

The Affective Practices of Incels:
A Social Identity Approach to the Construction of Incel Identities

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Abstract

The advent of the internet has allowed for individuals, previously isolated from each other, to find each other and come together online through various forums focusing on a particular interest or identity. While often positive, people with socially maligned interests or identities have also found each other, developed communities, and engaged in discourse where worldviews and social identities have been constructed. Involuntary Celibates (incels) – men who identify as forced into celibacy by women who refuse to have sex with them – are one such group, where the worldview has resulted in self-identified members committing mass murders, and for some governments to recognise such acts as terrorism. Whilst some research has been conducted on incels and their worldview, no research has yet explored the nature of the affective features of their discourse or how incels construct their ingroup identity. Discourse Analysis and Social Identity Theory were used to explore and analyse how incels talk, construct identities, and explore the affective practices within this worldview. The posts of a prominent incel forum (incels.co) were observed for two weeks. Affective practices, in particular anger, were key features in constructing identities and often functioned as a means of keeping members attached to the conclusions of the worldview. Affective discourse was often hidden under layers of other interpretative repertoires used in the construction of the ingroup, and used in the construction of outgroups, working to build negative affects aimed at outgroups that may motivate members to commit or celebrate violent acts.

Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree of diploma in any University, and, to the best of my knowledge, this thesis contains no material previously published except where due reference is made. I give permission for the digital version of this thesis to be made available on the web, via the University of Adelaide's digital thesis repository, the Library Search and through web search engines, unless permission has been granted by the School to restrict access for a period of time.

Contribution Statement

In writing this thesis, I relied on the tireless support of my two supervisors, Prof. Martha Augoustinos and Dr. Peta Callaghan, who guided me throughout the process of this discourse analysis. I collaborated with both my supervisors in generating areas of analysis that were lacking from the literature or required further in-depth analysis from a fine grain discursive point of view. I was able to draw upon both supervisors' vast expertise for ways of analysing the data within the framework of social identity theory as well as their peerless knowledge of the relevant literature that would guide me in conducting a discourse analysis, and the many tools in its arsenal. Whilst I wrote up all aspects of the thesis, both supervisors offered invaluable advice and critique, as well as help in selecting the extracts that best represented the data and the analysis offered.

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I would like to thank my parents for their tireless support and love throughout my life but particularly this year, without which I would likely not have been here. I would also love to thank Prof. Martha Augoustinos and Dr. Peta Callaghan for all the advice, conversations, and for taking me on as an honours student, especially considering how difficult this year has been due to Coronavirus, and all uncertainty and extra work that it has wrought. I am sincerely grateful to have been guided by such knowledgeable and capable mentors, and only hope I will have more opportunities in the future to do so. I would love to thank all the rest of my family and friends, too many to name, who have offered support, encouragement, and many much-needed morale boosts. This year would not have been possible without them.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 Overview

In 2014, Elliot Rodger went on a rampage, killing seven people and injuring fourteen others. Prior to the rampage, Rodger uploaded his manifesto and a video online, which detailed his frustration at being a virgin, being ignored by women, and his anger at a society that denied him what he felt he deserved (Allely & Faccini, 2017). In 2018, inspired by Rodger, Alek Minassian drove a van into pedestrians, posting “The Incel Rebellion has begun!” prior to killing ten and injuring sixteen others (Jaki et al., 2019). Minassian was radicalised on Incel (Involuntary Celibate) forums, places for self-identified incels to congregate and talk, but where often participants routinely blame women for their celibacy, dehumanising and vilifying them in the process (Cecco, 2019). Minassian explained to police following his arrest that,

“I know of several other guys over the internet who feel the same way... [but they are] too cowardly to act” (Cecco, 2019).

Lone wolf terrorism has been described as a premeditated action of violence unleashed by an individual who was driven by either discretely held views or a cogent ideology espoused by an organisation (Beydoun, 2018). Whilst incel forums are not part of a formal organisation, certain forums do espouse a particular worldview that is extremist in terms of the incel ingroup identity and outgroup identities, and the explanation of how these groups act and interact (Baele, Brace, & Coan, 2019).

The worldview of interest is known as “the blackpill” and is an extension of the redpill philosophy central to the “manosphere” (a mixture of online forums, blogs, and communities comprised of different anti-feminist groups). The redpill philosophy is itself an appropriation

of the choice Neo is given in the film *The Matrix* (1999) by Morpheus, where taking the blue pill means remaining unaware of the truth but taking the red pill allows one to become enlightened as to the true nature of society, allowing one to use that knowledge to their advantage (Ging, 2019). However, to “swallow” the blackpill is to become aware that there is no escape from their condition or placement on the social hierarchy, and any belief it is possible is just a delusional “cope” (coping mechanism) (Baele, Brace, & Coan, 2019).

In the wake of the Toronto attack, Canadian authorities added incels to their terrorism guides, acknowledging the growing threat self-identified members pose to society (Russell, 2020; Russell & Bell, 2020). As such, the type of discourse that occurs in these communities and its common features, particularly its affective nature, and how they are used in the construction of the blackpill worldview, the incel identity, and outgroup identities, is of current importance.

1.2 The Blackpill Worldview

The precursor to the blackpill worldview, the redpill, supposedly opened men’s eyes to the brainwashing and misandrist nature of society, essentially that men were an oppressed group due to feminism but allowed men to use this knowledge to their benefit (Ging, 2019; Jaki et al., 2019). The blackpill builds upon this, but instead asserts that only physical appearance, determined by genetics, matters and that all people exist in a social hierarchy based upon physical attractiveness (generally, a decile scale). In this hierarchy, the most attractive (“Chads” for attractive men; “Staceys” for attractive women) are at the top, “normies” (for men) and “Beckys” (for women) are in the middle, and incels (a group made up exclusively of men) take up the bottom rung (Baele et al., 2019). According to this worldview, in times past, laws and social conventions ensured a fair distribution of relationships, and everyone would

end up with their “looksmatch” (that is, people of equal attractiveness would end up with each other) (Baele, Brace, & Coan, 2019).

However, the feminism of the 1960s eroded these norms and social conventions and resulted in structural changes to patriarchal institutions that had once kept in check women’s biologically determined instincts and behaviours. According to the blackpill, women are naturally “hypergamous”, that is they are driven to mate with men above their “looksmatch”, specifically Chads as they have the best genes, and will therefore ignore normies and incels, who must now compete in a much more limited sexual marketplace (Baele et al., 2019; Marwick & Caplan, 2018). A belief of the blackpill worldview is that the aim of feminism was to increase women’s access to Chads. However, after a woman realises she won’t marry a Chad, she may settle with a normie for financial reasons, but behind his back still have sex with as many Chads as possible in an attempt to be impregnated by their superior genes, deceiving their partners as to the real father (Baele et al., 2019). As such, whilst incels claim to want to have a relationship, they also view women as incapable of offering them love due to their hypergamous nature, leaving them no means of attaining a relationship.

1.3 Incels

The first study of involuntarily celibate persons in online communities was conducted by Donnelly, Burgess, Anderson, Davis, and Dillard (2001). Referred to as “the Donnelly study” on incel forums, the study defined an involuntary celibate as someone “who desires to have sex, but has been unable to find a willing partner for at least 6 months prior to being surveyed” (p. 159). Donnelly et al. (2001) found that virginal and single involuntary celibates were significantly less likely to have dated as teenagers or have any form of sexual experience, and that if they had, it occurred later than traditional expectations regarding sexual transitions. Further, virginal and single men were more likely to report shyness, a lack of social ability, and

negative body image regarding their physical appearance or characteristics as barriers to forming and maintaining relationships. The study reported that despair, depression, frustration (at a lack of sexual/romantic events), and a loss of confidence were common of involuntarily celibate persons, and that the internet and forums were used to find moral support and fulfil emotional needs by creating a sense of community.

