2023-01-19

No Girls Allowed: How incels.is Operates as a Gendered Discursive Space

Kukurudziak, Sabina

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

No Girls Allowed: How incels.is Operates as a Gendered Discursive Space

by

Sabina Penney Lush Kukurudziak

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE

DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA STUDIES

CALGARY, ALBERTA

JANUARY, 2023

Abstract

Incel is a short term used to reference involuntary celibates, a group once created to afford lonely people a place to exist without judgement, but now, co-opted into an ideologically motivated extremist community, existing under a misogynistic belief system (Ging 2019; Kelly and Aunspach 2020). While this community operates primarily within the online realm, their impact through discursive means has proved to be destructive, promoting a violent anti-feminist view through a multitude of open access forums. This thesis explores the content collected from the forum incels.is, utilizing a critical discourse analysis to help identify trends within the acquired data set to explore how users on this site operate as a gendered discursive online community. Disclosed themes throughout the analysis concern the topics of: (1) Gender Essentialism, (2) "Fuel" as an Idealized Masculine Emotional Response, (3) Ambiguous Discourse x Anonymity, and (4) "Saint Elliot", an incel hero. Through a feminist lens, and informed through existing literature surrounding popular misogyny, platform affordances, and the "manosphere", I argue that incels.is manipulates their ability to grow and influence the opinions of others, specifically in extremist fashions, by using media platforms and discursive tactics to their advantage (Gotell and Dutton 2016; Massanari 2017; Banet-Weiser 2018).

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Jessalynn Keller, for all of her feedback, understanding, and above all, encouragement, throughout the process of this project. It is because of her that I was able to write something I am both excited about and proud of. Her expertise in the feminist field, and enthusiasm as a mentor, inspired me every step of the way.

To my committee members, Dr. Julia Sze Hang Chan and Dr. Matthew Croombs, thank you for taking the time to advise on my project. Your gracious comments and thoughtful questions throughout the defence greatly helped me to refine the final manuscript, as well as presented valued insight for continued exploration in the field. Your feedback and encouragement are immensely appreciated.

An immeasurable thank you to all of the people who entered my life upon my move to Calgary to pursue my masters. There is a long list to whom I owe so much, and to not mention them by name would seem a disservice. So, thank you Hevyn, Emily, Jordan, Dylan, and Nicole for not only supporting me through this thesis, but through everything else that life threw my way these past two years. To Emma and Jenna, my partners in stress and sounding boards throughout this process. And to those who have supported me well before this chapter of my life, specifically, Emily-Kate and Rebecca, your unwavering friendships and unconditional love has gotten me through my worst and accompanied me at my best. Here's to many years to come.

A massive thank you to Jo Farrell. Without your support and encouragement throughout my time at Carleton University, I would have never even thought it possible for me to pursue this research

at the master's level. It is because of educators like you that students gain confidence and the ability to succeed.

Thank you to my mom for always listening, learning, and offering loving encouragement at every stage. And to my dad, for inspiring me to always pursue my dreams and living so selflessly every single day. You have answered every phone call, even with a 3-hour time difference and knowing that there was a high chance of emotional meltdown on my end. I could not possibly repay you both for everything you have done, but for as long as I live, I will wholeheartedly try.

And finally, to Gus. Thank you for accompanying me on every mental health walk, through every bout of COVID isolation, and all of the caffeine induce all-nighters. Who would have thought that an 18-pound furry goblin would be the one thing to get me out of bed every morning (he is a dog by the way)? I love you beyond words.

While this list is long, there are still so many I owe so much thanks to. I will forever appreciate those who stood by me at my lowest and got me to the finish line.

Dedication

To the women who are scared to reject romantic advances in fear of violent retaliation.

You are not alone; you are not overreacting.

Your fears are valid.

Content Warning

I would like to take the time to issue a content warning for the readers of this thesis. Due to the topic of study, there are discussions and examples of foul language and subjects that are violent in nature. I believe that by exploring these topics and shedding light on real world misogynistic extremism, we can work towards protecting the vulnerable and de-normalizing these violent ideologies. However, one is not expected to go forward if they feel as though the contents of this paper may be traumatizing or possibly detrimental to their mental well-being.

Please prioritize your mental safety.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The Birth of Involuntary Celibates

In the early 1990s, a young Canadian university student known solely by the first name, Alana, decided to create a website to discuss her frustration surrounding her sexual inactivity with others who also shared in this experience (Hintz and Baker, 2021). She titled it "Alana's Involuntary Celibacy Project". The website was created in hopes of connecting with people of all genders and sexual orientations who also experienced difficulty in finding and maintaining romantic and intimate relationships. Her intent was to foster a community of individuals who all struggled with being involuntarily celibate in hopes of connecting and encouraging one another in their journey of feeling less alone in this tough early adult experience -- an experience far less normalized and represented in mainstream media than others.

In 1997, Alana started a mailing list linked to her original "Involuntary Celibate Project" under the abbreviation INVCEL, which she later further shortened to "incel", the new official term for involuntary celibate (Kelly and Aunspach, 2020). Her description posted on the project's website read "for anybody of any gender who is lonely, has never had sex, or who hasn't had a relationship in a long time" referring to whom this project was meant (Kelly and Aunspach, 2020 149). Three years later, in early 2000, Alana came out as bisexual, a realization she greatly attributed to her involuntary celibacy project and explained how talking about her experiences with others helped her discover her true sexual orientation (Hintz and Baker, 2021). This self-discovery led to a newfound confidence, allowing Alana to comfortably remove herself from the involuntary celibate community and move into intimate romantic relationships. She decided she no longer needed to participate in her online project and gave the site to a stranger in

Order to keep it active in hopes of it helping others the way it helped her (Hintz and Baker, 2021). She then stepped away from the community for good, assuming to unlikely ever be faced with the term "incel" again.

Nearly 15 years later, Alana accidentally stumbled across an article in the feminist magazine, *Mother Jones*, while browsing a bookshop. The article was about Elliot Rodger. Rodger was a 22-year-old male residing in Isla Vista, California, who in the evening of May 23, 2014, enacted a terrorist attack in the name of misogynistic extremism and incel ideology (Witt 2020). He started by fatally stabbing three men in his apartment building, two of whom were his roommates, before driving to a local Starbucks around 8:30 PM, where he ordered a vanilla latte and began doing work on his laptop (Witt 2020). At 9:17 PM he uploaded his "Retribution" video to his self-titled YouTube channel, then proceeded to email out his manifesto titled, "My Twisted World" at 9:18 PM to his parents, former teachers, childhood friends, and therapist (Witt 2020). He then drove to the well-known UCSB local sorority house, Alpha Phi, with intentions of continuing his murder spree, but failed to get inside the house (Medina 2014). Instead, he decided to use his Glock 34 handgun to shoot at any nearby pedestrians, successfully killing three people and injuring a fourth (Medina 2014). He then continued to drive around Isla Vista, shooting at anyone he could, striking six people using his SIG Sauer P226 handgun, and hitting seven more with his BMW 328i Coupe in attempts at running them over (Medina 2014). All were critically injured, but each made a full recovery (Medina 2014). At 9:35 PM, police located Rodger dead inside of his car due to a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head, ending his ideologically motivated massacre with six murdered and fourteen critically injured (Medina 2014). In his later published manifesto, Rodger attributed the attack to a lifetime of women rejecting his romantic advances, and self-described as an incel.

Alana realized that the once all-inclusive friendly online community of lonely individuals she had founded back in the 1990s, had somehow morphed into a deeply misogynistic online subculture, reserved exclusively for heterosexual men who believed modern society had unfairly alienated them (Witt 2020). Today, in 2022, the now misogynistic extremist incel community continues to grow, using online forums to extend their reach and spread their incel ideology. Identifying that the incel community was co-opted from once being a safe space for those experiencing loneliness, to a group dedicated to seeking retribution against those who do not relate to their misogynistic grievances within such a short period of time is important. Understanding how a well-intended passion project is now historically the foundation of an ideologically motivated extremist community is necessary to predicting projected further growth from this group. As a community that operates predominantly in the online space, exploring how existing social media platforms, and advancements in these technologies may play part in extending the incel ideology to a larger audience is vital.

There are many possible facets of research pertaining to incel communities, especially when analyzing how their overarching motives are demonstrated through their online forums. As a community that has been banned and censored on a number of social media platforms, most notably, Reddit, it is curious to dive into understanding how they maintain their community in the online realm, and what ploys they use to avoid overbearing censorship. Because of their taboo conversation topics that often include violence, the incel community is one that is heavily monitored, yet remains predominantly in open access spaces. This begs the question as to how they discursively operate in order to adhere to existing as an influential online community. Because incels have an overwhelming myriad of different online forums, it is interesting to

consider how different forums maintain this community status, while upholding the greatly violently extremist incel ideology, and while avoiding being heavily censored or removed from the online space altogether.

In this thesis I argue that the online incel forum, incels.is, discursively operates as an influential online community, producing and circulating ideas concerning gender by practicing strategic self-mediated discourse in order to both maintain and extend their misogynistic ideology. I chose incels.is as a case study primarily due to its longstanding available post history, creating a richer body of data to analyze, compared to other open access forums. To explore this topic, I emersed myself in the world of incels, ensuring that I understood why they exist, how they originated, and what they intend to achieve going forward. All of these points were vital in constructing a well-educated ability for me to critically analyze their discourse, through identifying purposely cryptic messages, masked in order to maintain innocence. As well as comprehending why they communicate with such regulation, and how that plays into their unspoken guidelines as a community.

