissiveness. Young girls are likely to be less confident than mature women and have less agency and bodily autonomy. This combined with the notion of being ‘untouched’ makes them ideal females to incels; however, this perspective is not unique to the incel community, with endorsement for the sexualisation of young girls both overtly and symbolically present societally.

Revered scholars over the decades have even expressed what seems like support for sexual relationships with children. Michael Foucault (1978) talked about the sexuality of children throughout *The History of Sex*. In one example, he described a story in 1867, of a ‘simple-minded farm hand’ and his attempted rape of a young girl (Foucault, 1978, p. 31), the importance of which for Foucault was not the rape of the child, but rather that this led to the state intervening and investigating child abuse, or as Foucault named them, these ‘timeless gestures’ and ‘everyday pieces of theatre’ of ‘barely furtive pleasures between simple-minded adults and alert children’ (1978, pp. 31–32; Jones, 2020, p. 11). For Foucault (1978) societal intervention on sexual violence towards a child was mere ‘pettiness’ (p. 31). Recently, allegations about Foucault being a paedophile, substantiating these predilections, have been made.

The Gender Schema Theory (Bem, 1981) maintains that the consumption of media images leads to internalised perceptions and expectations of masculinity and

femininity. Anime, hand drawn and computer animation originating from Japan – notably an openly patriarchal society, is incredibly popular amongst incels as well as having dedicated subcultures online. Female anime characters are child-like, dependent, submissive, with exaggerated feminised features and costumes – such as big eyes, petite figures, tiny waists, large breasts and, more often than not, wearing schoolgirl or sailor outfits. Anime has also influenced pornography such that there is a dedicated category named *hentai* for those who have a sexual fetish for these cartoon characters, which presents even greater distortions of womanhood. Bresnahan, Inoue, and Kagawa (2006) highlighted the negative consequences of viewing such sexually skewed media content. In particular, Bresnahan et al. (2006) emphasised how these images reinforce sexist stereotypes, especially about Asian women, and noted that women in both Japan and North America have struggled to achieve equality. These types of media affirm gendered role expectations of male power and female subjugation, whilst bolstering the perception that women are intellectually inferior to men, essentially both nourishing and validating incels core beliefs.

Incel Spaces and Norms

The origins of incel, in regard to the community of men which is the focus of this book, can be traced back to 2003 in memes on 4chan's Imageboard. Then, in 2005, PUAs posted about 'The Game' on Reddit, which provided tips and tricks to manipulate women into having sex. In 2009, the manosphere was mentioned on blogspot, before subreddits for men's issues (usually with or because of women) began emerging in 2012. From these, the incel community as we know it today started developing and incelism became the topic on various sites, videos and forums, most notoriously, *r/incels*, which at the time of being banned in November 2017 had approximately over 40,000 subscribers. After the closure of *r/incels*, subsequently *r/braincels* became the most popular subreddit for incels, with 16,900 followers by April 2018. This, however, was also closed in October 2018.

The individuals who participated in interviews generally spoke of frequenting more mainstream platforms such as Twitter, Instagram and YouTube and the well-known incel sites and forums on Reddit, etc., rather than notorious places such as 4chan and 8chan, renowned for abuse and offensive behaviours. Interview participants spoke about being directed to */r/thredpill* and */r/incelswithouthate* after searching for support and advice about relationships. From there, specific searches would also be undertaken using terms such as the redpill, Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW) and incels on YouTube, the features of which would then recommend further videos and channels such as that by Monday FA Monday.⁸ The now defunct *r/braincels* was also described as a gateway space to becoming an incel, whilst *returnofkings* and *Rooshvforum* were also noted as other prominent sites. Others spoke about how their curiosity was piqued after

⁸ *Monday FA Monday*, also known as, '*Monday Blue*', was a vlogger and public figure who used to vlog about his incelism and the incelsphere. Although he frequently used the self-identifier 'forever alone', he also uses the terms 'incel' and 'forever alone' interchangeably.