In 2009, a blog article coined the term *manosphere* to describe a loosely connected set of online men's groups and communities associated with "Men's Rights Activism" (MRA), itself an online quasi-successor to the anti-feminist faction of the "men's liberation" movement of the 1970s and 1980s (Ging, 2019). The *manosphere* gained media coverage for its extreme misogyny and links with high-profile events, such as the Isla Vista and Oregon mass shootings, cases of rape occurring on college campuses, and vitriolic, sustained abuse and harassment targeted against female gamers, game developers, and journalists as part of Gamergate (Ging, 2019). It was within the *manosphere* that the modern conception of incels, initially "redpilled" and eventually "blackpilled", found each other and formed their own communities (Ging, 2019; Marwick & Caplan, 2018).

Whilst the *manosphere* is well known for its association with online anti-feminism, it also shares an understanding of masculinity found in MRA discourses (de Boise, 2018; Ging, 2019). In the *manosphere*, whilst members may sway between hegemonic and subordinate forms of masculinity, hegemonic masculinity is still reified, especially a hegemonic masculinity that is invested in gaining male power and removing female power (Ging, 2019). Further, masculinity is presented as a natural function, inseparable from male biology, but something that is being devalued (de Boise, 2018). Research has shown that there are similar ideas present in incel discourse and through their blackpill worldview (Baele et al, 2019).

Whilst the blackpill worldview is historically based within the discourse of the *manosphere* community, it is a specific and extremist worldview shared by a small subgroup

of both the manosphere and incel communities (Baele et al, 2019). However, whilst there is much research regarding the history of modern incels and their roots (Baele et al., 2019; Ging, 2019; Marwick & Caplan, 2018), as well as research into their worldview and how they construct outgroups (Baele et al., 2019; Jaki et al., 2019), there is little research on how incels talk to each other and construct their own identity as involuntarily celibate and how they understand themselves as masculine.

1.4 Affective Discourse

Whilst Baele et al. (2019) captured much of the features of the blackpill and its construction, they did not analyse the incel discourse in terms of its affective foundations. It is a well-known phenomenon that people are unwilling to change their strongly held beliefs and that a biased assimilation of evidence assists in maintaining prior held beliefs, but so too are emotions such as anger (Suhay & Erisen, 2018). The presence of such affective discourse in incel forums has been suggested by prior research in their construction of outgroups, such as women as “degenerate” or “whores” and normies as “traitors”, and the need for them to be violently punished for their complicity for the current state of society (Baele et al., 2019; Jaki et al., 2019). Several studies have described the blackpill worldview of incels as either a hate-group (Jaki et al., 2019), extremist (Baele et al., 2019; Vito, Admire, & Hughes, 2018), or as recognising violence as a reasonable response to their purported victimisation by society (Baele et al., 2019; Marwick & Caplan, 2018). But whilst the presence of affective discourse has not been disputed, it has not been thoroughly analysed either in terms of its effects nor how it is used in their talk.

The affective discourse of Men’s Rights Activists (MRAs), a group with a longer history within the manosphere, was conducted by de Boise (2018) and may offer some insight into the affective practices conducted by incels. de Boise found a range of affective practices

within MRA discourse, with common threads in the talk invoking and justifying rage, anger, frustration, anxiety, and fear. Whilst MRAs are distinct from incels, their shared history in the manosphere may lead to similar reproductions of affect in their talk.

Unlike traditional ingroup identities in which members strive to achieve or maintain a positive social identity, the modern conceptualisation of an incel as derived from their worldview is a negative social identity (Jaki et al., 2019; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). There are facets of positive features about the incel identity, such as only incels have recognised the truth about the world (i.e., taking the blackpill) (Baele et al., 2019); however, this limited positive social comparison is still within a group identity that, according to their worldview, places them at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Donnelly et al. (2001) found that involuntarily celibate persons used the internet to create a community to fill emotional needs. It therefore stands to reason that affective discourse may be used not just to incite hatred at outgroups, but to keep ingroup members invested in a negative self-identity.

1.5 Community and Echo Chamber

Social psychologists have long recognised that being a part of a social group or having a social identity can be important for self-esteem, reducing uncertainty about oneself and creating a sense of belonging (McKenna & Bargh, 1998). Just as the participants in Donnelly et al.'s (2001) study appeared to use the internet to find moral support, creating a community that allowed them to fill emotional needs, it stands to reason that many members also look to online forums as a safe place to talk about their identity and their struggles with involuntary celibacy.

However, unlike the involuntarily celibate persons in Donnelly et al.'s (2001) study, many of the modern incel groups, specifically those invested in the redpill and blackpill philosophies, are rooted historically within online anti-feminist campaigns and discourses, such

as Gamergate and the manosphere (Ging, 2019; Marwick & Caplan, 2018). A key feature of these worldviews is that it positions men as being oppressed (Baele et al., 2019; Farrell, Fernandez, Novotny, & Alani, 2019; Marwick & Caplan, 2018). Interestingly, this discourse is so central to the worldview that it has been noted in other groups that share common histories within the manosphere and the alt-right (Bezio, 2018). As Ging (2019) noted, the precursors of online incel discourse was greatly preoccupied with men's psychological and emotional pain within a context of an online space for men to commiserate and share, wherein the suffering of men was fundamental.

This discourse is deeply embedded within the historical precursors of the manosphere, with Marwick and Caplan (2018, p. 546) noting that even feminist critiques of traditional masculinity in the 1980s resulted in "discourses of decline, crisis, and public paranoia" in which feminism and liberalism were the key culprits. This discourse, of men and traditional society being in decline, has carried forward and is seen "in the narrative structure of Incels' worldview", with blame-attributing claims focusing on women and feminism as responsible (Baele et al., 2019, p. 14).

Social identity theory posits that individuals strive to create and belong to a positive sense of self (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), and that shared social identification or group membership helps to provide that positive sense of self (Reicher, Haslam, & Rath, 2008). Though online social groups allow an opportunity to share in the benefits of group membership, fulfilling the basic need to belong (McKenna & Bargh, 1998), radical right wing groups have been exploiting the internet since the mid-1990s, allowing them to not only find like-minded individuals across the globe, but to also build a sense of identity through the othering of adversaries within online echo chambers (Futrell & Simi, 2017). Within these online spaces comes a sustained reinforcing of similar messaging regarding worldviews and the production of affective

discourse, with both being produced and reproduced through constant online interactions (de Boise, 2018).

Suhay and Erison (2018) found that emotion, particularly anger, can motivate a person's thinking and actions towards the defence of the ingroup and in attacking outgroups. As such, exploring the role of affective discourse within the context of a forum environment where identities are formed and negotiated, particularly through the lens of the blackpill worldview, may offer important insight into their construction.

1.6 Outgroup Construction

The incel worldview is one of distinct group boundaries, in which one's group membership is biologically determined, and therefore one's place on the social hierarchy immutable and the hierarchy itself unchangeable (Baele et al., 2019). Whilst Baele et al. (2019) suggest the incel worldview consists of a three-tier social hierarchy for both men and women based on appearance, male out-groups ("Chads" and "normies") are separate entities that are distinguishable both in appearance and operation, whereas female out-groups ("Staceys" and "Beckys") are often not distinguished in how incels talk about them, often grouping them together as "foids", "femoids", "roasties", or other dehumanizing terms, due to their hypergamous nature, anti-social values, and cuckolding behaviours.

Understanding how incels construct and define the category boundaries that separates incels from other male identity groups may offer some important insights (Baele et al., 2019; Reicher et al., 2008). Baele et al. (2019) found that much incel anger is focused on normies as traitorous men who have enabled and endorsed the feminist agenda that has led to the current predicament, whereas Chads, whilst hated, do not share in that blame or in the same level of vitriolic hatred. A focus on how incels use affect in their construction of different outgroups is an important area to analyse, as how in-groups participate in the "othering" of adversaries

plays a significant part in how in-groups also then understand their own collective identity (Scrivens, Davies, & Frank, 2020).

1.7 Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory offers a long and well-formulated theoretical and research tradition from which to understand the formulation of the incel ingroup identity and outgroup identities. The foundations of social identity theory explored how social categorisation and social comparison produced intergroup behaviour (Turner, 1999), and that individuals are motivated to identify with a group to build a sense of self-identity (Demmers, 2016).