This thesis is comprised of five coherent chapters. The following is the Literature Review, constructed meticulously to explore existing research and debate concerning facets of the online realm that contribute to the construction of incel forums. In this chapter I discuss literature pertaining to the zeitgeist of popular misogyny, and how it has influenced a resurgence in patriarchal views (Banet-Weiser, 2018). Next, I explore the "manosphere", and its role in the production and circulation of misogynistic extremism, existing as a host for incel forums (Ging, 2019). Finally, my review of literature takes a deep dive into examining current online platforms, specifically in the interest of understanding the relationship between affordances and user practice within these sites (Massanari, 2017).

Chapter three presents the theoretical framework used to guide my analytical research, as well as the specific methodology used to conduct my study. The theoretical lens I used as the backbone of my project is feminist theory, as it concerns itself with understanding symbolic annihilation when observing the portrayal of women in mainstream media, extending on the creation of harmful gendered stereotypes and how they are influenced within modern society (Harvey, 2019). Furthermore, I implored a thematic critical discourse analysis as my primary methodology of choice when analyzing my collected data from the incels.is forum. This method allowed for a qualitative critical evaluation of discursive patterns presented throughout the forum, equipping me with the tools to confidently pull overarching themes that were ultimately used to answer my research question.

The fourth chapter of this project delves into the data analysis portion of my research, revealing the four themes I identified through critical discourse analysis of my data set, namely: (1) Gender Essentialism, (2) "Fuel" as an Idealized Masculine Emotional Response, (3) Ambiguous Discourse x Anonymity, and (4) "Saint Elliot" an incel hero. This chapter outlines each emerging theme and how they contribute to understanding how incels.is operates as an online discursive community.

The final chapter, chapter five, presents my key findings and conclusion concerning my original research question. In particular, I acknowledge how anti-women discourse exists as the overarching trend woven throughout all four themes identified in my research, and how this misogynistic lens influences all conversations circulating the incels.is forum. Additionally, this chapter recognizes study limitations I experienced throughout this project, as well as informed recommendations for future research in this field.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The intent behind my research is to evaluate the ways in which the online forum, inels.is, operates as a discursive community made to produce and circulate ideas concerning gender. In this respect, my research draws upon feminist media studies to understand how scholars have understood incel communities in relation to gender, online practices and discourse. It is pertinent to identify how the online sphere has allowed for individuals to exist in a space where their threats of terror are viewed as being less alarming, since they are in the digital world, instead of the physical world. Yet, understand how these online threats can, and have begun, to quickly cross over into society on a physical and high threatening level.

This chapter is made up of three sections. The first section will look at "popular misogyny", drawing largely on work by Sarah Banet-Weiser (2018), and how it has quickly resurfaced over the past few years, especially in correlation with Donald Trump's 2017-2021 presidency, and how its recent resurgence has played a large role in the growing of the incel community, both on and offline (Dignam and Rohlinger, 2019). I explore how social medias' portrayal of influential figures supporting popular misogyny plays into engraining misogyny within younger generations whose core understanding of social norms are greatly influenced by online news. Next, I look at the "manosphere", a term coined by Ian Ironwood (2013) and popularized by Debbie Ging (2019). I explore it as playing a central role in the production and circulation of popular misogyny. I trace how it has intrinsically curated a corner of the internet dedicated to the population of misogynistic dialogue in various forms, disguised as a safe space for male antifeminists (Marwick and Caplan, 2018; Ribeiro et, al., 2021). Finally, I examine recent literature within online platforms, focusing on platform affordances and the ways in which scholars have theorized the relationship between affordances and user practices. Platforms have

adopted different affordances while existing on the internet and are theorized to attempt to mitigate what is posted and how it is perceived (Peddinti, Ross and Cappos, 2014; Helmond, 2015; Massanari, 2017).

Through these core sections, I position my research project within the broader understanding of toxic masculinity within online platforms, the culmination of the use of popular misogyny online, and how these forums are being filtered through the biased lens of misogynistic mediators.

Popular Misogyny

Sarah Banet-Weiser (2015) stated in her piece, Popular misogyny: a zeitgeist*,* that popular misogyny holds a,

> "basic anti-female violent expression, it helps contribute to a misogynistic political and economic culture, where rape culture is normative and reproductive rights and other rights of the body for women are either under threat or being formally retracted".

This type of misogynistic mind frame has become popularized as of late, and is used as a counterpart to popular feminism, as a way for hyper-masculinity to maintain status within society (Banet-Weiser, 2018). Banet-Weiser's (2018) book, *Empowered: Popular feminism and popular misogyny*, further examines popular misogyny, placing it at a point where is it understood as a tactic to battle feminist views and undermine them, especially in the media. Popular misogyny works as a mediated discourse in the online realm by normalizing toxic masculine narratives and points of view (Banet-Weiser, 2018). Banet-Weiser (2018) explains that popular misogyny is "often expressed as a need to take something back, such as patriarchy, from the greedy hands of women and feminists" (p.21), therefore, its framework often targets feminist views in order to

bolster more traditional masculine mindsets. Ideas such as cultural sexism, as explored in

Heather Savigny's (2020) book, *Cultural Sexism: The politics of feminist rage in the #metoo era,*

have greatly played into the forming of popular misogyny. Cultural sexism within a Westernized

capitalist culture is practiced through the belief that women should be silenced and controlled

accordingly (Savigny, 2020). It promotes a sexist idealistic version of women, those who adhere

to "womanly" duties and are complacent in their role within society, one that is seen within the

patriarchal structure of the household (Savigny, 2020). Through the popularization of misogyny,

we are reinforcing these sexist views that have existed for centuries, and allowing them to be

normalized within our communities, which in turn, sways common practice in everyday views

towards women (Banet-Weiser, 2015; Savigny, 2020). Savigny addresses that not only does this

affect a woman's status, but it promotes a culture where sexual assault and violent threats

against women are not just normalized, but validated, as well as threatens women's bodily

autonomy, such as their right to abortion and birth control (Savigny, 2020).

Sarah Banet-Weiser (2015) describes popular feminism as being perceived as "zeitgeist"

– the defining spirit or mood of a particular period of history as shown by the ideas and beliefs of

the time. Banet-Weiser posits that "popular feminism has a title a-zeitgeist! – while popular

misogyny registers more as a familiar "boys will be boys" practice" (2015). The idea of viewing

popular misogyny as more of a "normative reaction" within society is because it has been

engrained within a societal understanding of the world for centuries (Banet-Weiser, 2015).

Whereas popular feminism challenges that norm, making it harder for those who benefit from

popular misogyny to accept that feminism is not an attack, rather the equalizing of a society.

In correlation to Savigny's definition of cultural sexism, Kate Manne (2017) discusses

how she interprets misogyny as "a system that operates within a patriarchal social order to police

and enforce women's subordination and to uphold male dominance" (p.41-42). Scholars mentioned thus far are of the like-minded opinion that the reason popular misogyny is beginning to dominate our media platforms is in order to regulate women's power and ensure that men remain in prioritized positions within society. Prominent and powerful public figures, such as former president Donald Trump, are main contributors to the popularization of misogyny in the 21st century since they possess a large following of individuals who benefit from misogyny, therefore they perpetuate it into society at their own levels (Masullo Chen, Pain and Zhang, 2018).

Since the early 1990's, Donald Trump existed as an influential individual within westernized society and was easily followed through his abundance of media appearances. While he was always well known for many of his controversial comments concerning women and their bodies, it was not until his 2016 presidential campaign that these comments began to influence the way people were voting – both good and bad (Harp, 2018). In his infamous 2005 Access Hollywood tape where he insinuated that because he was a famous public figure, he could do whatever he wanted to women and have zero repercussions, he demonstrated the normalizing of misogynistic discourse (Prasad, 2019). Specifically, his statement, "grab em' by the pussy" (Prasad, 2019) from this interview began to resurface during his presidential campaign, then he insisted that there is "nobody who has more respect for women" than he does (Prasad, 2019), but his comments and actions continued to say otherwise. Examining this on a wider mediated landscape of popular misogyny, we see that a prominent figure has not only exercised misogynistic discourse, but has benefitted from it, signaling to others that they can do the same.

Former President Trump goes so far as to sexualize his own daughters, infamously stating that "If Ivanka weren't my daughter, perhaps I'd be dating her" (Trump, 2006) when answering

how he would feel about Ivanka being a playmate in a 2006 interview on *The View*. In short, his promotion of popular misogynistic talk, even when discussing his own daughters, mixed with his insistence that he has a deep respect and love for women sends a very confusing message, especially as a man who was once in the position of being the "most powerful person in the world", as is described being the President of the United States. His campaign slogan "Make America Great Again" in and of itself is problematic, since he is romanticizing and looking to return to a society when women were viewed as property rather than autonomous beings, a time when men were considered superior in all aspects. Trump thrives on a mindset rooted in cultural sexism, which Savigny notes is "essentially comprised of the ways in which sexism is both constituted by, and constitutive of, our Westernized Capitalist culture" (2020, p.24). Being in such a position of power, his obsession with either degrading or sexualizing women can be very dangerous. His opinions on women work in extremes, either you are worthy because you are attractive, or you are useless because you are ugly, there appears to be very little middle ground in his mind. Human rights lawyer, Jill Filipovic (2017), stated that Trump's comments over the years "aren't about sexual desire, but a more generalized dehumanization of women". This dehumanization of women is a trend greatly found within posts and comments on INCEL forums, and having a man of such power, such as Trump, validate these emotions, can be seen as a justification in the minds of incel's that their distain towards women is rationalized. Trump genuinely believes that the way he speaks about and thinks about women is normal, therefore, popularizing his misogynistic mindset and pushing it to grow within society.