they read about incels in the mainstream media, most notably after the term was associated with high-profile attacks, whilst some noted that they first learnt of incels on Twitter, where they were being spoken about disparagingly and from there went to incel subreddits to learn more. It does appear that the same people are members of incel groups across different platforms. Although interview participants were keen to highlight that there are probably many more people who identify as incel or at least align with the incel philosophy, but do not describe themselves in this way, on spaces that aren't ordinarily incel related, due to the negativity directed towards the community. There is also the recognised overlap with the other manosphere groups and conflation of anyone who expresses misogynistic views as being an incel, as Tom states:

Some people are MGTOW and had a relationship or marriage and got badly burned so they bash women online, however incels also bash women in almost the exact same way, so it's hard to tell. I think many people assume they are just incels. (Tom)

Not all of those present on incel sites are self-identifying incels, but they consider themselves to be affiliated with the community due to a shared belief in the blackpill or redpill ideology and other ideas typical of these places. However, to be an accepted and active participant of incel spaces, such that you aren't trolled or forced to leave under your current username, it is not necessarily the case that men have to be virgins or truecels, or even considered ugly or unsuccessful with women, but it is imperative that members are open about their dogma, and that it is supportive of the blackpill. As Mike informed me 'a blackpilled Chad has more in common with incels compared to a virgin male feminist'.

The suggestion from those I spoke with is that there is no hierarchy within the incel community and no individuals assuming leadership roles, although Roosh V was noted for returnofkings, rather the community can be understood by the networks of online boards and YouTube channels. There are the founders and moderators who uphold the rules of various sites, but these were deemed not to impose their individual views. Even without a clear organisation structure though, and certainly from immersing oneself within the online incel activity, there are those who have more influence with established reputations, based off their followers and subscribers on YouTube for example. Therefore, although these people are not necessarily presenting themselves as leaders as such, their prominence amongst incels cannot be underestimated.

The incelsphere was also described as a cult by John:

They [incels] are actually a lot bigger than I originally thought they were and are pretty much a cult. I didn't realise how toxic all of it was until I left the blackpill. People in a cult never know they are in a cult, and how toxic their ideologies are.

As someone who was a strong believer of both and spent a considerable time in both the online communities, both TRP and incels/blackpill originate out of similar ideas that society has been unfair

to men and modernity/liberalism/feminism is toxic but both are very different in ideology and practice. A lot of people who haven't been in the manosphere seem to confuse the two. Both are very toxic cults, are very different in ideas and reality. At some points both even hate each other. If you disagree with any of their points or go against them you're met with hostility, insults etc. Think of it as interacting with a cult or a radical religious group... Black Pill isn't a community, it's a dangerous cult. (John)

The concept of cult was implicit in the work of Howard Becker on spiritualism, who described cult in terms of an 'amorphous, loose-textured, uncondensed type of social structure ... is that of purely personal ecstatic experience, salvation, comfort and mental or physical healing' (Von Wiese & Becker cited in Nelson, 1968). Becker's interpretation formed the basis of the definition provided by J. Milton Yinger (1957, cited in Nelson, 1968), who maintained that a cult is normally a small, short-lived group, developed around the personality of a charismatic leader. In the absence of a dominant human guide, the indication from John is that the blackpill and the mandatory complicity of believing in its components demanded this role in the incel community.

Groomed for Hate?

Baele et al. (2019) conducted a study of the Incels.me forum, using a mixed-methods content analysis approach in order to investigate how the structure of the incel world view results in support and motivation for violence. This research was concerned with the social categories and causal narratives of the incel ideology and concluded that not only are incels' views extremist, but they also occupy a specific extreme position separate from the rest of the 'manosphere' in subscribing to the idea of the blackpill. Baele et al. (2019) suggest that this world view is dangerous, as it leads incels to not only harm themselves but also to commit 'cathartic' acts of violence against women and others who 'oppress' them.