Based on social identity theory, Reicher et al. (2008) propose a five-step model of collective hate which offers ways to understand the affective practices of extremist groups such as incels. The five steps include the following: the first step begins with the creation of a cohesive and identifiable ingroup; the second step involves the creation of category boundaries that allow for exclusion and the creation of outgroups; the third step involves the construction of a “threat” that the outgroup poses to the ingroup; the fourth step is the process of representing the ingroup as uniquely good; and the fifth step culminates in the celebration of violence done against outgroups as a defence of the ingroup. The construction of the ingroup, they argue, comes first because the construction of ‘them’ is contingent upon how we define ‘us’. Reicher et al. (2008) argue that social psychological research has largely focussed on how outgroups are constructed, paying relatively little attention to the social formation of ingroup identity. For a group that endorses cruel violence against outgroups and glorifies those who have perpetrated mass murders (Baele et al., 2019), it seems an oversight that the talk in the construction of the ingroup has been overlooked. This is especially pertinent with regard to work done in the 1990s (Kawakami & Dion, 1993; Smith, Spears, & Oyen, 1994) that found that group identities, when made salient experimentally, felt the effects of collective deprivation more acutely

(Brown, 2000). As a group that fixates on their perceived societal deprivation, the Social Identity tradition offers a strong foundation from which to explore the construction of the incel identity. Social Identity Theory, therefore, offers a robust theoretical perspective from which to explore the socially constructed incel identity, albeit from a discursive perspective.

1.8 The Present Study

This study aims to explore how incels construct their own social identity, how they talk to each other, and how they construct outgroups, within the framework of their blackpill worldview. A further focus will be on affective practices in their talk: how incels imbue their discourse with emotion, and how such practices function to denigrate outgroups.

CHAPTER 2

Method

2.1 Analytic Approach

The aim of the present study is to analyse how incels construct and talk about the incel identity and outgroups within the context of their blackpill worldview. As Baele et al. (2019) did not explore the emotional dimensions of this discourse, a focus on how affective practices are weaved into these constructions may offer some important insight into how such identities and group constructions are maintained.

The analysis was informed by a social constructionist epistemology (Burr, 1995; Edley, 2001) that views language as more than just a medium of communication but as actively constructing meaning and sense-making in everyday life. The analytic method drew on the principles of discursive psychology (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter, 1996) and Wetherell's (1998; 2012) critical synthetic approach to analysing discourse. This approach was used to examine how incels understand and make sense of the world and the identities constructed within their world-view (Horton-Salway, 2001). As such, a central concern was how incel talk is used to construct identities and worldviews, but also how identities and worldviews are imbued with a certain shared understanding.

A further aim of the discursive analysis of incel talk was the affective or emotional practices that are invoked in social interactions within the incel community (Wetherell, 2012). An exploration of common or recurring affective practices and discourses within incel discussion allowed for an analysis of what such practices were used to achieve. As Wetherell (2012) has noted, habitual talk and social action often emerge unbidden as a reflex to the communicative flows of recognisable discourse. These affective practices and discourses may then sediment and solidify in the daily lives of incel members and develop into an affective unconscious that maintains ingroup identification (Wetherell 2012; Wetherell, 2015).

The analysis was also informed by principles from Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, & Flament, 1971; Tajfel & Turner, 2004), which has become a foundational approach to the study of intergroup behaviour and social identity. Within this approach, Reicher et al.'s (2008) Five-Step Social Identity Model of the Development of Collective Hate argues that the first step in examining extreme affective practices is understanding the building and scaffolding of the ingroup's identity in relation to those targeted as outgroups. As Baele et al. (2019) noted, violence perpetrated against outgroups, particularly women, is supported and celebrated within the forum spaces that incels reside in, thus already providing evidence for the fifth step of Reicher et al.'s (2008) five-step model – the celebration of violence against outgroups as a defence of the ingroup. Moreover, as Jaki et al. (2019) note, the identification of a negative outgroup that is to blame justifies the violence, fulfilling the second and, to some extent, third steps of the model.

As already noted, there is little analysis of how incels talk to each other and construct the incel identity, with most studies focusing on the blackpill worldview rather than the construction of both ingroup and outgroup identities (Baele et al., 2019; Jaki et al., 2019). As Reicher et al. note, a feature of psychological research into intergroup relations neglects the construction of the ingroup social identity and instead focusses on the representation of outgroups. Whilst Reicher et al. were focused on the neglect of leadership in the formation of ingroup social identities, they echo Brown's (2000, p. 769) stress of the need "to develop a theoretical account which links identity processes to the formation and dissemination of belief systems", that is, a need to focus on how ingroups are constructed and the practices that allow them to be maintained. As such, a rigorous analysis of the construction of the incel identity will form the main aim of this study. Given the extent to which incel discourse is grounded within discourses of masculinity (Farrell et al., 2019; Ging, 2019; Marwick & Caplan, 2018), this

study will be guided by previous work on the construction of masculine identities by men (Wetherell & Edley, 1999; Wetherell & Edley, 2014).

2.2 Material and Method

The material for this analysis consists of forum posts made during April 2020 on the Incels.co website (<https://incels.co>), in the “Inceldom Discussion” section. Thread starters can label their posts with certain tags that indicate what topic(s) the thread is concerned with, and threads can be marked with multiple tags. A pre-analysis was conducted to determine the general meaning of each tag: there were twenty tags (not including untagged threads) at the time of pre-analysis. Posts were filtered by each individual tag and the first five threads were analysed to determine the general topics or orientation of the discussion, detailed in Table 1. This process, whilst incomplete, allowed for the selection of certain tags that were considered relevant to the construction of ingroup and outgroup identities through the blackpill worldview and of affective practices.

Table 1. Overview of the different tags and their general usage.

Thread Tag	General Theme of Threads
Based	Thread posts are concerned with uninhibited ideas or persons. Essentially, unfiltered persons, ideas, or behaviours unconcerned with societal expectations or the social contract.
Blackpill	Threads regarding construction or evidence for the blackpill ideology. This can be about “mainstreaming” or spreading the blackpill, “scientific” evidence to support the conclusion, or news articles/story that are interpreted as evidence for the blackpill.
Cope	Threads on the topic of “coping”, which includes how members may “cope” with the nihilistic beliefs of the blackpill, what is or is not a “cope”, or even small things that are going well in individual’s lives that they share with the group.
Discussion	Threads often centred on the discussion of a particular topic, often ingroup construction.
Experiment	Threads where any form of “experiment” is conducted: this can include polls of members on particular questions, or can be centred on offline “experiments” conducted by members (such as “Chadfishing”, where members construct a dating profile but use a picture of a Chad).

Hypocrisy	Threads that revolve around discussion of hypocritical behaviours by outgroups or society in general. For example, they may capture evidence of anti-incel groups joking about male prison rape as evidence for their hypocrisy.
It's Over	"It's Over" is an expression of defeat, and threads tagged as such are often centred on discussion on the realisation that "it's over" for a particular individual or group. For example, a scientific study looking at women's preference of penis size and girth may result in a thread entitled "It's over for dicklets" (that is, people with small penises).
JFL	JFL is an acronym for "Just Fucking Lol", and tagged threads often centre discussion at laughing at the misfortune of outgroups or incels who hold onto certain copes.
LDAR	LDAR is an acronym for "Lay Down and Rot", a defeatist idea that can accompany the acceptance of the Blackpill's nihilistic philosophy. Threads tagged often centre discussion on societal reasons for why one should simply do so or events that led to the acceptance of it as the final outcome.
LifeFuel	Threads tagged with LifeFuel revolve around events or discussions that bring satisfaction or enjoyment to incels, often the suffering or misfortune of outgroup members.
News	News tagged threads centre on current events or news that are important for incels.
NSFW	NSFW is an acronym for "Not Safe for Work". Threads tend to have no specific theme except for graphic materials, sexual content, gore, violence, or other things not considered acceptable to look at in public spaces or work settings.
RageFuel	Threads tagged with RageFuel centre on topics/events/groups/persons that provoke rage, anger or frustration for incels.
Serious	Threads tagged as "serious" are done so to inform other members that a serious question or topic is to be explored. This can include struggles with mental illness or attempted suicide, or can be questions that are posed with genuine curiosity.
Soy	Soy tagged threads tend to revolve around discussions of the "bluepill", non-blackpilled persons, or anti-incel groups. Soy is considered an estrogen-enhancing food, and therefore discussions may also invoke the idea of the west being a "soyciety".
Story	Threads tag refers to anecdotes and stories of interactions or recounts of experiences by group members.
SuicideFuel	Threads tagged with SuicideFuel deal with topics or events that are intended to provoke feelings of suicidality. This might be reminders on what they are missing out on due to their looks, reminders of loneliness, or discussions on the commonalities of incel experiences.
TeeHee	Threads centre on the behaviours of women that showcase a double standard in word and deed. For example, women who claim that personality matters but who only date tall and/or attractive men.