We can see how Trump's "pussy" comment is indicative of misogyny "going viral" (Savigny, 2020, p.24). This claim is supported by examples such as the one mentioned by Banet-Weiser and Miltner (2015) where they discuss the trending Twitter hashtag from 2015,

#MasculinitySoFragile. The hashtag was created with the purpose of illustrating the "precariousness of "toxic masculinity", a (heterosexual) masculinity that is threatened by anything associated with femininity (whether that is pink yogurt or emotions)" (Banet-Weiser and Miltner, 2015, p.171). This hashtag which is meant to promote anti-misogynism by ridiculing ancient gender norms demonstrates how misogynistic mindsets have in fact gone so "viral" that one of the only logical ways to combat them is to go viral with a response.

Savigny discusses the media and how they "are not just technologies of communication, but systems of communicating values and beliefs" (2020, p.49), proving that it plays part in promoting misogyny and the values and beliefs behind misogyny. In a world where media and social media are such a huge proponent in dictating social norms within society, to have misogyny popularized on these platforms only allows those who currently hold misogynistic views to feel a sense of empowerment. Subsequently, it allows them to use these platforms as a means to recruit others who consume the content and influences their current beliefs and views towards women. Savigny highlights that sexism and misogyny are being "normalized and legitimated through ways in which media talk about and frame our understanding of what it means to be a woman" (2020, P.61), - once again, identifying and honing in on the reality of how influential media consumption is in correlation with ones frame of mind regarding different topics. If misogyny is a topic that is being largely distributed on different social media platforms, then its normalization within society will be imminent since we are already allowing it to exist within some of the most interacted with technologies. While many feminist scholars would argue that misogyny within society is already the norm, the focus on misogynistic posts on social media platforms is meant to identify how misogyny can be further intertwined in everyday life, becoming the overarching way of thinking.

Popular misogyny is not bred solely through the opinions of celebrities, such as Trump to

whom I referred to earlier on – rather, viral internet phenomenon's such as hashtags are adding

fuel to the fire that is popularized misogyny. Existing anti-feminist hashtags such as #Meninism

and #Meninist allow anti-feminists to make their opinions known on all platforms quite easily

(Ging and Siapera, 2019). However, additionally, they take to attacking existing feminist

movements online as well, such as the #MeToo movement, through threats of rape and death

towards women who interact with the hashtag (Ging and Siapera, 2019; Savigny, 2020). In this

respect, popularized online misogyny is making online safe spaces for women and their trauma,

increasingly toxic and even dangerous, exemplifying that women do in fact have something to be

afraid of if they try and speak out against years and centuries of misogynistic fueled abuse. Not

only are men who dub themselves as "Meninists" attacking movements such as #MeToo, but

they also take these movements personally and argue that feminism at its core is a blatant attack

on men's rights and is dangerous towards men (Savigny, 2020). By definition, feminism is the

advocacy for women's rights on the basis of aiming to accomplish equality of the sexes (Sterba,

1998; Heger and Hoffmann, 2021). But men who dub themselves "menisits" or associate

themselves with that community do not want equality, they want majority power. They view

feminism as "an attack on their rightful place in the social hierarchy" (Savigny, 2020, p.172) –

which to them, is at the top. Therefore, feminists who are advocating to have equal rights are

viewed as the enemy.

Banet-Weiser suggests that popular misogyny projects itself as representing "ethics" or

"equality", possibly because of a "long standing normalization of violence against women that

has now been exposed in public media" (2015), therefore suggesting that this violence is the

norm and is required in order to maintain normalized gender roles. Savigny notes that

"assumptions about rape and male sexual violence against women have not only shaped

legislation (written by and predominantly for white men) but how these understandings about

ape are enshrined within culture" (2020, p.111), solidifying that not only does violence against:

women still exist on a very predominant level, but that it has been written into our culture and

our society for years. Violence against women will not be easy to eliminate without serious

change – change within societal norms is one step, but long-standing laws and legislations make

it easy for gender-based violence to exist on an established level.

Popular misogyny exists within many facets, one of them predominantly being within the

porn industry. Nowadays, the "imagery of sexual violence towards women has become ever

more freely and frequently available" (Savigny, 2020, p.111), largely being fetishized, therefore

creating a supply and demand for these types of videos (Smith and Dines, 2012). It is important

to identify within this discussion that there are many different categories of porn, and not all

porn is violent or misogynistic. However, the existence of heterosexual porn that plays into the

fetishization of a woman being sexually assaulted within the video is an ever-growing category,

and its existence is harmful. The normalization and fetishization of sexually assaulting women

derives from a desire for power, and a way to keep women "under control" (Elman, 1997).

These types of sexual fetishes have been grouped with acts such as bondage and a lust for

"rough" sexual encounters – insinuating that being aroused by "rape fantasies" is a normal thing,

simply another kink, when in fact, normalizing such behavior is problematic and has led to

minimizing the horror of sexual assault (Elman, 1997; Bivona and Critelli, 2009).

In addition to the normalization of sexual assault through pornographic videos, the media

is also at fault for undermining the acts of microaggressions against women – therefore once

again, normalizing them within our society. Savigny notes that "men do not just suddenly rape,

harass or assault women. This understanding of the interconnectivity between micro aggressions

and larger scale violence towards women is important in making sense of how sexism is

normalized, and lines of acceptability are presented as blurred" (2020, p.29). The focus on the

idea that microaggressions have become banal and that men are afraid to do anything towards women anymore in fear of being told that their actions are actually assault just solidifies how engrained these microaggressions towards women are within our society. By sympathizing with the male perspective in these scenarios, we are suggesting that women need to understand that they will be harassed and assaulted by men throughout their lives, and that they just need to be prepared for that (Miedzian, 2002; Savigny, 2020). Questions within our society focus on "How are men supposed to be able to interact with women? How can men flirt without fear?" when perhaps questions should be shaped more around the lines of "How are men interacting with women that comes off as intimidating or threatening? What can we do to change these behaviors so that women do not feel this way?" (Miedzian, 2002; Savigny, 2020). Popular misogyny has allowed for men to feel entitled to women's kindness and reciprocation of advances, therefore condoning inappropriate behavior, "disputing the space of the victim contributes to the avoidance of any consideration of accountability concerning structural conditions and society's responsibility and, in turn, paradoxically enables popular misogynistic narratives to put forward an account of victimization that negates the existence of gender violence as a problem grounded in an unequal distribution of power" (Nunez Puente and Gamez Fuentes, 2017, p.22). Popular misogyny has co-opted the narrative that men are being harmed by "feminism" when we dispute theses microaggressions, in layman's terms, suggesting that if men are not allowed to commit these small assaults on women, then we are taking away their manhood.

The acceptance of these microaggressions allows for the progression of serious and fatal assaults against women – ones that too are being watered down through media portrayal of the perpetrator. It is noted that "the killing of women is often accompanied by an explanation of the man's "good character"" (Savigny, 2020, p.118), in an attempt to humanize the assaulter,

therefore, minimizing the horror of the crime that they have committed, and like a domino effect, these minimizations then normalize this behavior to a certain extent – making them less shocking when they do happen. Violence against women is commonly accompanied by a backstory of the perpetrator, "we are invited to see, to understand, and somehow sympathize with men who take women's lives" (Savigny, 2020, p.119), but when men commit acts of terror or violence against other men, the humanizing aspect is less likely to arrive in media coverage (Easteal, Holland and Judd, 2015; Savigny, 2020). This trend is a misogynistic perpetuation of the devaluing of the lives of women in order to try and sympathize with men, "media reinforces a gendered narrative of trolling by focusing on women as victims, rather than men as perpetrators" (Savigny, 2020, p.88).

Popular misogyny is not only perpetuating a strong disdain against feminism, framing the movement in a way that is both harmful and incorrect, but it is also allowing for the normalization of violence and injustice against women to be rationalized within different societies. Currently in Spain they are "reinforcing the idea that men have become a socially disadvantaged group" (Nunez and Gamez Fuentes, 2017, p. 904) through their Pro-Justicia movement. Like many other Meninist movements, they have constructed a hashtag to spread their anti-feminist beliefs. Their hashtag being #StopFeminazis has been noted as being very strong in message since it is "linking the idea that like all totalitarian ideologies, feminazism does not tolerate dissidents or opponents" (Nunez and Gamez Fuentes, 2017, p.904). Their goal as an anti-feminist group is to spread the belief that feminism is a threat to the hegemonic system, in which case male power is viewed as the "better" international power to keep the world at peace (Nunez and Gamez Fuentes, 2017).

Most movements, groups, forums, etc. that perpetuate and look at normalizing popular misogyny within society all have the same goal in mind – victimize men and vilify feminists. Their stance is not that all women are bad, in fact, they dote and praise the women who stand with them and promote adhering to a patriarchal system, rather, feminists and anyone who agrees with feminist beliefs are viewed as the enemy. Meninists frame popular misogyny as a natural existence within society, and because societal beliefs and values have been built on misogynistic beliefs, it is easy for people to accept it. While popular misogyny has become normal practice, meninist misogynistic views are the more extremist route, mainly existing online through what is coined as the "manosphere". This next section will focus on the manosphere, what it is and how its existence is harmful towards the safety of women's rights and lives.