There is frustration amongst incels about how they are portrayed in the media and perceived to be all violent and full of hatred. It is not the purpose of this book to fuel the assumption that all incels are dangerous; however, it is also not going to undermine the very real threat that some incels or those affiliated with the incel philosophy pose, especially to women. Yet, many incels are vulnerable, suffering with anxiety and depression, and/or neurodiverse, which in turn can make them more susceptible to the blackpill. Moreover, it is this ideology and its influence on some men that is most concerning. As it is only men, self-identifying as incels or who have connections with the incel community, who have committed acts of violence and murder, the focus is on them rather than other genders. Amongst the online canonisation and support (whether faux or not) for the mass murders committed by the likes of Elliot Rodger and Alek Minassian, there are those who actively take a stand and denounce such atrocities and attempt to distance themselves from this mindset. However, their voices are often difficult to draw out from the cacophony of outrage, resentment and deliberate provocation overwhelmingly present within

incel communities. Nevertheless, even those who claim not to condone the actions of Elliot Rodger and Alek Minassian, still sympathise with their narratives about being galvanised to kill because of being rejected by women:

I can understand their frustration as they [Rodger and Minassian] grew up believing if they are just good, the right girl will come to them only to see that never happen to them. It's hard to see someone who is a decent human being from the beginning only grow bitter and increasingly resentful towards women, not because they can't find a girlfriend, but that the world lied to them about finding one. (Lee)

It is intriguing that both Elliot Rodger and Alek Minassian are described as decent human beings, who were negatively shaped by the societal expectations about accessing women.

Loneliness is apparent with incels, though violence and aggression within the communities is less common, certainly fewer than what might be expected given the narrative presented about incels. However, there is still enough to warrant concern, and it does vary depending on the different platforms. For example, on */r/incelswithouthate* subreddit, as the name suggests, hatred is unwelcome, and this is a space for incels that want to distance themselves away from that typecasting. Here the rules are clear, members must not induce hatred or violence, and certainly not praise those referred to as 'incel terrorists' – the likes of Elliot Rodger, Alex Minassian, etc. Whilst discussions vary on the dedicated incels sites such as *incel.co* and *incels.net* – from the despondent to the outright hateful, with limited suggestion of satire. On *incels.co*, there are a variety of threads, from those who seek to challenge the default position of incels being full of hatred for women to discussions justifying why hating women is a natural conclusion, to pure misogyny – where posts exalting the rape and murder of women are blatant. The tone is unsurprisingly more provocative and shocking on Reddit, 4chan and 8chan, evoking the 'shitposting' argument. Nevertheless, across the different platforms, the 'ironic' misogynistic, racist, 'worship of mass murderers', 'enforced monogamy' rhetoric is harmful and perpetuates discrimination, irrespective of whether or not incels are being serious or actually believe in what they are saying.

Where hatred is specifically mentioned by members in incel communities, it is inevitably levelled towards women foremost, although Chads are also noted as being hated. Along with this hatred, though, there is also a sense of grudging admiration for these men whom incels believe have the life that they should have if nature hadn't dealt them the poorest hand. Chads are also weaponised by incels, who discuss how they, in having access to women sexually, are able to physically hurt them and carry out the abuses that incels would want to do if they were given the opportunity. Hence, posts revelling in Chads raping and sexually abusing foids are easily found on incel sites:

I rejoice every time a foid gets killed by her Chad bf. I laugh every time one of them gets raped for being a whore. They rejected me just because I'm ugly. They deserve it.

(*Incels.co* user)

Rejection is a core reason for incels' hatred of women. There are endless stories about how women have caused hurt and distress, ranging from them not speaking to or noticing a particular man, turning down a request for a date, to cheating on their partners. The commonality is that women are not living up to the expectations of these men.