Toxic Femininity	Threads centre on the “toxic” results of feminism on society, and the double standard set for men and women, but especially the effects of such double standards on incels.
Venting	Threads centre on members letting off steam about frustrations and other aggravating aspects of their circumstances.
N.B. At time of writing, three more tags have been added: “WhitePill”, “Theory”, and “Brutal”.	

The thread tags selected for analysis in this study were: “Blackpill”, “LifeFuel”, “RageFuel”, “SuicideFuel”, “TeeHee”, “Toxic Femininity”, “Discussion”, “It’s Over”, “LDAR”, and “Story”. Whilst an in-depth analysis of all thread tags is certainly warranted, given that the first week resulted in 498 threads in just the selected tags, it was unfortunately outside the scope of this thesis.

The original aim was to analyse all posts with the tag of interest that were made in the month of April. Threads were printed into a PDF copy several days after the date of posting, as this allowed threads to reach their natural end and form complete discussions. The posts from the first day of April provided 83 threads of varying lengths and it was quickly realised that, to borrow a term from thematic analysis, the data would reach saturation rather quickly. Whilst all threads of interest in April were surveyed, the focus was scaled back to the first two weeks, and an emphasis placed on threads which were considered representative of one or more of the constructions of interest. The first week of April provided 498 threads and the second week provided 513 threads for analysis.

Goodman’s (2017) guide to conducting psychological discourse analysis, which outlines eight key steps, was followed to ensure a high-quality analysis. In line with the first step, a literature review was conducted to determine an appropriate question or area for analysis and missing from the literature was how incels talk about and construct their own social identity, and the affective practices found within their talk. Per the second step, an appropriate source of data was found at the incels.co forum, which follows the research of Baele et al.

(2019) and Jaki et al. (2019), who both used the same website for their analyses. In line with the third step, a corpus was generated using the posts from the first two weeks of April 2020, using selected forum tags of interest. For step four, no data needed to be manually transcribed as they existed as written forum threads, but the threads did need to be saved as a PDF document, as outlined above. For the fifth step, a preliminary reading was done of the first two days of data to become familiar with the talk. Alongside the fifth step, notes were written in a separate file to keep track of interesting and relevant aspects of the data. In the sixth step, the data was analysed for the discursive and rhetorical devices deployed, with a particular focus on how such strategies are used in constructing the incel identity and with the affective practices present. Whilst all rhetorical strategies were analysed, a particular focus was how they worked with and within interpretative repertoires. Interpretative repertoires are “a recognisable set of routine arguments, descriptions and evaluations” that is commonly brought about through the repetitive use of “common places, tropes and characterizations of actions and situations” throughout a corpus (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 443). Once these six steps were completed, collecting extracts was the final step before writing up the report. Extracts were chosen for their representativeness of the talk as a whole, in particular the more salient or common rhetorical devices that were employed in building up the incel identity within the context of the blackpill worldview.

To accomplish a rigorous and transparent investigation, an audit trail was kept throughout the study in line with Wolf’s (2003) recommendations, so that the analysis and interpretation of the data was clear and consistent. No amendments were made to any of the posts, including punctuation, spelling, or grammar, and are presented as originally written.

2.3 Ethical Considerations

In conducting Internet-Mediated Research for this study, the British Psychological Society's (2017) guidelines were followed to maximise benefits and minimise harm. Incels.co was chosen for analysis because it has been the focus of studies before (Baele et al, 2019; Jaki et al., 2019), forum users expect that they are being observed (particularly by anti-incel groups), and because the data is publicly available without needing to sign up. Forum posts were already de-identified as members used pseudonymous handles and what limited personal information was present in the corpus was not present in extracts. As such, potential disruption or harm to the community was deemed low.

CHAPTER 3

Analysis and Discussion

3.1 Blackpilled Incels

One might assume that the incel social identity is straightforward – a group of people who are celibate and whose celibacy status is involuntary. However, for incels who have “taken the blackpill”, there is far more to the group identity than simply involuntary celibacy. Rather, as with many social identities, blackpilled incels have discursively constructed a much more complex understanding of their social identity, especially regarding how it exists in relation to other groups and society.

3.2 Incels as Victims

As the blackpill worldview places incels at the bottom of the social hierarchy, a key element of incel discourse focuses on their victimisation by society, and society’s attempted gaslighting of their victimisation. This victim status is legitimated by how incels construct society and higher status outgroups within their perceived social hierarchy. The basis of this worldview is an evolutionary repertoire that utilises a broad array of discursive tools to achieve an empiricist accounting of purported historical and factual knowledge.

In Thread 1, forum member mgtow offers the thread title “You are a victim” and begins Post 1 with a rhetorical question, “of what?” What follows is an answer that constructs society as being centred around “foids” (women): a society constructed to exonerate women from their biologically driven preference for Chads whilst also creating a path for non-Chads to succeed in this society, but one that is ultimately illusory.

Thread 1. [Blackpill] You are a victim.

of what?

Foids wanted to not feel bad about rejecting you - can't fault her if her genetic programming is to find/like/get wet only for a Chad. So the norman society invented the concept of self improvement as a reason to politely decline your advances. And the sub-humans takes it too seriously while this whole concept is not about them at all: it is about Stacy to get rid of her guilt(if any).

Post 1 by thread starter mgtow

BASED. It's not our fault that we were born with inferior genes. We were dealt a bad hand.

Post 2 by forum member Genetic Dead End

We're victims of shit genetics and (mostly) asshole parents. Guess how many people care?

Post 4 by forum member InMyCellInHell

WØLF said: ☹

I blame my mom for choosing to have kids with a random manlet. I COULD HAVE BEEN A FUCKING CHAD FFS.

It worked in the past when there were threats to life - war, famine, poverty, diseases. When the bottom of the Maslow's pyramid is at threat, foids accepted the negotiation. Now that the State and society (passively by condoning e-whoring) ensures that there is no survival threat to them, the standards, expectations and the continuous 'enrichment' of the the ideal mate hit herculean heights.

Look what is happening now: They are trying to prevent a full scale collapse so that society can get back to normalcy once all the pandemic scare is over. There is no lesson to learn - foids getting a free hand as usual, if you go by the increase in divorce rates in Wuhan province.

Post 9 by thread starter mgtow responding to a post by user WØLF

Yup, they say exclusion is a form of bullying, so being excluded from sex is another form of bullying

Post 11 by forum member PersonalityInkwell

These responses came from several different forum posters, and each demonstrates a clear understanding of the victimisation of their social identity by different elements of society. Through their worldview, an interpretative repertoire centred upon evolution routinely emerged in the construction of this victimisation.

Through this evolutionary repertoire, incel posters attended to the construction of their identity as victimised or marginalised. As can be seen in Post 2 and Post 4 of Thread 1, the incel status is constructed as a “fault” of being “born with inferior genes” and that incels are therefore “victims of shit genetics”. This biological determinism is not reserved solely for

incels, but also for women, but where the evolutionary repertoire concerns itself with biology's effects on physical appearance for incels, for women it is concerned with their behaviour. As mgtow argues, you "can't fault [women] if [their] genetic programming is to find/like/get wet only for a Chad" (Thread 1, Post 1).