The Manosphere

The "manosphere" is a term coined by scholars to refer to "a collection of [online] communities aligned by their common interest in men's issues, often associated with online harassment and real-world violence" (Horta Ribeiro, 2021, p.1, Marwick and Caplan, 2018; Ging, 2019; Van Valkenburgh, 2021). Some examples of websites part of the "manosphere" include, *Return Of Kings (2012-2022)*, *The False Rape Society (2008-2015)*, *The Spearhead (2013-2017)*, and *Boycott American Women (2012-2022)*, just to name a few. Some of these online communities focus purely on what they want to "regain" for men, acting as what they consider themselves to be "advocates" for men, while others are more focused on hating women, and plotting the downfall of women, "feminist analysis of the manosphere concludes that there is an ideological shift away from the men's rights topics that used to unite members, towards more misogynistic and violent ideas" (Farrell, Fernandez, Novotny and Alani, 2019, p.87). The one

thing that all portals of the manosphere have in common is that they believe men are being harmed by feminist and pro women movements, and that men, specifically in most cases, straight white men, are largely disadvantaged and are being picked on and targeted by society as a whole, "the manosphere shares a central belief that feminine values dominate society, that this fact is suppressed by feminists and political correctness and that men must fight back against an overreaching misandrist culture to protect their very existence" (Marwick and Caplan, 2018, p.546).

The manosphere may be viewed by some as a space for men to advocate for the return to "traditional" hegemonic masculinity deep seeded in the assumed superiority of white, Christian cis-gendered, and heterosexual men, when in reality, it is a space that is fostering extremist misogynistic views and allowing these views to grow and reach others who may be violent. A space like the manosphere in actuality is a space that allows for the justification of violence against women, "online platforms are increasingly exploited to spread hate, extreme ideologies, and weaponized information, and have been repeatedly linked to radicalization leading to real world violent events" (Horta Ribeiro et., al., 2021, p.1). On this note, the manosphere, which fosters groups such as incels, just by pure existence is a part of real-world violent problems by allowing them to manifest in the online realm.

As noted above, there are many specific groups that exist within the manosphere. Manoel Horta Ribeiro et. Al., (2021) notes that "older communities such as Men's Rights Activists and Pick-Up Artists have eventually been overshadowed by new communities like Men Going Their Own Way, and Incels" (p.1). Following the Men's Liberation Movement from the late 1970's, a social movement meant to voice criticism concerning the restraints which society imposes on men, the manosphere began to evolve as the internet became more accessible (Ging, 2019).

Nowadays, the internet is more of an expected technology and less of a privilege within society, creating the ability for more niche communities to form, that serve to be a breeding ground for the discussion of all kinds of qualms.

Manoel Horta Ribeiro et al, (2021) produce a "manosphere taxonomy" that outlines the key players/groups who exist and thrive within the manosphere. The four groups they explore at length are the Men's Rights Activists (MRA), the group Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW), the community known as Pick Up Artists (PUA), and finally, Involuntary Celibates (INCELS) (Gotell and Dutton, 2016; Bratich and Banet-Weiser, 2019; Ribeiro et., al, 2021). Below I describe these four main groups, as it is vital to the understanding of the manosphere to explore a brief history for each, some noteworthy events in history and where each group stands now within the manosphere. Additionally, it is important to note that these four groups are not the sole groups that exist within the manosphere, rather through research, they have been dubbed as the four most prominent players. Most other groups have manifested due to inspiration from these four key communities, which once again hones down on the idea that the existence of the manosphere allows for an ever-growing anti-woman narrative which invokes violence against women, both online and in the physical world.

Men's Rights Activists (MRA's)

The term "men's rights" dates back to as early as February 1856, when Putnam's *Monthly Magazine of American Literature* published an author who was responding to the perceived issue of women's rights, countering it with what he dubbed as the need to fight for men's rights (Woodhull, 1871). Women even at this time period were viewed as being the "privileged sex" and the idea of the women's rights movement was perceived by many men as a ruse to try and convince people that they were oppressed, and in such the Men's Rights Activists

18

were born (Morris and Bax, 1896). MRA groups have a long-standing existence, but in more modern years, their primary arguments revolve around refuting sexual assault and honing in on (incorrect) data which suggests that rape accusations against men are falsified more times than not, and that men are the real victims when it comes to sexual assault, regardless of the hundreds of research studies which clearly state otherwise (Gotell and Dutton, 2016). Lise Gotell and Emily Dutton (2016) argue that "MRA rape culture critics typically begin by challenging statistical evidence of the pervasiveness of sexual violence, instead depicting rape as being very rare" (p.75). MRA's go so far as to dub feminist empirical research as "junk science" and continue to push their own agenda by reporting solely on research that backs up their beliefs regarding sexual assault (Gotell and Dutton, 2016).

Men's Rights Activists are notorious for claiming that women's rights have caused men to lose autonomy, both physically and mentally, regarding most facets of life. Some of their most contested causes are (but not limited to) the following:

Child custody: Men's rights groups argue that the legal system and family courts discriminate against men, especially when considering child custody in case of divorce (Gotell and Dutton, 2016; de Coning and Ebin, 2022). They believe that men do not have the same rights as their ex female spouse, using statistics on custody wars as evidence of judicial bias against men, often ignoring context of the suit and focusing solely on outcome (Gotell and Dutton, 2016; de Coning and Ebin, 2022).

Divorce: Men's rights groups began contesting divorce reform in the early 1960's, when by law, husbands no longer held legal control over their wives and children (Dinner, 2016). They argue that the act of divorce allows for the judicial system to discriminate against men and favor women, leaving them with what they consider to be "unfair consequences" in the shape of

alimony, ignoring the fact that alimony is not a gendered legal obligation, rather one based off of financial gain and/or dependency in the relationship (Dinner, 2016).

Education: Men's rights activists argue that the education system has become increasingly "feminized" in the wake of feminist movements, and therefore hinders boy's access to educational achievement and motivation compared to girls (Messner, 1998).

Health: MRA's consider a male's chance at a statistically shorter life span compared to women as proof of discrimination against their health due to gender. A main argument they make is that women's health issues receive higher funding than men's often comparing funding for prostate cancer research versus funding for breast cancer research (Salter, 2016). What they fail to acknowledge however, is that 1 in every 100 cases of breast cancer is found in men, while the possibility of women contracting prostate cancer is "extremely rare", therefore noting that breast cancer affects more of the population as a whole, which is why its increased levels of funding makes sense (Salter, 2016).

As mentioned earlier, these are merely small examples of some of the Men's Rights Activists causes on which they advocate for, and the thought process behind their arguments. In short, MRA's view feminism and women's rights as strictly an attack on men's rights, and not as the hope to live within an equal society.

Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW)

In 2001 a blog titled, *No Ma'am,* published a "Men Going Their Own Way Manifesto" which set the footing for the next 21 years of MGTOW content (Solanas and Avital, 2004). Men who belong to this group view the idea of male separatism as the solution to a society that they see as being fully corrupted by feminism (Gotell and Dutton, 2016). Similar to other groups within the manosphere, MGTOW believe that feminism has in fact made women dangerous to

men, therefore, their solution is to practice male self-preservation, meaning they look to dissociate from women entirely (Gotell and Dutton, 2016).

Alas, many men who belong to this group struggle with full separation from women for various reasons, many of them being of carnal desires, in which it appears that there four levels of ideological belief within the MGTOW community (Wright, Trott and Jones, 2020). The first level consists of men who believe that women are strategic in purposefully attempting to manipulate them for their own gain, however, these men still acknowledge the value of marriage such as repopulation and companionship, therefore they still believe in pursuing long term romantic relationships (Wright, Trott and Jones, 2020). At the second level, men do not believe in long lasting relationships or marriage due to the fact that they believe these types of arrangements are beneficial only for the woman (Lin, 2017). However, they do still participate in short term relationships and sexual encounters with women, therefore not participating fully in the disengagement of women (Lin, 2017). The third level, men reject even short-term relationships with women and attempt in limiting all female interaction to the best of their abilities, aside from situations that they cannot control such as working environments and public spaces (Wright, Trott and Jones, 2020). Finally, in the fourth level men fully disengage from all female interaction, meaning they avoid all encounters within state and society (even including employment) when they realize they cannot control whether or not they will need to engage with a woman (Wright, Trott and Jones, 2020). This is dubbed as "going ghost" since they exist singularly in their own world, often times working for themselves from home and rarely occupying public spaces (Wright, Todd and Jones).

While the Men Going Their Own Way community is still greatly anti-feminist and anti-woman, they are one of the more peaceful groups to exist within the manosphere since they do

not thrive on violence against women, rather, they view full disassociation as a solution, which in reality, affects only them.

Pick Up Artists (PUA's')

Individuals who belong to the Pick Up Artist community self-identify themselves as dating coaches (Krendel, 2020). This group emerged in the mid 1900's when books and publications such as, *The art of erotic seduction* (1967) by Albert Ellis and Roger Conway, and, *How to Pick Up Girls!* (1970) by Eric Weber became popularized amongst men who desired romantic connections with females but were struggling with how to obtain such relationships (Marwick and Caplan, 2018). The success of these types of publications only led to a rise in access to the PUA community, with "dating coaches" now putting on seminars and workshops to teach men of ways to pick up women. They viewed dating as a game and women as objects, purely deeming females as useless beings outside of their sexual capacities for men (Marwick and Caplan, 2018).

Pick Up Artists, while not intrinsically violent towards women, do objectify them and perpetuate the notion that interacting with women is a game, one that is easy to win. Characters in popular culture who encapsulate the PUA mindset are examples such as Barney Stinson from the sitcom, *How I Met Your Mother,* which while his character is obviously over dramatized, his focus on running "plays" from his "play book" to seduce women into bed with him is a perfect manifestation of what a Pick Up Artist believes to be common practice when engaging with women (Marwick and Caplan, 2018).