There is no set number of rejections that lead a man to turn to incelism. For some, they have never experienced direct rejection, but because they have had little to do with women and have thus not had a relationship or sex, they think that all women are actively repudiating them. This is enough to hate women, retaliating against those they feel already loathe them, based off a caricature created by the blackpill rather than any actual informed knowledge. Those who have been turned down have experienced these situations ranging from once to enough times that it registers as a pattern depending on the individual, such that the rejection is described as continually occurring, impacting upon how they perceive women. The espousing of hatred is a way of regaining the control they feel they have lost about themselves. The hurt experienced from being cheated on has led some men, identifying as incel or at least engaging with the incel community, to generalise all women as unfaithful. The blackpill provides a persuasive explanation for some men's lack of success with women and the biological standardisation of women to be deceptive. Therefore, equipped with this knowledge, the next logical step is to hate the cause of the distress:

Basically take a virgin, insecure and socially inept guy, radicalise him with toxic ideas that all his problems and failures are society's and women's fault, make him full of hatred. He'll start interacting with others like him online, and there you go you have an incel.
(Tom)

Jaki et al. (2019) conducted an analysis of the forum website Incels.me, investigating the group dynamics of the community, particularly how incels create ingroup identity and how they construct outgroups, such as women. They explored the vernacular used by incels and applied automatic profiling techniques in order to determine the traits of posters (e.g. gender, ethnicity), before discussing the hate speech posted on the forums. The study concluded that a significant proportion of the discourse could be classified as hate speech, with the forum being full of misogyny, anti-feminism and homophobia. Overall, Jaki et al. (2019) classified incels as an 'alliance of necessity' for isolated young men with a largely negative mindset and pronounced misogynistic views.

Barbara Perry (2001), a leading hate crime scholar, notes that the internet has enabled groups that were previously fractured to come together online. Although the dynamic of the incel community is borne from the internet and would not exist in the manner it does without the networked technology enabling its inception, much of the mindset pre-existed and continues to co-exist offline. Overtly stating hatred against women offline could prove problematic for men, and it is difficult to identify others for whom this perspective resonates with, but online, under the guise of anonymity and emboldened by the support of a community,

it is easy to discover kindred others who share that animosity: ‘Unfortunately they find comfort and support in such spaces which then radicalise them’ (John).

Rebellion and uprising are terms in frequent use on incel forums – the notion that incels need to rebel against ‘foids’ and wider society. However, the discussions involving rebellion include different suggestions ranging from catfishing women using false identities accompanying images of Chads they have taken without that man’s consent, making fun of the sims and cucks who support women, NEETmaxxing – which is essentially withdrawing from social and work life by not participating in education, employment or training, the mandated use of sex workers or sex robots, to proposals about their own suicides and the fantasies/threats of mass murder. Often there are disclaimers alongside these ideas, such as acknowledgement that these suggested uprisings are not actually going to come to fruition, but the core motivation driving the insurgent mindset is about creating an environment in which it is easier for incels to get girlfriends, believing in a twisted and paradoxical manner, that alienating and abusing women is going to help them achieve this. Incels still desire women, even though they consider women to be vile and debased, this inclination advances their frustrations and bitterness internally and externally, because knowing this ‘truth’ about women hasn’t alleviated them of their longing for sex and intimacy. Hence, the declarations of hatred and even violence to discharge the tensions, much of which, may well be lip service. The issue, however, is knowing what could get acted upon and who could engage in it. Here it is not the case that individuals aren’t wearing the warning signs of a would-be attacker, instead there is an overabundance of accounts that contain potential red flags, from the profiles to the posts made that condone or ‘call’ for violence, as such identifying what is empty talk as opposed to actual threats is extremely challenging.