However, the circumstances of incel identity specifically and men more broadly is constructed as a contrast to the circumstances that women face. Whereas incels and other non-Chad men face "herculean heights" that need to be achieved in order to fulfil the role of an ideal mate, women instead get "a free hand as usual" (Thread 1, Post 9). Across the corpus, such extreme case formulations and contrast structures were common when comparing what men need to achieve compared to the minimal standards necessary for women, and such formulations were even more extreme in regard to the incel identity and ingroup members. Pomerantz (1986) has described extreme case formulations as a means to justify or argue conclusions by using the extreme points on relevant descriptive dimensions to persuasively strengthen a case. Contrast structures, on the other hand, offer "distinctiveness information" (Edwards & Potter, 1992) – they provide information on the ways in which two groups are meaningfully distinct. Together, they work not just to illustrate the differences between the standards for men and women, but the extremity of that difference.

These extreme circumstances are then further reinforced by state or governmental complicity, which functions as a separate extreme case formulation, but one that works to reinforce the "herculean heights", and therefore the severity of incel marginalisation by society. Such constructions of society as complicit work to further institutionalise the discrimination that incels feel whilst also further legitimising the central tenet of the blackpill worldview of only physical appearance having any worth. As such, when "they" are invoked to say "they say bullying is a form of exclusion" (Thread 1, Post 11), the "they" of the government or society has already been vividly described as explicitly aware of the blackpill truth regarding physical

appearance, and therefore consciously aware that exclusion from sexual activity is “another form of bullying”, but on a much grander scale.

This construction of society as complicit in marginalising incel members is an assumed knowledge central to the incel identity: the recognition that society is built to normalise and placate women’s anti-social behaviours in a way that punishes men (though, non-chads generally and unattractive men specifically). The opening post by mgtow offers this societal construction as an answer to the posed rhetorical question, where “norman” or “normie” society “invented the concept of self improvement as a reason to decline your advances”, and where men buy into this construction and leads to “the subhumans [taking] it too seriously” (Thread 1, Post 1).

This construction of incels as victims, whilst often utilising an evolutionary repertoire that allows it to be presented as objectively constructed, was part of a much larger conversation that occurred in the corpus where affective routines and practices predominated. In this larger conversation, the evolutionary understanding of incel marginalisation, as Ging notes (2019) legitimated individual personal accounts of bullying or marginalisation that often led to discussions around shared experiences of bullying or marginalisation, both of which reinforced and further legitimated their blackpill worldview. The affective practices within discussions of incel victimisation centred around two key emotions: anger and defeat.

In Thread 2, thread starter ShySaxon offers a recount of being bullied in high school by two good looking guys, in which extreme case formulations are used in conjunction with contrast structures regarding his life compared with his bullies, all vividly described with strong uses of affective language designed to provoke sympathy for ShySaxon and anger at his bullies and the school environment in which it occurred. It is in the responses to the opening post that many of the affective routines are deployed.

Thread 2. [Blackpill] Bullies won and I lost

This is fucking wrong, someone needs to correct this.
Or be a good cuck and let them live their lives without being punished for their crimes.

Incels of the world, those of you who were bullied, DO NOT FORGIVE DO NOT FORGET.

Post 3 by forum member yeshuallah

Never going to win anyways

Post 7 by forum member III

ERfuelmaxxing, also ethnics foids are the biggest white worshipping whores. They deserve all a 45 for being hoes, and the chads for being cunts.

Post 9 by forum member FUCKITALLREEE

OP, what you just described is what so many of us have gone through. This SHOULD NOT be the way the world works. Seriously, something HAS TO BE DONE ABOUT THIS. I WILL NEVER FORGIVE OR FORGET.

Post 12 by forum member BITG

Nothing will be done about it ever. Its just how it works. There are vomit-inducing hypocrie worms disguised as humans. Because bullies are less than worms to me.

Post 17 by forum member reallyunfuckable

wrong, you committed the worst crime imaginable: you were born an incel

in nature there is no sin worse than this

Post 19 by forum member Alex Grandi

The winner takes it all, the loser is ridiculed by all.

In a just world you'd have disfigured them.

Post 35 by forum member The Abyss

The posts in response to Thread 2's original post were common across the corpus where similar discussions occurred. Strong affective calls for violence against or of hatred for outgroups, particularly women, were routinely deployed in discussions of incel victimisation. The belief that the women in ShySaxon's recount "deserve all a 45 for being hoes, and the chads for being cunts" (Thread 2, Post 9) was a common sentiment, just as much as the idea

that they were “vomit-inducing hypocrite worms disguised as humans” (Thread 2, Post 17). These affective deployments of hatred, wherein outgroups were dehumanised and worthy of contempt worked within a larger framework of the incel social identity being seen as an unjust circumstance; a circumstance that was “fucking wrong” (Thread 2, Post 3) and that “many of us have gone through” (Thread 2, Post 12) for having “committed the worst crime imaginable” (Thread 2, Post 19). The affective routines of anger and hatred to incel victimisation is therefore legitimated as a righteous anger aimed at an unjust world and the actors who participate within it. As such, calls for violence against outgroups were normalised in the texts and often bound up in expressions of outgroup hatred.

The other affective practice regarding incel victimisation, centred around defeatism, focused instead on how incels should cooperate within a society that is unjust. The belief in the immutable hierarchy of the blackpill in which incels are at the bottom were also associated with affective routines where they were “Never going to win anyways” (Thread 2, Post 7). So prevalent were these affective practices that two of the forum tags, LDAR and It’s Over, encourage the reification of such beliefs into common discursive practices. As incels construct themselves as marginalised members in an immutable hierarchy, rather than attempt to improve their situation, resignation in the face of this injustice was offered as a reasonable solution to their situation. The outcomes of such resignation and defeatism, and the affective practices produced by it, are seen in Thread 3, where “contributing to society” is seen as “cucked advice” that leads one to being a “pathetic slave” (Post 1) whose miserable existence is positioned as solely to benefit other people.

Thread 3. [Blackpill] "Contributing to society" is the most cucked advice there is

Contributing to society is a politically correct way of saying "you are a pathetic slave and the sole purpose of your miserable existence is to benefit other people".

It's funny because foids say that "you're not owed sex!!!" yet somehow you owe society so much you have to pay taxes, help others and "contribute", while getting nothing in return. I didn't ask to be born, I don't owe anyone anything.

None of the top-tier Chads even pay taxes but hide them in offshore banks. If a Chad doesn't contribute anything to society he's smart, if an incel doesn't contribute he's a freeloader.

Post 1 by thread starter CopeDopeRope

I have never understood the purpose of "contributing to society". Society hates people like me, therefore it should receive the reciprocal attitude from me... It deserves to collapse.

Post 5 by forum member GanyoTribe

You contribute to society but society doesn't contribute to you
Is that fair?



Post 6 by FinnCel

Contribute to society today by leeching off all the benefits you can possibly get without working and intentionally spreading COVID-19 to others if you catch it.

Post 8 by forum member jetfuelcel

Every incel who contributes to society is a retarded cuck

Post 16 by forum member manicel

As with much incel discourse, extreme case formulations are common even in their affective talk regarding their resignation within society. To be unattractive is to be incel, and therefore leads to being marginalised by society. As their social identity is marginalised by society, anger is considered an acceptable reaction; however, since their position in society is unchangeable, not contributing or participating is the best answer, by "leeching off all the benefits you can possibly get without working" (Thread 3, Post 8). Therefore, incels who do

participate are denigrated much the same way as non-blackpilled normies are, as “retarded cuck(s)” (Thread 3, Post 16) or “pathetic slave(s)” (Thread 3, Post 1) to a society that “deserves to collapse” (Thread 3, Post 5).

The concept of fairness both legitimated the anger as justified, but also reinforced the defeatist narrative. Fairness was viewed through a broader social context informed by the evolutionary repertoire, and was therefore outside the scope of the marginalised incel members to change. Thus, resigning oneself to not feeling a part nor contributing to society was an acceptable revolt to the circumstances incels faced. As forum member FinnCel states, representative of a broader pattern in the forum’s discourse, “You contribute to society but society doesn’t contribute to you”, and so then asks the rhetorical question, “Is that fair?” (Thread 3, Post 6). Such affective routines, where resignation or defeatism co-occurred with anger, were common in the discourse regarding the construction of the incel identity as marginalised, as such routines worked within the understanding of an entrenched injustice.