While Pick Up Artists do exist quite prominently within the manosphere, focusing on sharing tips and tricks to "seduce" women, they also exist largely within the physical realm as well. They objectify women and exist on the basic thought that women are dumb and can be

manipulated into doing whatever it is you want them to do, in turn, suggesting that women are but pawns in the game of life.

Incels

The term incel is contrived of the two words, Involuntary Celibate, since those who belong to incel communities are in fact most times involuntarily celibate, or at the very least, struggling with maintaining any type of physical or emotional relationship with women (Ging, 2019). While this group was originally created to serve as a support group for people of ALL genders and sexualities who struggled with engaging in romantic relationships, in the late 2010's they were slowly co-opted to becoming a misogynistic extremist group, overlapping greatly with other hate groups such as the alt-right and white supremacists (Ging, 2019).

Incel forums exist all across the internet and the dark web, harboring spaces for those who belong to the community to discuss their disdain for women and their violent fantasies towards them since they reject them. Conversations on these forums often revolve around the belief that men are entitled to sex, feminism and women's rights are harmful to a good society, and that it is up to society to rectify the wrong doings against them (Ging, 2019).

Incel communities have made up a large portion of what is known as being the "modern manosphere" and often overlap with other prominent groups such as MRA's, MGTOW and PUA's (Ging, 2019). Incels are one of, if not the most dangerous community to exist within the manosphere since they perpetuate the most misogynistic extremism, and believe in very violent solutions to their, which have already begun to manifest within physical society. While their presence is not ideal, understanding how they function, which theories they grapple with and what they hope to achieve in their version of an "idealistic society" is extremely beneficial to understanding the modern manosphere as a whole.

In continuation with an understanding of the manosphere as a whole, many scholars such as Lori Kendall (2007), Adrienne Massanari (2017), and Debby Ging (2019), have identified through their independent research and analysis that "Geek" males are thought to be the primary players within the manosphere. In her piece, "Alphas Betas, and Incels: Theorizing the Masculinities of the Manosphere," Ging (2019) states that "geek males embrace some aspects of hypermasculinity… but do not comply with others… therefore, although they are white, male and possess, significant cultural capital, they perceive themselves as marginalized" (p.642). Massanari (2017) additionally points out how this type of personality complex hinders a "geek" male to even recognize their own privilege as an individual. In continuation with this conversation, Arthur Chu (2014) a columnist, comedian, 11-time *Jeopardy!* Champion, and self-declared nerd, addressed popular misogyny in one of his articles, suggesting that geeky young men are taught that women, specifically attractive women, like money and status, therefore, once they obtain success due to their nerdy attributes, they will also obtain the ideal woman. Obviously, this is not a promised trade off, therefore when these men "get good grades, they have a job, and that wife they were promised in the package deal doesn't arrive" (Chu, 2014, p.172), they are inclined to blame women and society, since in their minds, they did everything right.

The idea of the "geek" as an individual, or a type of individual, characterizes what type of people exist on these websites within the manosphere. They believe that they have done everything right by societies standards, or the standards they have perceived, and therefore now they deserve their so called "prize", which to them, is a woman who is devout to them. This translates again into some of the stances set out specifically by MRA's who desire a more archaic way of life, where women were viewed as men's property – they believe the world is

best when this is how it operates and have anger towards feminist ideology because it fights back against this type of power and relationship dynamic amongst men and women. This traditionalist theory surrounding both masculinity and misogyny antagonizes an increase in anti-feminist propaganda online, "positing, that the Web's facilitation of information dissemination across boundaries and platforms has increased the spread of extreme anti-feminist views, along with misogyny and violent rhetoric" (Ribeiro et., al., 2021, p. 3).

Participants in the manosphere do not only circulate ideas about gender, but also utilize online connections to advocate for and perpetuate sexist actions that target women. Alice Marwick and Robyn Caplan (2018) trace how networked harassment is an integral part of the manosphere, which includes behaviors such as doxing (publishing personal information online), revenge porn (spreading intimate photos beyond their origins), social shaming and intimidation (Salter and Crofts, 2015; Dematagoda, 2017; Gabriel, 2019). A well-studied example amongst scholars in this area is the online harassment campaign known as Gamergate (Dewey, 2014; Massanari, 2017; Mortensen, 2018; Salter, 2018). In August of 2014, followers of the #GamerGate movement, that promoted sexism and anti-progressivism within video game culture, targeted women in the video game industry, most notably, female game developer, Zoe Quinn, and feminist game critic, Anita Sarkeesian, by doxing them (Dewey, 2014). To dox them meant to leak their private personal information online, such as their home addresses, and personal phone numbers, leading to hordes of harassment both virtually and physically (Massanari, 2017; Mortensen, 2018). Doxing is dangerous as it allows extremists the means and methods to contact an individual that they wish to channel their rage towards, in this case, providing that both women (and others who were also targeted) received a slew of threats

pertaining to rape, violence and death and seeing as their personal information had been posted, it made these threats much more plausible and terrifying (Mortensen, 2018).

Doxing exists with the manosphere, as does the social shaming and intimidation that goes hand in hand with this scare tactic. Men who feel any type of anger towards any woman that they may consider having rejected, humiliated, or wronged them, utilize methods such as doxing within the manosphere to recruit other like-minded men as themselves to go after their target. The manosphere is compiled primarily by men whose main belief is that women are lesser, that they should serve men and therefore if they do not do what they want, they deserve the punishments, either online or in the physical realm, that they receive.

Platforms

My previous discussion of the manosphere points to the ways in which social media platforms are a crucial space for the proliferation of the manosphere and popular misogyny. There is a myriad of platforms that exist on the world wide web. Many of them being considered to be "social platforms" – these include, but are not limited to, spaces such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Reddit, etc. (Gillespie, 2010). By definition, the term platform is a "system that can be reprogrammed and therefore customized by outside developers – users – and in that way, adapted to countless needs and niches that the platform's original developers could not have possibly contemplated, much less had time to accommodate" (Helmond, 2015, p.3). In this respect, it is important to address that platforms are constantly changing and evolving and will continue to do so in order to meet the needs of its users. Comparable to the ways that users of incel sites adapt according to what they want to post on their sites, incels exist on all platforms, but in different ways (Dynel, 2020). When incel threads/forums exist on insanely public

26

platforms such as Twitter and Reddit, they get heavily moderated and run the risk of being shut down. However, when they exist within their own self-developed platforms, this governance of their conversations is much less of a risk. Ribeiro et., al., (2021), addressed how "when toxic online communities on mainstream platforms face moderation measures, they may migrate to other platforms with laxer policies or set up their own dedicated websites" (p.316), highlighting that within mainstream platforms, the use of community level moderation can be effective in mitigating harm, however, it does not eliminate it entirely.

These platforms have come to exist from the phenomenon spoken about by Anne Helmond (2015), dubbed platformization – "the rise of the platform as the dominant infrastructural and economic model of the social web and its consequences" (p.1). Helmond explains how the term platform has secured itself as being the "dominant concept for social media companies" (2015, p.1), and that is allows companies to position themselves within different markets of addressing people, making it widely taken up by consumers on the press. This idea suggests that the term platform and the idea of the platform draws in users because they see these online spaces as spaces where they can be selfish and spread their beliefs, knowledge, likes, dislikes, interests, etc. (Helmond, 2015; Bruns, 2019).

When it comes to platforms, the conversations surrounding anonymity have been largely discussed and researched over time. It is no surprise that a user's option to remain anonymous on various sites will affect the ways that they operate online – what they days, who they say it to, etc. Peddinti, Ross and Cappos (2014) discuss how "anonymous users are generally less inhibited to be active participants, as they tweet more, lurk less, follow more accounts, and are more willing to expose their activity to the general public" (p.83). Specifically, platforms such as Reddit are infamous for most of its users operating in an anonymous sense, therefore, creating

the image that Reddit is a more toxic platform since it allows extremist views to be easily displayed without much trouble for the users in question, "Reddit's administrators take an extremely hands-off approach toward content share by users… few rules they enforce prohibit sharing private information (doxing), sexualized images of minors, or manipulating voting (Massanari, 2015, p.331). Twitter falls under this idea of toxic technoculture as well since it is not uncommon for anonymous accounts to be created to voice opinions. However, this also has to do with what kind of culture is meant to be created on these platforms – Twitter and Reddit were created more under the guise of giving opinion and having conversation, therefore some people may prefer to be anonymous (Peddinti, Ross and Cappos, 2014; Fox, Cruz and Lee, 2015). Contrarily, platforms such as Instagram and Facebook, where the sites are more advertised as being places its users want to be known in order to show off their lives and their accomplishments, do not bode well with their mission statements if users try and participate anonymously.

Many platforms, such as Facebook and Google+ are enforcing what is called a Real-Name policy, which requires users to user their real name when creating accounts (Cho, Kim and Acquisti, 2012). The legally stated reason for such a policy is to try and improve the quality of the content within the service, as well as to decrease any spam, bullying and hacking (Cho, Kim and Acquisti, 2012). This attempt to diminish anonymity exists partially for the reasons as posited above, it wants to try and eliminate the toxic techno culture found so prominently in platforms such as Reddit and Twitter, as well as increase accountability, and enable users to find one another, creating a more collaborative feel to various social media platforms. Additionally, from a capitalist point of view, the real name policy exists in order to aid in gathering data about users so that advertisers are better able to categorize them based on their searches, views,

interactions, etc. (Greengard, 2012). While there are simply work arounds to the Real-Name policy, platforms that have such a policy in place are less likely to be targeted as the location in which extremism is spread since it advertises a sense of moderator control.