It is acknowledged that not all incels are a threat, in that they are not going to engage in physical violence and are at risk of carrying out a terror attack; however, this is not to minimise the harms of the ideology not only to wider society but to the community internally. Many incels are accepting of their misery and have resigned themselves to living their lives in unhappiness and hopelessness, and their outlet is to bitterly pontificate about women and society amongst their incel peers. In this community, they have achieved the acceptance unattainable elsewhere, and here, they can indulge in their fantasies about how they could exact retribution. It is these delusions and the lack of nuance as to where the boundaries are between imagination and reality that are problematic, especially to those who are viewing life as futile and could be easily suggestible. Therefore, it is important to recognise the risks that some men who identify as incel, or are influenced by incel ideology, or seek to exploit the notoriety from being associated with the incel community, pose: ‘Radicalising one into being an incel is much easier than you think, especially if the guy is young’ (Ben).

On Twitter, I have observed many provocative discussions between incels, or at least from accounts pertaining to be incels, and those who are attempting to challenge incels and/or raise awareness or gain an understanding of them. I emphasise that accounts are claiming to be incels rather than definitively stating they are incels as naturally, I have limited evidence in which this can be verified against. There are also debates about copycat incels, potential trolls, aiming to benefit from the notoriety of the community, to gain attention and provoke emotive

responses, as trolls delight in doing; however, due to the anonymity afforded by being online, this is difficult to prove or disprove. Such accounts usually have a graphic or anime/manga character for their profile picture, incel generally features within their username, and the bio will more than likely make references to the blackpill or other associated incel traits, so there is little to identify the individual behind the account. A perennial issue, receiving attention on Twitter, is that about the dangers posed by incels. Where users have posted questions pertaining to this or indeed persons dedicated to tackling incels have taken screenshots of posts to evidence the threat, incel accounts, who weren't part of the original thread, often respond to present alternative arguments. This also indicates that incel accounts are searching – potentially using keyword searches or hashtags or receiving notifications when the term 'incel' is cropping up in tweets and then intercepting those discussions. For example, in a conversation (started by a woman) about how widespread incels are and their effects, an incel account entered into the discussion to counteract these concerns with the argument that more risk is posed from partners rather than incels, irrespective of how incels do wish harm upon women. In this instance, this claim is correct – intimate partner violence (IPV) or gender-based violence (GBV) is one of the most pervasive forms of men's violence against women. Despite the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (United Nations Human Rights, 48/104/1993), global estimates published by the World Health Organization⁹ continue to indicate that about one in three (35%) of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual IPV or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime. A global study on gender-related killing of women and girls indicates that women killed by intimate partners or family members accounts for 58% of all female homicide victims reported globally, and that little progress has been made in preventing such murders¹⁰. Nevertheless, attempting to diminish the risks posed by one group by diverting attention elsewhere is unhelpful as those risks remain regardless of that other threat being significantly greater. Mass murder that has been conducted by incels, in the name of incel ideology, or those claiming to have been associated with the incel community, are undeniably far fewer than the deaths caused by IPV; however, it would be problematic to disregard these because of this comparison. The victims of those appalling attacks had not set out to interact with incels or persons purporting to be incels, and yet tragically lost their lives nonetheless, and even if they had meant to engage with incels, would never have deserved what happened to them.

Further, in response to the concerns about the threats posed, the incel account claimed that people, normies, outsiders to the incel community, would have to go out of their way to find them. Considering how easy it is to discover incel activity through a mere google search, this is not strictly true. Moreover, as demonstrated in the earlier discussions about how the interview participants first found out about incels and began their journeys to self-identifying as incel, it is not necessarily the case that people were searching for the community, or even knew about

⁹<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women>

¹⁰https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/GSH2018/GSH18_Gender-related_killing_of_women_and_girls.pdf

them in the first instance, rather they were seeking answers for their loneliness or relationship failures/ rejection, and it was these searches that drew them to incels. In other situations, individuals were exposed to incel ideologies and parlance via gaming sites. Therefore, it is relatively easy to find incels, even if you are not directly looking for them, and more significantly, their beliefs are not unique nor contained within incel spaces; instead, these ideas permeate in wider society such that they fuel and reinforce hatred against women and other marginalised groups. Also, returning to the bios of such accounts, in some instances, these contradict the assertions made regarding the minimising of the incel risk, by praising infamous serial killers of women such as Jack the Ripper and the Long Island murderer,¹¹ who receive extra credence for not getting caught.