Social identities are formed and constituted through prior discourses (Wetherell, 1998) and a key part of the incel discourse is the sharing of personal suffering, as seen in Thread 2, which is utilised in the manosphere to build an affective consensus (Ging, 2019). The evolutionary repertoire that incels deploy to construct their social identity as marginalised is imbued with an affective consensus of personal suffering that has been repeatedly mobilised and reified in the prior discourse (Ging, 2019), and should be seen as underlying the evolutionary repertoire deployed by incels.

3.3 Incels as Aggrieved Masculine Actors

This history alluded to in Thread 1, based on the evolutionary repertoire and captured in the work of Baele et al. (2019) as “a past golden age” of patriarchal monogamy (p. 13), is elaborated on in Thread 4 by forum member IncelKing. As Ging (2019) has noted, discourses of masculinity in the manosphere are dominated by evolutionary psychology and driven by a genetic determinist framework. In the opening post of Thread 4, this evolutionary biological repertoire is used to construct an imagined past that explains current society and the incel victimisation within, where first there was chaos that was brought to order through a negotiation by men which formed the patriarchy and resulted in a “safe and fair distribution of sexual resources”.

However, due to women’s biological imperatives, this fairer and safer society was upended and the “average/unattractive men who were previously sexually satiated during patriarchal times have now been left sexually unsatisfied in the modern era” (Thread 4, Post 1). Since “everything in life comes down to sex”, “the rates of rape and murder have once again increased” as sexually unsatisfied men, driven by their biological imperatives, begin “lashing out at a society which they consider to be against their personal interests” (Thread 4, Post 1). Baele et al. (2019) broadly captured this conceptualisation of history, and this understanding of the world as inseparable from the incel identity.

Thread 4. Opening Post of [Blackpill] [For IncelTears & Normies] The patriarchy was necessary for maintaining social order via equal distribution of sexual resources (SEXUAL COMMUNISM)

In caveman times where survival of the fittest was the norm, women had sexual preferences for tall men and men with robust, trauma-resistant skull-structure (square jaw, prominent chin, hunter eye area, hollow cheekbones), as these qualities were an indicator of strength and ability to protect one's tribe from predators/other men. However, the men who possessed these traits only comprised roughly 20% of the male population, yet they were mating with 80% of women.

These genetically elite men (alphas) had harems of women while the genetically inferior men (betas) were left with scraps or nothing. The only way for beta men to mate was to form packs, kill an alpha and take his women for themselves (by force). It was during this time that **rape and murder became part of male nature**, an evolutionary mechanism which allowed weak men to bypass female sexual selection in order to pass on their genes by force, the same way **it became female nature (through evolution) to select the most genetically elite men**.

However, this system was one of total chaos and anarchy. Men were killing each other for sexual resources and women were raped. Men of the past, knowing that **everything in life comes down to sex**, realised that the only way to establish peace and order (where men were no longer being killed and women were no longer being raped) was to **create a safe and fair distribution of sexual resources**

The patriarchy was essential for creating social order. You see, the patriarchy was a **MERITOCRATIC**, where instead of 1 man (alpha) having a harem of 4 women to himself while 3 beta males missed out, every man (irregardless of genetics) had claim to a woman **BY MERIT** of fulfilling his role in society as a productive member, hard worker and valued contributor.

However, everything comes at a cost, in order for one group to "gain" something, another group must be at a "loss", such is the nature of the world where resources are limited. Rape and murder were at their lowest during the patriarchy, yet ever since feminism changed the structure of society, the rates of rape and murder have once again increased as average/unattractive men who were previously sexually satiated during patriarchal times have been left sexually unsatisfied in the modern era, hence lashing out at a society which they consider to be against their personal interests.

Selected extracts from Post 1 by thread starter IncelKing

Within Post 1 of Thread 4, a factual accounting of history is presented using an empiricist repertoire (Potter, 1996) to construct an imagined past and the actors within it. The use of an empiricist repertoire allows for this history to be constructed in a way that minimises the involvement of incels in its construction and interpretation by relying on third person formulations of the evidence, giving the history an *out-there-ness* quality, independent of incels doing the construction (Gilbert & Mulkay, 1984; Potter, 1996). By referring to terminology such as "survival of the fittest", use quantification rhetoric (20% and 80%) (Mitra, 2013), and "evolutionary mechanism", IncelKing claims to present a factual accounting of natural male and female behaviours, such as "rape and murder [becoming] part of male nature" and how female nature drives "to select the most genetically elite men", "through evolution". Using an

empiricist repertoire allows for the account to attend to the dilemma of stake and interest (Edwards & Potter, 1992), presenting such ‘facts’ on a supposed objective scientific foundation, rather than ideologically or personally motivated accounting. This account of history then allows for the knowledge claim that “everything in life comes down to sex”, a central tenet of the incel worldview, to be offered as a truth systematically constructed from the evidence.

Thread 4. Responses to the Opening Post [Blackpill] [For IncelTears & Normies] The patriarchy was necessary for maintaining social order via equal distribution of sexual resources (SEXUAL COMMUNISM)

78980n said: 

I think feminism might of had some progressive aspects to it but this aspect was aborted by the female strategy you mention is the root cause of feminism .

Women consider serving their husband and children in return for food, clothing, shelter and all their needs being accommodated for, as being "enslaved," but they don't consider being a wageslave for government and corporations (in order to accomodate those same needs) as "slavery", which makes me think that feminism was never about female empowerment but about liberating themselves from being married to those evil, unattractive men who kept women in concentration camps known as "homes", enabling them to chase Chad dick and have their fill while society foots the bill.

Women are enjoying this new system which has given them so much freedom, although its not women (but society rather) which is paying the price of increased violence and social instability.

Post 20 by thread starter IncelKing responding to a post by user 78980n

I thought everyone on this forum already one that it was females procuring wealth and having enough financial independence to not need men was a quintessential cause of the utter lack of monogamous and dedicated relationships.

Why has society decided to abolish a perfectly fine social structure in exchange for the right of females to freely work? Capitalism, and the increased tax revenue they can get from a larger workforce to increase the potential GDP of the economy.

It's a sort of pandora's box one country released on the world, as if females could not work in your country, you would fall behind as a result economically pewpew.

Post 21 by forum member Anonymous MG

Sexual communism, as with all communism, is doomed to fall apart as people's greed causes them to demand more. People would rather have almost nothing but feel like they have freedom than have enough but feel limited by some system. The nature of foids will always cause any structure we build to fall apart.

Post 23 by forum member cryptic_egg

well written and very high iq. I feel like most blackpilled guys do understand this topic, but this was just a more deeper version of it. However, my question is, what do we do next? Is there no solution to this and do we just have to LDAR?

Post 29 by forum member Offlinemode

Ap0calypse said: ☹

I've always been a strong supporter of this theory. It explains the reasoning for the patriarchy's existence and monogamy in the first place with biology.

The usual explanation for patriarchy by feminists is "ugly man bad"

Same. Men who are deprived of sex can go insane in the long run because they are repressing their biological urges. Due to the imbalance between the top 20% Alpha men who can get all the sex they want and the bottom 80% of men who can't or have a hard time getting laid, sexual communism is the only way that men with high sexual market value are equal to those with low sexual market value.

If leftists can say that it's unfair how the top 1% have more money than they will ever spend while the majority are in poverty and promote socialism as a solution, then it's only fair that we apply the same standards to sex.

Post 31 by forum member Vision responding to a post by forum member Ap0calypse

As forum member Offlinemode notes, whilst “most blackpilled guys do understand this topic”, IncelKing offered a “deeper version of it” (Thread 4, Post 29). History in these online interactions, therefore, is less concerned with the historical accuracy of the past and more so the deployment of history as a shared rhetorical resource. By relying on history as a shared rhetorical resource, incel group members are able to present an understanding of the world which validates the incel identity as an identity under attack and victimised by feminism and the outgroups that support it. What follows, therefore, is talk situated within this understanding, and the expectation that “everyone on this forum one that it was females procuring wealth and having financial independence to not need men as a quintessential cause of the utter lack of monogamous and dedicated relationships” (Thread 4, Post 21). That is, incels understand their masculinity in its opposition to feminism, and the critiques of feminism offered.