Reddit as Example of Toxic Technoculture

Reddit is a fruitful example when considering the relationship between social media platforms and the manosphere, as evidenced by Adrienne Massanari's research discussed here. It is important to specifically address Reddit when discussing incel forums since Reddit was once host to some of the most infamous incel conversations, disguised under the name of r/4chan (Horne, Adali and Sikdar, 2017). When analyzing Reddit as a cultural platform, it is an "open-source platform on which anyone can create their own community of interest (subreddit)" (Massanari, 2017, p.330), therefore, allowing for conversation of all dimension to exist within the platform. Geeks, some of the primary actors within the manosphere, migrate towards Reddit since "subreddits are wide and varied, but often reflect a geek sensibility, with many revolving around computing, Science or fandom interests" (Massanari, 2017, p.330). Massanari studied the infrastructure of the platform and found that Reddit's "karma point and subreddit systems, ease of account creation and loose governance structure/policies were creating an environment for toxic techno culture to proliferate" (2017. P.89), therefore, identifying the toxic affordances associated with the platform. This form of toxic techno culture is unique as it breeds both the grounds for a "channel of coordination and harassment and its seemingly leaderless, amorphous quality" (Massanari, 2017, p.333). Within this normalized toxic affordance, members of these online communities will often demonstrate "technological prowess" (Massanari, 2017, p.333), by engaging in unethical actions, such as the act of doxing as mentioned above. The common platform practices amongst most popular social media sites

encourages the value of aggregating large audiences, but in exchange, offers little to no protection to potential harassment victims (Massanari, 2017; Chen, Chan and Cheung, 2018). Many of these toxic technoculture related acts are also happenings that have been examined within the manosphere, hinting at the idea that if the manosphere was considered to be a unitized platform of its own, it would fall under the guide of toxic technoculture as well (Massanari, 2016; Chen, Chan and Cheung, 2018). Instead, however, the manosphere is made up of a conglomerate of mini platforms, whereas Reddit exists as a specific online platform that serves as a host for this kind of toxicity.

Not only is Reddit viewed as being a toxic space, but research within the area suggests that it is a platform that favors white heterosexual men, consequently, the main actors who much up incel forums and other parts of the manosphere, "algorithmic politics of certain platforms such as Reddit aggregate material in ways that prioritize the interests of young, white, heterosexual men" (Ging, 2017, p.643). Reddit's algorithm and affordances reifies the desires of certain groups (mainly young, white, cis-gendered, heterosexual males), while also marginalizing others, through its ease of user account creation, karma point system, governance policies (or lack therefore) surrounding offensive content - therefore, providing fertile ground for conversations surrounding anti-feminism and misogynistic activism (Ging, 2017; Massanari, 2018). Reddit's platform affordances make the site more appealing to incels since there are less hoops they must jump through in order to spread their messages.

In recent years, Reddit has actively tried to eliminate toxic spaces within the platform that has affected its presence, "Reddit's aggregation of material across subreddits that it hosts is another design choice that can implicitly suppress certain types of content… and also serves as an unintentional barrier to participation" (Massanari, 2017, p.337). However, this "suppression"

via Reddit regulations has only encouraged relocation of this type of conversation within more secure places on the internet. Former Reddit CEO, Yishan Wong, noted that in regard to the company's decision to not ban the subreddit /r/thefappening, a forum that was illegally condemning and spreading revenge porn, that "each man is responsible for his own soul" (Massanari, 2017, p.339), suggesting that while he did not necessarily agree with the forum, he did not see it as his place to govern others. This statement caused a lot of uproar since it suggests that Reddit can be used as a platform for any kind of opinion since people should have the right to freedom of expression. This type of stance when addressing a platforms allowances and affordances is extremely dangerous, especially when it is such a popular platform, since it suggests that they value individual opinion more than mass protection. After backlash, this decision was ultimately overturned and /r/thefappening was banned.

The research that I have reviewed in this section points to the importance of considering platforms and their affordances in relation to incel communities. The section observed the need for platforms to be managed, otherwise issues such as those discussed surrounding Reddit will occur. Reddit was the host for some very infamous incel forums, which spewed hate and played a part in the forming of discursive communities (Massanari, 2017; Massanari, 2018). While it is difficult to identify the line between governance and free will within these platforms, what has been noted is that small acts of moderation within these sites actively discourages the spreading of hateful conversation, therefore, addressing a small problem before it blossoms into a larger one.

This literature informs the following chapter, where I outline my theoretical lens and methodological approach.

CHAPTER THREE: THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

In this chapter I outline my theoretical framework, which utilizes feminist theory to understand how incels.is operates as a gendered discursive space. Specifically, I implore poststructuralist feminist theory, as it postulates that gender is socially constructed and performative. I couple this theoretical approach with a thematic critical discourse analysis as my methodology in order to analyze my data according to broad themes related to gender found in my collected data sample.

Theoretical Framework

Feminist Theory

According to feminist scholar Deborah Bosley (1992), gender may play a factor in how different human beings represent reality. This outlook on gender implies that an understanding of self and of others can be impacted based on gendered norms surrounding the individual. Feminist theory identifies varying terms and ideas such as the 'male gaze' and the 'symbolic annihilation of women' to signal that a gendered representation in media affects how we react to one another and perceive created stereotypes (Harvey, 2020). In order to understand the data collected from Incels.is, the use of feminist theory, specifically, poststructuralist feminist theory, helped in analyzing how and why users on the site have created a gendered discursive space.

Teresa De Lauretis (1987) explores how media is a technology of gender, positing that our societies ideas about traditional gender roles are produced, in part, via the media. Poststructuralist feminist theory informs these ideas, as it identifies the social and performative construction of gender (Butler, 2002). Gaye Tuchman (1978) discusses symbolic annihilation, which is the misrepresentation or underrepresentation of a specific group of people in the media. The term is typically applied to media criticism in the field of feminist or queer theory in order to

describe the ways that the media promotes stereotypes of specific identities (Tuchman, 1978). Furthermore, within media studies, feminist theory employs the idea of the gaze, and how the patriarchy has shaped this phenomenon (Harvey, 2020). Feminist film theorist, Laura Mulvey (1999) explains that the ways in which women are structured in film is meant to allude to them appearing as objects rather than active subjects, calling it the 'male gaze'. This translates to media portrayal in general, popularizing men being portrayed as active, while women continually appear passive (Harvey, 2020). This in turn, has created an objectification of women within the media, placing them as the role of the decoration, prize, or prey (Harvey, 2020). According to Mulvey the 'male gaze' is conceptualized as being constructed for the benefit of the heterosexual male viewer, ensuring that their pleasure is prioritized (Harvey, 2020).

Mary Wollstonecraft (1792) authored 'A Vindication of the Rights of Woman', which is considered to be one of the earliest pieces of feminist theory. Since then, feminist understandings have evolved and changed, passing through a number of phases including "gender theory" which is where "the ideological inscription and the literary effects of the sex/gender system are explored" (Showalter, 1988, p. 174). Broadly, feminist theory is the extension of feminism within the realm of fictional, theoretical or philosophical discourse, and ultimately aims to comprehend the presence of gender inequality (Harvey, 2020). The feminist perspective opposes the concept of 'natural' gender norms, suggesting that expectations surrounding masculinity and femininity are social constructs that are repeatedly performed, maintaining the gender binary and heteronormative male domination (Harvey 2020; Butler 2002; Butler 1990). The feminist theoretical lens has allowed me to operate through a framework of existing power structures in relation to gender in the media.

Cultural theorist Stuart Hall (1995) suggests that the framed construction of race in the media is linked to personal identity, an argument that has been extended to gender within

feminist theory (Harvey, 2020). The feminist lens applies the comprehension of symbolic annihilation when observing how women are portrayed in the media, and how this influences gendered stereotypes (Harvey, 2020). Since historically, women are most often linked to domestic activities within the media, they are then socializing a view of women as "dependent, inferior and subordinate", which then gets translated to the real world (Harvey, 2020, p. 65).

Through the lens of feminist theory, when the media represents women as being most valued when they are in the roles of housewives, mothers, or romantic partners, if any woman is to go against this stereotype they are viewed as betraying traditional femininity (Tuchman, 1978; Harvey, 2020). In this way, the media is supporting hegemonic ideology, a set of ideas that reproduce ideological norms in order to appeal to traditional society (Harvey, 2020). By operating through a feminist lens, identifying how the media has played a part in popularizing idealized or traditional femininity helps make sense of incel perspectives on the forum.

Within media studies, feminist theory employs the idea of the gaze, and how the patriarchy has shaped this phenomenon (Harvey, 2020)

Because it is a sexist model that dominates the media portrayal of women, the concept that "sex sells" has been induced within all facets of female portrayal. As mentioned above, the male gaze is meant to place women as objects of attraction for male viewers, which ultimately has popularized the need to sexualize women in order to attract a larger audience. Due to this, as identified under feminist theory, the media has begun to normalize creating visual similarities between mainstream content and pornography, insinuating that an expectation of sex is appropriate (Holland, 1983). This in turn has led to an overwhelming trend referred to as 'rape culture', a concept in which sexually aggressive masculinity is not just normal, but attractive (Harvey, 2020). Feminist theory addresses that the increase of sexual content and expectations within the media plays a part in the heightened desire for intimate relationships. Its normalization

34

suggests that these are the gender roles most acceptable between men and women, and therefore a man's desire for a woman of traditional femininity is a given. These concepts within feminist theory are beneficial to my project because they help add legitimacy when theorizing why incels concern themselves so greatly with the concept of abiding by gendered constructs.