Effects of the Blackpill

There are commonalities between MGTOW and incels, particularly in relation to how the latter are impacted by the blackpill. Some incels describe, how after being awakened to the blackpill realities, they are no longer interested in women and don't want to pursue sex or relationships with women anymore.¹² MGTOW also reject women and actively veto the notion of sex and relationships with them too, undertaking the adverse of incels – voluntary celibacy (though this term is not necessarily utilised by MGTOW) – as they would not engage in homosexual relationships either. This last point is significant, as lesbianism, within the manosphere, is viewed as a way to deny men sex rather than someone's sexual orientation. However, for MGTOW, the distinction between them and incels is that they feel empowered by dismissing women, and they retain control, whilst incels are apathetic and powerless, and their situation is one borne of resignation. MGTOW also aim to avoid contact with women in any part of their lives wherever possible.

The long-term effects of the blackpill are palpable and negative perceptions of women remain, even for those who claim they aren't incels anymore:

I don't care about having sex or a relationship with them [women] because I despise them morally. If I have to get sex I need to make the least effort possible (knowing that on the first date probably I won't get sex is a turn off for me). I also rejected a girl that wanted to hang out with me a few days ago because I consider it a waste of time. And my libido is still ok and I fap daily. Why waste time with women when I can simply fap and turn off the desire. (Tom)

¹¹The *Long Island serial killer* (also referred to as *LISK*, the *Gilgo Beach Killer* or the *Craigslist Ripper*) is an unidentified suspected serial killer who is believed to have murdered 10–16 people over a period of nearly 20 years, mostly sex workers and left their bodies in areas on the South Shore of Long Island, New York.

¹²<https://incels.co/threads/did-you-lose-interest-in-pursuing-women-after-the-blackpill-read-before-answer.145718/#post-3062914>

The disillusionment with women caused from believing in the blackpill suggests that even if incels do start having sex or enter into romantic relationships (with women they want) and ascend from incel, they will not become happy and fulfilled. This dispiritingly implies that there is no return from the effects of the blackpill. Interview participants spoke about the bitterness caused by the blackpill, tainting their ability to enjoy sex and affection from women, even after they thought they had moved on from being an incel. This means that departing from incel is more complex than simply entering into a romantic relationship with a woman. Others, who still identified as incel, said that they embrace the blackpill because it prevents them from wasting time (being concerned about women) and they can engage in what they deem more productive activities:

I like the blackpill because it made me more analytical and since it made my interest towards women shrink I have also more times for my hobbies and self-improvement. (Mike)

There is no consensus amongst incels or even ex-incels, as to whether the blackpill has a positive or negative impact upon their lives. There are those who extol the philosophy and claim that accepting it has made them happier (though not happy per se) and improved their lives, whilst others acknowledge the damage it has had upon their mental health (yet still embrace it). What is evident though are the increased effects on younger men:

I have to say that the blackpill is usually always detrimental to the very young (under 20 years old). The younger you get the blackpill the more damage you'll get from it and very few benefits compared to the damage received. (John)

Mental Health

Mental health questions to polls on incels.co provide insight into the incel experience, with many incels reporting feeling profound dissatisfaction and unhappiness with their lives. In total, 77% of respondents said they are not optimistic about their future. Similarly, 88% of respondents reported that they are unhappy. Furthermore, 95% of respondents said that they find the blackpill ideology to be an accurate reflection of their reality, demonstrating that the pessimism and self-loathing associated with the blackpill is core to incel culture.