This shared understanding of history is also key for understanding how incels perceive their social identity as marginalised in an unjust society. In these discourses, incels still align their identity as an inherently masculine identity, but a masculine identity that has little value

or agency in a system that does not value achievement or merit, simply physical appearance. Even within the construction of the pre-patriarchal times, “genetically inferior men” could still achieve, even if they had to “form packs, kill an alpha and take his women for themselves (by force)” (Thread 4, Post 1).

However, whilst the evolutionary repertoire is still apparent within the empiricist framework presented and one that justified historical and now current incel violence, evolution is still presented as something that men were capable of overcoming. Within this evolutionary and empiricist framework, it was the “men of the past, knowing that everything in life comes down to sex, [that] realised that the only way to establish peace and order (where men were no longer being killed and women were no longer being raped) was to create a safe and fair distribution of sexual resources” (Thread 4, Post 1).

What is presented by this construction is a contrast structure, where men are capable of negotiating a “meritocratic” system in the patriarchy, that allowed “every man (irregardless of genetics)” to have a “claim to a woman BY MERIT of fulfilling his role in society as a productive member, hard worker and valued contributor” (Thread 4, Post 1). In this negotiation, it is men who are presented as rational, able to overcome their “male nature” of “rape and murder” (Thread 4, Post 1). On the other hand, women are contrasted as operating according to their essential female nature, which “always cause(s) any structure we (men) build to fall apart” (Thread 4, Post 23). Whereas the patriarchy is presented as a “perfectly fine social structure” (Thread 4, Post 21) that was “essential for creating social order” (Thread 4, Post 1), feminism is instead contrasted as a means for “enabling [women] to chase Chad dick and have their fill while society foots the bill” (Thread 4, Post 20).

Women in this contrast structure are positioned as being lazy, self-serving, and driven by their biological need to have sex or procreate with attractive men, whereas men are positioned as creating order, safety, and fairness, as well as being “productive member(s), hard

worker(s) and valued contributor(s)” to society (Thread 4, Post 1). It is within this essentialist masculine nature that incels understand themselves as men and how to be men in a just, patriarchal society.

As Marwick and Caplan (2018) noted, the prevailing discourse of the manosphere more broadly is that of society in decline and crisis because of the structural changes due to feminist intervention. As such, the affective practices in incel discourse when constructing their masculinity is shaped by anger and loss. This is most evident in the nostalgic talk when members reminisce about the imagined patriarchal past, when there was “peace and order” and a “fair distribution of sexual resources” (Thread 4, Post 1). Such nostalgic talk of the patriarchal past was common across the corpus, but often couched, as Baele et al. (2019) also found, within empiricist repertoires. The empiricist repertoire functioned to conceal the affective talk whilst also reinforcing discursively constructed feelings of resignation, as the repertoire reinforced the objective nature of the circumstances that incels and their masculinity face. In this regard, incels align themselves with a hegemonic masculinity, like other groups in the manosphere, intent on defeating feminism (Ging, 2019), but resign themselves to not performing as men should, as in modern society, it simply makes one a “wageslave for [the] government” (Thread 4, Post 20) and, therefore, contributes to maintaining the unjust social order.

As Wetherell (2012) notes, affective practices, like other forms of habitual talk, often emerge unbidden, jointly constructed with the flow of others’ talk and practices. Across the corpus, jointly constructed affective practices were evident throughout, both in the formation of opening posts and in responses by forum members. This is how, alongside the empiricist repertoire, “Is there no solution to this and do we just have to LDAR?” (Thread 4, Post 29) can be offered as a serious question. Thus, although there is nostalgia for the fair and meritocratic patriarchy of the past, there is only resignation in the face of what incels understand as the objective reality that their social identity must endure in modern society. Their masculinity,

how they perform masculinity, is irrelevant in their eyes, as they have a “low sexual market value” (Thread 4, Post 31) due to their appearance and, therefore, any form of contribution to society according to masculine norms of productivity and hard work is simply “cucked” (Thread 3, Post 1), which is the behaviour of inadequate men (Lokke, 2019).

3.4 Kissless, Hugless, Handholdless Virgins – the “true” incels

Whilst most of the discussion threads in the corpus pertained to the incel identity in relation to the wider society, there were also discussions regarding who can make the claim towards incel status. As mentioned previously, the social identity of incels who have “taken the blackpill” is not as straightforward as people who are simply involuntarily celibate. While the categorisation of “involuntary celibacy” may not seem to exclude non-virgins or those who have had minor success with women and dating in the past, within the threads it was evident that there are two types of incels where these categories and boundaries are negotiated and argued. The more restricted identity is that of a “truecel” or “trucel”, which is any incel who is “KHHV”, an abbreviation for “kissless, hugless, handholdless virgin”; the broader incel category, on the other hand, does not preclude those who have ever kissed, hugged, or held hands with a woman in the past.

In March, forum admin SergeantIncel released the results of a survey of the demographic data collected from almost 680 forum users. The survey covered demographics such as age, height, socioeconomic status and other common demographics, but then also asked questions pertinent to the incel social identity, such as self-rated physical appearance, mental health status, beliefs regarding the causes of lacking a partner, and sexual status (such as having kissed a girl or having had either paid or unpaid sex) ([News] Survey Results – March 2020¹).

¹ See data file.

Due to the release of the survey results, conversations occurred between those who identified with the truecel identity and those who fit the broader incel category, often with claims from the truecel members that those who admitted to having had kissed a girl were “fakecels” (fake incels). Thread 5 was one such thread that garnered 351 posts where much discursive work was done by both truecels and incels over who belonged and who did not qualify as an incel.

Within these discussions, two interpretative repertoires became readily apparent. For truecels, a restrictive definition was used that relied on formulations that rationalised their position that “KHHV”, or at the very least being kissless, should be the basis for claims to the incel social identity. Broader incel members, in contrast, relied on a more inclusive definition to dispute the extreme claims of the former. This broader category ascription focused on the more practical or lived experiences of rejection assumed as a core feature of the incel identity, pushing for a construction in which those who can make claims to the incel identity are those who validate their incel status through action.

Thread 5. [Blackpill] Be VERY suspisuous of members that defend bragging fakecels.

**REMEMBER: BE HIGHLY SUSPICIOUS OF BRAG DEFENDERS
BECAUSE THEY ARE PROBABLY FAKECELS THEMSELVES.**

**IF you defend other posters bragging about kissing/sex you're either
an incel cuck or a fakecel larping faggot.**

Selected extract from Post 1 by thread starter Colvin76

Kissing a female should be a bannable offense.

I've said it before. If your face is good enough that a female will kiss you, then you are able to fully ascend.

My face is completely repulsive and a female would never put her mouth near mine

Post 3 by forum member FidelCashflow

Anyone here who even has female friends is a fakecel. Holes find my face so repulsive that they won't even talk to me.
Either be a truecel or get the fuck out of here

Post 8 by forum member metabuxx

If your face is good enough that a female will kiss you, then what's stopping you from getting sex?

Post 15 by forum member FidelCashflow responding to Post 12

If a woman kisses you voluntarily, it means shes attracted to you. Women dont kiss ugly men, ever.

Post 35 by forum member Legendarywristcel

Colvin76 said: ☺

EXACTLY. I 100% agree and I've said this many times before.

KISSING A FOID = INSTANT PERMABAN AND FAKECEL

Imagine being a 40 y/o oldcel, you have 2000 approaches, after your 1257th approach you received one kiss(you were 29 at this time). And then you have some teenagers that has never approached calling for you to be banned.

Post 67 by forum member EyesAreSoCold responding to a post by forum member Colvin76

AND YET SOME INCELS PROUDLY admit they have not approached one woman in their entire lives. And they think it makes them trucels

if any of my 5-7 friend sex havers followed that they would be VIRGINS

Post 106 by forum member Ropemaxx

What would make a foid kiss a guy and not go all the way? riddle me this. We all know foids are geared towards a man's facial attractiveness, there are many studies that show this.

If a foid found your face attractive enough to kiss, youre on the right path to losing your inceldom. There are exceptions, but this is the general rule.