Finally, before discussing my methodological approach, I want to end this chapter on the use of adding the intersectional lens to feminist theory throughout this project. Intersectionality encourages us to take into account the ways in which multiple oppressions intersect to create unique lived experiences for individuals who may share an identity, such as gender (Crenshaw, 1989). That way it is not assumed that all women share the same experiences, and acknowledge for example, that a black woman faces different, and presumably more, challenges than a white woman. In order to properly do a critical discourse analysis on my data set, I had to ensure that intersectionality was implored, especially when identifying talk of violence against women on the forum, acknowledging that the incel community may hate all women, but their feelings are discursively more palpable towards specific groups of women.

Methodology

Critical Discourse Analysis

In this thesis I employ a critical discourse analysis in order to better understand how power operates discursively within incel communities (Van Dijk, 2015). Discourse analysis as a whole applies to a myriad of approaches that consider language and social construct as their focus of study (Gill, 2018). Because the term 'discourse' means all different types of talk and text, including different media texts, a stream of discourse analysis was most appropriate when analyzing an online forum (Gill, 2018). This methodological approach enabled me to make sense

of my generalized data and helped in categorizing that data to help answer my overarching research question.

In recent years, a 'turn to language' has emerged across the arts and humanities as structuralist, poststructuralist and postmodernist ideas grow, giving a need for discourse analysis to play a part in understanding these ideas (Gill, 2018). In my data set, incels discuss topics relating to gender and naturalness, creating social discourse and providing information concerning current views on female bodies and actions from the perspective of male involuntary celibates. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) concerns itself with relations of power and inequality within language, making it most suitable when analyzing these conversations within this forum (Blommaert and Bulcaen, 2000). In utilizing Foucault's (1972) dialectical view of discourse, CDA encourages the consideration that discourse can be socially shaped, as well as socially constitutive (Gill, 2018). Critical discourse analysis is a qualitative analytical approach, allowing it to critically interpret how different discourses construct, maintain and legitimize social inequalities, and positions of presumed power (Mullet, 2018). It identifies that the way people use language is purposeful and contributes to the reproduction of sexism, racism, and other forms of prejudice and oppression (Mullet, 2018). A key idea within critical discourse analysis is the concept of power, and how the construction of discourse has the ability to grow and elicit this power and dominance of opinion within different groups, understood as Foucault's notion of power-knowledge (Gill, 2009). Critical discourse analysis requires scholars to put forward their take on a particular phenomenon, while still remaining open to interpretation as related discourse of their area of study continues to emerge (Gill, 2018).

My critical discourse analysis focuses on various threads posted on one specific incel forum, incels.is. I chose this specific incel forum largely because of its open access to data

without registering for an account. I was able to view and read all of the sites threads as if I belonged to the community, making data collection of a wide variety of information more accessible. Additionally, incels.is has posts that date back to as far as 2017, a rarity when looking for incel posts. Due to the nature of the content on these forums, they commonly get deleted and it can be difficult to identify a large data set from the same source. The posts selected range between the years of 2018 to 2022 and cover a myriad of topics, as my research question was interested in understanding how this particular incel forum operates as a discursive community. I was interested in identifying common themes within the discussions on this forum, as the members of this community advertise themselves as being innocent men who have been outcasted by unrealistic societal expectations. Because they do not meet these expectations, their chances of obtaining popularity or romantic partners are greatly diminished, something they view as an injustice. As such, they argue that these forums are meant to help with the loneliness they feel and find like-minded individuals who they can bond and relate with. As a researcher, the goal of my critical discourse analysis was to provide a focused discussion on what themes were most common within the discussions on this forum, and how they encourage the violent anti-women beliefs within this discursive community.

The forum is set up to show three different sections that a user can post on. The first is called 'The Lounge' and is described as being a space where you can talk about your day, lifestyle, music, gaming, or just chill. The second is the 'must-read content', a page with the most noteworthy and thought-provoking threads on the site. In order to move a thread to the 'must-read content' section, the user who posted the thread must submit an application on the site, pleading their case to the site moderator as to why their thread should be highlighted as must-read content. Finally, there is the 'Inceldom Discussion' section, the area dedicated to

discussing your incel experiences, venting, or sharing anything related to inceldom. Once you choose a section, it will bring you to a list of all of the threads posted within this area. Each thread is categorized by a prefix of the authors choosing. For example, there is "Based" which alludes to the post containing evidence to back up whatever claim it is making. There is "toxic femininity" which focuses on conversations surrounding women being terrible. And there is "LDAR" which stands for "Lay down and rot" and consists of posts about one's hopelessness surrounding their circumstances. There are 23 different prefixes for users to choose from, but the three above best demonstrate some of the most common themes.

When scrolling through the threads, you can see the title of the thread, how many replies there are, and what date and time someone last replied to the thread. This helps in identifying how popular a certain topic is. If there are more replies, there is more engagement. The remainder of the site consists of a rules and FAQ page, which clearly outlines that women, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and non-incels are strictly prohibited from joining the site. Other than that, a long list of rules concerning content and behavior when posting on the site are listed, but as per my experience monitoring the forum, these rules are very seldomly followed.

Between December 2021 and May 2022, I collected a total of 322 posts from incels.is. My intent was to collect 50 different threads and 4-6 comments posted within each thread, in order to thoroughly analyze the discussions surrounding different topics and how they are received by different members. When selecting this sample, I ensured to not be biased in my selection, in order to maintain researcher credibility and to not alter my findings to any sort of preconceived ideas of what kinds of posts may be on an incel forum. To do this, I went in chronological order as it appeared on the site and selected the first 50 threads that had 4-6 tangible comments. A tangible comment would be identified as a comment that was three or

more words long, and none of those three words being emojis. As of the final date of my data collection, May 23rd, 2022, incels.is had a total of 389,520 different threads which amassed to 9,040,608 posts from 18,390 different members. While it would be impossible for me to analyze all of this data within a project of this size, I am confident that by collecting 50 different threads and 4-6 comments preach thread I was able to holistically gain an overarching understanding of some prominent themes within these online discussions. I decided to collect threads only between the years of 2018 and 2022. This was to ensure that the data I collected was relevant to today's climate of the incels.is forum and allowed for an understanding of discursive change and progression within this community over the past 5 years.

All of my data was saved by screen shotting each individual thread and comment, which included the comment, username, date and time of each post per collected screen shot. I then conducted a manual data categorization process in order to identify analytical themes. I opted for a manual approach rather than using a Qualitative Data Analysis Software, such as the popular NVivo, because the size of my data set allowed for this process to be feasible and in turn ensured a more accurate depiction of discursive themes. Being that I analyzed this data based on a qualitative basis rather than a quantitative basis, I believe this method of data categorization was beneficial to the ultimate findings of this research.

Through my critical discourse analysis, I identified four analytical themes based on the posts from my data collection period. I landed on these themes first by categorizing each post according to the topics discussed. For example, if the post contained mention of any desire or dream to inflict physical pain towards someone it would be categorized under 'violence.' If there was any discussion concerning sexual attraction towards minors, the post would be categorized under 'pedophilia', and so on. There were times when posts cross categorized, for example, a user mentioned how it is natural for men to be attracted to underage girls and that Elliot Rodger

could agree with him based on the manifesto he left. In this case, this post was categorized under 'naturalness' and 'Saint Elliot.' Each time I collected a screen shot I would transcribe it in a word document including the message from the post, the date, time and username. This helped with my purposeful categorization of posts as I was able to identify common words and phrases and further code them for another layer of analysis.

In order to identify my final four themes, I considered which discussions arose most frequently and how these discussions affected the construction of this discursive online incel community. I noted how users utilized certain tags through their forums' pre-generated categorizations to flag their posts. In doing do I was able to identify the following four themes: (1) Gender Essentialism, (2) "Fuel" as an Idealized Masculine Emotional Response, (3) Ambiguous Discourse x Anonymity, and (4) "Saint Elliott" an incel hero. Once the entirety of my data was coded by analytical themes, I began to conduct my critical analysis. Throughout my analysis I made sure to consider in which context each post was being made. I flagged them as either "title thread" or "reply post" in my data organization to help identify conversation starters vs. additional commentary to the original idea. It is important to note that no posts were analyzed out of context in order to bolster any perceived themes. In concluding my analysis, I considered my research question, as well as what the individuals' emotional intent would be behind each post. If their intent appeared to be malicious in an unprovoked manner or enabled by coercion of their peers on the site, it would change how the comment was analyzed and categorized. This method of critical discursive analysis allowed me to answer my research question with confidence in my findings of how incels.is operates as a discursive community.

There were important ethical considerations to account for as I completed this research. While the site is public, it is important to consider the ethical implications of utilizing public posts for the purpose of research. When collecting this data, it is noted that all users on the site

appear under usernames that are purposely meant to shield their personal identities. However, the importance of ensuring anonymity and personal privacy for the subject is important to do as a researcher. Because I was unable to personally contact each user to request their permission to use their posts in this project, all usernames have been renamed as "anonymous" to maintain their anonymity and confidentiality.

Additionally, the nature of the themes within this research consists of many possibly triggering topics such as sexual assault, violence towards women, pedophilia and incest. In the interest of the well-being of all those who engage with this project, I have ensured trigger warnings at each stage. As well, I have considered the potential for harm when relaying my findings and have made sure to keep all forms of potential physical, social, psychological, and all other types of harm to an absolute minimum. Finally, through peer and supervisor review, I ensured that my work is free of plagiarism or any forms of research misconduct. As well as accurately representing my results free of bias or cherry-picked data. Because of these meticulous methods of collecting and analyzing the data, as well as ensuring all necessary ethical considerations have been made, I am confident in the accuracy of the results this project has produced.