The majority of respondents also reported suffering from psychiatric disorders, like depression and anxiety. In fact, 67% of respondents said they experience long-lasting depression. Even when full-blown depression is not an issue, an outsized percentage of respondents, 74% – say they experience anxiety, stress or emotional distress ‘in a constant manner’, which means that just 26% of respondents consider themselves free from a significant psychological impairment or struggle.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, contemplation and discussion of suicide features prominently on incel forums, and functions in tandem with the pervasive blackpill. As many incels believe they are doomed to a life of unhappiness and celibacy,

they consider suicide a legitimate and viable alternative. In a 2019 incels.co poll, a full 68% of respondents said they have considered suicide in a serious manner.

Suicide, ultimately, affects men more than women. In England and Wales, official figures show that the suicide rate for men in 2019 was the highest for two decades. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) found that men accounted for approximately three-quarters of the 5,691 suicide deaths registered in 2019 – 4,303 compared with 1,388 women.¹³ This means the male suicide rate of 16.9 deaths per 100,000 in England and Wales was the highest since 2000. Men aged 45–49 remain at the highest risk of suicide; however, suicide is the single biggest killer of men under the age of 45. These are trends that occur in many other countries. Compared to women, men are three times more likely to die by suicide in Australia, 3.5 times more likely in the United States and more than four times more likely in Russia and Argentina.¹⁴ Suicide is an immensely complex and nuanced issue. In the United States, adult women attempt suicide 1.2 times as often as men; however, men are more likely to use more violent methods of attempting suicide, meaning that intervention is unlikely. This could also indicate that men have higher levels of suicidal intent than women.

Seeking support, however, from mental health professionals such as psychologists or psychotherapists is actively discouraged by incels, because they are seen to minimise external factors such as the value of looks and money in society and overvalue internal factors such as self-improvement. In fact, psychologists were even described as blatantly lying, which would completely negate their ability to assist people in overcoming their problems. Psychologists are also considered by incels to be mainly women and so would automatically be inaccessible to them, especially as they believe that men's problems cannot be understood by women.

In the interviews, childhood experiences were emphasised as important in paving the future path to incelhood. Participants spoke about how problems such as bullying in schools and overuse of digital technologies lead to mental health and self-esteem issues, which often go unaddressed in men. For Mike, though, fearing his intimidating stepfather impacted upon his confidence and self-esteem and ultimately his ability to interact with women. To Mike, the stepfather embodied the hegemonic alpha male, whilst he was unable to satisfy that role as a child, which then influenced his perceived subordinate adult identity.

Conclusions

The incel rebellion, in reality, is not a homogeneous organised dissent; however, the incelsphere involves a cacophony of online voices outraged at shared perceived injustices arising from women and a society that supposedly enables them to harm men. It provides outlets for aggrieved men to divulge their fantasies

¹³<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/bulletins/suicidesintheunitedkingdom/2019registrations>

¹⁴<https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20190313-why-more-men-kill-themselves-than-women>

and darkest thoughts, fuelled by bitterness and resentment. As such, no coordinated or systematic mobilisation or recruitment is required. The mere existence and appeal of the community is enough in itself to inveigle young, often vulnerable and impressionable, men to incelism and to begin engaging with the blackpill beliefs. Such men have often experienced romantic rejection, which has deeply affected them, perhaps more so than other people might react. This vivid response could be due to a sense of entitlement, a belief that they are owed a girlfriend/sexual partner, due to being a man or what society has promised them. The blackpill ideologies, therefore, present appealing explanations for the loneliness and self-loathing that has ensued from their being rejected or inability to interact with women. The novel language creates a unified sense of community that obstructs outsiders and further perpetuates misogyny, racism, homophobia and ableism. The world view of incel is not unique however, and there is validation for the philosophies, found elsewhere in the manosphere, from uncritical interpretations of 'scientific' studies, as well as mainstream society and popular culture.