Extract of Post 115 by forum member Legendarywristcel

bottom 2% in looks? i would bet my life, that 100% he can make female friends.

why does he have ugly glasses and ungroomed facial hair that doesnt fit him? noeffortcel and should be banned

if you think otherwise you need to rope now. blackpill **hyperboles** have destroyed your mind

Post 140 by forum member Ropemaxx

Legendarywristcel said: ☹

Look shouldnt matter while making a friend. But they do, its the world we live in.

Exactly. Holes hate ugly men. They don't want to do anything with us (not even be our friends).

Post 189 by forum member metabuxx responding to a post by forum member Legendarywristcel

I can't take him seriously anymore lmao. He just wants to defend his fakeceldom

ANY SEXUAL/ROMANTIC CONTACT WITH A FOID = FAKECEL. NO EXCEPTIONS & NO EXCUSES. These facts cannot be denied.

Post 319 by thread starter Colvin76 responding to post 314

A common restrictive practice was that “If your face is good enough that a female will kiss you, then you are able to fully ascend” (Thread 5, Post 3), because “What would make a foid kiss a guy and not go all the way?” (Thread 5, Post 115). This descriptive repertoire worked to justify the belief that those forum members who had been kissed were “fakecels” by using descriptive formulations of women and their practices. Extreme case formulations of how women interact with men were also present in this justification, as truecels often describe their faces as being “repulsive”, such that women would neither put their mouths near the mouth of a truecel or even talk to them (Thread 5, Post 3; Thread 5, Post 8). Even in regard to friendship, incels construct women as hating ugly men to the point that “they don’t want to do anything with us (not even be our friends)” (Thread 5, Post 189). As such, constructions of women centred on how they were “geared towards a man’s facial attractiveness” and, therefore, if a forum member admitted to having had a kiss, it was an admission that they have no claim to the incel identity.

Truecel members were able to restrict category membership by also deploying an empiricist repertoire to support their constructions of women and their behaviours. The claim that women “are geared towards a man’s facial attractiveness” is supported by the assertion that “there are many studies that show this”. The shared understanding of evolutionary history

was drawn upon heavily to legitimate such claims that any sexual or romantic contact with a woman is grounds for being a fakecel, and that “these facts cannot be denied” (Thread 5, Post 319).

However, forum members not aligned with this extreme conceptualisation of what constitutes an incel did attempt to challenge the legitimacy of such a formulation. Those members challenged the restrictive definition with their own interpretative repertoire, where to make a claim to the incel social identity requires active attempts to ascend, so that one has positive proof that legitimate claims to the incel identity. Forum member EyesAreSoCold (Thread 5, Post 67) offers the scenario of “being a 40 y/o oldcel, [who has] 2000 approaches” and, within those active attempts to engage with women, managed to get one kiss. However, according to “some teenagers that [have] never approached”, such a person should be banned. As another member reinforces, “SOME INCELS PROUDLY ADMIT they have not approached one woman in their entire lives. And they think it makes them trucels” (Thread 5, Post 106). The member goes on to state that “if any of my 5-7 friend sex havers followed that they would be VIRGINS”. In this attempt at a contrast structure, both forum members make claims towards incel categorisation being an actively achieved social identity, challenging the extreme and passive formulation of the incel social identity. This also allows for members using the more inclusive definition to challenge the empiricist repertoire, used by members wanting a stricter definition, as being constituted of “blackpill hyperboles” (Thread 5, Post 140) that do not align to social reality or even statistical probability.

The affective practices present in the negotiation of the incel identity tended towards anger and frustration, but also again resignation. As many truecel members conceptualise the incel identity towards an extreme lack of intimate or romantic interaction, anger is aimed at those who attempt to challenge their conceptualisation, claiming them to be either “incel cuck(s) or a fakecel larping faggot” (Thread 5, Post 1), or simply just forum members who

want “to defend [their] fakecelldom” (Thread 5, Post 319). Resignation is evident in how incels describe how they imagine women view them, often viewing themselves as “repulsive” and “ugly men” and unable to be friends with women as a result. Whilst many incels may find themselves facing feelings of resignation as evidenced previously, it allows for incels to further justify anger at outgroups who they also see as central to their marginalisation.

Frustration was also clearly evidenced as an affective practice within the negotiation of the boundaries of the incel identity. As the discussion progressed, many truecel members evinced outward frustration towards forum members who argued for a broader incel categorisation. Such frustration encouraged a turn towards an empiricist repertoire by truecel members as the discussion progressed, trying to remind other members that there are some “facts [that] cannot be denied” (Thread 5, Post 319). However, frustration was also evident in the members arguing for a broader incel identity, where it is the “noeffortcel(s) [that] should be banned” because even someone in the “bottom 2% of looks... can make female friends” (Thread 5, Post 140). This frustration challenged features of the shared worldview, arguing that certain members had swallowed “blackpill hyperboles” as truths rather than as recognising them for what they were, and that such naïve acceptance was destroying minds.

What is clear, however, is that throughout these posts, negative emotions such as anger and frustration seem to underlie many of the constructions of different groups and discussions that occur throughout the forum. Such anger was not reserved solely for outgroups, but also for members suspected of being “fakecels” that attempt to access the community and make claims to the incel identity. Further, whilst there were many features of the incel and truecel social identities that overlap, it is also clear that the boundaries of what counts as a true incel is still in a state of negotiation; a negotiation that lends itself to the complexity of how incels have discursively constructed themselves as part of a marginalised social identity within a fixed and immutable social hierarchy.

CHAPTER 4

Conclusion

4.1 The Present Study

The present study has examined the construction of the incel social identity, through the lens of their worldview and their understanding of society and the outgroups within. This was achieved through a thorough investigation on just over 1,000 threads using specific tags on the prominent incels.co forum. The identification of discursive features of incel discourse enabled the analysis the synthesise common features across the corpus in the identity construction of different groups. The analysis demonstrated that incels see themselves as victims, marginalised in a society that no longer values the hegemonic masculinity that they identify with. Further, the boundaries as to who can make legitimate claims to the incel identity is seemingly in a state of negotiation, with such boundaries being challenged and upheld by different interests as to where the line should be drawn.

An analysis into the key discursive patterns demonstrated that incels often utilise an empiricist repertoire as a means to claiming their worldview as an objective reality. The empiricist repertoire functions alongside an evolutionary repertoire that allows for historical facts to be constructed in a way that explains the present, further lending claims to the legitimacy of the blackpill worldview. The empiricist repertoire was used to explain the behaviours and biologically determined preferences of different outgroups, but also allowed for incels to attend to the dilemma of stake and interest, as the empiricist repertoire was able to present itself as objective, rather than as a subjective interpretation of evidence.

However, even within the empiricist and evolutionary repertoires, extreme case formulations presented themselves as another key discursive pattern. Extreme case formulations were embedded throughout the discourse, working as ways to construct the

behaviours of outgroups, the extremity of the marginalisation of incels, and the severity of involuntary status of their celibacy. For a set of discourses that has already been associated with mass murders, it is unsurprising that extreme case formulations are common, especially the ones presented throughout the corpus that were used to construct outgroups and society.

The affective discourses were spread throughout each thread and post, and often were understood as part of the larger ongoing conversation. Affective discourses routinely invoked anger and hatred, especially when used in the construction of outgroups and society. Such affective practices were useful in maintaining ingroup identification, as it allowed members to feel, as well as know, a collective anger at the society that marginalised them and the outgroups responsible.

4.2 Limitations of the Current Study

There were many limitations to this study, key to which is how the shared understanding of the blackpill worldview affects individuals who identify as incel. Throughout the corpus, there were many posts in which members had internalised the blackpill worldview and had come to know the futility and hopelessness of their situation. Whilst the social identity theory approach allowed for how the group understands its shared identity, there are real individuals who are affected by such discourses, but understanding how such discourses impact upon the lives of group members was unfortunately outside the scope of this study.

4.3 Directions for Future Research

A key challenge of future research should be to determine how ingroup members find and identify with such an identity, and the effects it has on the individual. The subreddit *r/IncelExit*, a forum for former incel members and current members looking for a way out, may offer some insight into how it affects the personal wellbeing of individuals. In exploring how people are affected by and exit such groups, research might shed light on how to help members

out of the other groups which find common roots in the manosphere's toxic discourses, whether it is in a therapeutic setting or even in offering warning signs for friends and families.

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