CHAPTER FOUR: FORUMS DISCURSIVELY DEEPENING THE INCEL IDEOLOGY

In this chapter I use discursive textual analysis to analyze the ways in which the incel community operates as an influential discursive online community, using the website incels.is as a case study. My analysis has revealed four dominant discursive themes: (1) Gender Essentialism, (2) "Fuel" as an Idealized Masculine Emotional Response, (3) Ambiguous Discourse x Anonymity, and (4) "Saint Elliott" an incel hero. As such, I argue that users on incels.is utilize the online space as a place to encourage and spread violent extremist misogyny through discourse.

Michel Foucault (1971) adopted the term 'discourse' to describe it as a way of assigning power to words and produce knowledge and meaning. Stephen Gill (1995) explained Foucault's ideas surrounding discourse as "a set of ideas and practices with particular conditions of existence, which are more or less institutionalized, but which may only be partially understood by those that they encompass" (p.399). The incel community has created a discursive community in which they have co-opted their own kind of discourse to alienate others and bolster their beliefs and points of view. They pick and choose how they want certain words, phrases and ideas to be understood, in order to justify their deep hatred for those who do not belong to their community. The themes discovered in my research demonstrate their manipulation of discourse to help grow their community and suit its needs.

In the first section of this chapter, I examine how the idea of "naturalness" operates as a central discursive theme across incel postings. I explore how gender essentialism is produced via conversational threads about the "naturalness" of gendered behaviors, circulating to become a dominant logic within the incel community (Witt, 1995; Bohan, 1993; Narayan, 1998). I explore

what is gender essentialism and how feminist theory has historically examined the phenomenon, especially when looking at arguments made by those who are pro-essentialist in their discourse.

In the second section of this chapter, I explore the term "fuel" commonly found as a descriptor, or "tag" within a user's post. I argue that by utilizing the "fuel" descriptor as a platform affordance, users are able to discursively mobilize anger as a legitimate – and natural – response for incel men. As such, this practice builds on longstanding ideas about gendered emotions by legitimating anger, and by extension, violent response by men as a "normal" gendered reaction to a perceived injustice. Additionally, exploring how "fuel" dominated expressed emotions online are in fact strongly predictive of the user's intended conduct, making these posts dangerous and important to monitor (Verhagen, Nauta, and Felberg, 2013; Martin and Vieaux, 2016).

The third theme I identified in my analysis is what I'm calling "Ambiguous Discourse x Anonymity". This is a practice whereby users on incels.is purposely utilize specific language or tactics when expressing their thoughts and opinions in order to not be flagged as possibly dangerous or ideologically extremist, coupled with the option of being anonymous. I contend that this practice is used in order to be able to spew violence and hatred towards others, while maintaining a non-threatening and non-identifiable personal status. In doing so, participants on incels.is work to produce a closed community of insiders that are strategic in their posts in order to avoid legal ramifications and are quick to call out anyone who appears to question these tactics. These strategies are used mainly to evade what the incel community calls "fedcel's," who are individuals that either monitor incel forums, or falsely participate in incel forums in order to gather evidence that may prove intended violence or danger deriving from the online community (Squirrell, 2018). Trends in a change of language and euphemisms used while comparing posts

from 2018 till 2022 indicate strategic use of discourse and intent in the posts in order to not be "flagged" as dangerous. This section explores how users on incels.is utilize code and paraphrasing to avoid incriminating themselves, while also maintaining the extra layer of security due to anonymity, which consequently changes the ways that they communicate with one another in the online realm.

The fourth and final theme I identified is what I'm describing as "worshiping of Saint Elliot" (Elliot Rodger). Rodger is responsible for perpetrating the 2014 Isla Vista Killings in California, a spree that was motivated by misogynistic terrorism and is dubbed as an inspiration within the incel community (Witt, 2020). I analyze the ways in which users discursively position Rodger as representative of an idealized form of masculinity, a hegemonic form of masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity is a practice meant to legitimize a male's dominant position within society through idealized masculine traits such as confidence, assertiveness and intelligence (Hearn, 2004). Rodger referred to himself as the "supreme gentleman", as he considered himself to be intelligent, refined, handsome, fashionable and charming, all characteristics belonging to the idealized form of hegemonic masculinity. While incels as a group express deep self-loathing and subordinate masculine traits, because they consider Elliot Rodger to represent hegemonic masculinity, the idea that he could be rejected and ignored women both legitimizes their deep hatred toward women while casting Rodger as their idol.

Taken together, these themes suggest that users on incels.is utilize hypermasculine discourse in order to encourage and justify their anti-woman beliefs to themselves and to others, creating a space where misogynistic extremism is more normalized.

Gender Essentialism

Many of the comment threads on incels.is engage with the idea of "natural" genders – what scholars have discussed as gender essentialism. Incels fall under the guise of alt-right ideology,

specifically concerning misogynistic beliefs and the importance they place on traditional gender norms of masculinity and femininity (Kelly and Aunspach, 2020). Lea Skewes (2018) et, al., explain that gender essentialist thinking is that "all members of a category of gender share fundamental or "essential" qualities that make them what they are… arguing that a human group is natural, immutable, discrete, informative, historically and cross-culturally invariant, and grounded in deep-seated, biological factors" (p.3). An example of this is one user who is justifying hebephilia, the persistent sexual interest by adults in pubescent children who are in early adolescence, by arguing its "naturalness" (Blanchard, et, al., 2009).

> User 1: First things first; hebephilia is completely natural. On a biological level, a woman Becomes highly fertile in her early teens. This fertility decreases *immediately* as she ages. In short, a foid's[1] peak fertility is in her early teens and it is human nature for men to want to find someone to reproduce with

> User 2: There's no way any roastie[2] over the age of 25 could compete with a prime age 12–15-year-old foid. So roasties have universally removed them from the sexual marketplace and made it illegal to have sex with them even though biologically its natural for men to want to fuck young girls

> User 3: We are not pedos. It is absolutely natural to be attracted to a girl that has all the physical characteristics of a woman. In other words, if a 13 yo girl is 5'9 130 pounds large breasts its absolutely healthy to want her

Users on incels.is share in this gender essentialist mind frame, and discursively use it to their advantage when justifying what most people would view as repugnant behavior. In the example above, they utilize words such as "biological", "human nature" and "natural" when

---

[1] Foid is a slur used by incels to describe females/women
[2] Roastie is a derogatory word used by the incel community towards women who have a distended labium that appears the same as roast beef

arguing that their desire for underage girls is normal. Discursively, they are constructing a justification for hebephilia by associating the sexual desire for pubescent children with discourse that insinuates gender essentialism. They are positioning themselves as normal for having these sexual desires through discourse that promotes naturalness. Incels use this theme of naturalness to justify pedophilia and hebephilia, arguing that there is nothing men can do if they are attracted to younger girls since "biologically" they are wired this way.

Incels position themselves under the belief that those who oppose gender essentialism are simply "crazy woke feminists" who live to attack them. Feminist theory is historically anti essentialist as it rejects these notions in both forms (Witt, 1995). Feminist theory identifies the belief that gender is socially constructed and not biologically determined or natural (Witt, 1995). Users on incels.is utilize the term "natural" a total of 24 times within the data I have collected in order to justify the nature of their being. They use "naturalness" in a myriad of arguments, including most commonly their attraction to younger girls and their rage against women who will not have sex with them, as they view sex as a biological need for men, describing it as a "natural desire". In this example, a user justified their desire to be violent towards women who do not wish to engage in physical intimacy,

> User 1: We men have the right to sex whenever we want it. We are wired to need it and women who deny this need do not deserve to be alive

> User 2: Women are so surprised when men rape them. I don't understand why. WE NEED SEX TO SURVIVE. If we do not receive sex it is out of our control what we will do to get it. It is an instinct for us to have sex.

These two users on incels.is are suggesting that sex is essential to male survival and therefore if they are denied this "need" then naturally they cannot control what they will do to get it. The manner in which user 2 replies to user 1's post is much more expressive than his counterpart, using all capital letters to highlight the theme of the thread, which is their perceived need of sex for survival. He draws attention to the word "survival" since discursively the word alerts to the natural instinct of self-preservation. It is an argument of survival enmeshed with gender essentialism in an extreme manner. Feminist theory is anti-gender essentialism and therefore is dubbed by incels as being anti-men since they argue that any belief system that disagrees with their discourse surrounding naturalness is automatically the villain.

Additional to addressing the essentialist nature of men, users on incels.is also discuss what they perceive as a natural way of female being. Incels believe that a woman's role within society is to exist to please a man, praising virginity and faithfulness. However, this idea of the "traditional feminine" is not necessarily the norm in western culture today, making any women who diverts from this path considered to be degenerate. In a thread from April 2020, users talk about women who move away for college, diverting from their traditional path of homemaking,

> User 1: No matter how good you try to educate a female she will always turn into a whore eventually

> User 2: Being a whore is their natural state. They should not be in school because it's such a waste of time and resources

> User 3: The mistake is letting them get free and go to college. Naturally they will turn into a degenerate crack snorting whore

This thread highlights how users on incels.is consider women to be degenerate and hypersexual by nature if not controlled. They utilize the term "natural state" when referring to women as "whores" as if to suggest that without the control and guidance of men, women will cease to exist as valuable beings. Under the guise of popular misogyny, these users position men as the dominant figures and women as subordinate, expressing that the natural state of a woman without a man is invaluable.

Furthermore, due to their essentialist views, incels express that naturally, women should exist on a lower status level than men. User's often pine for what they consider to be the "good old days", referring to social norms from the early 1900's when women in North American society were predominantly homemakers (Giele, 2008). They base women's value off of their ability to provide sex and offspring, since they consider this to be the natural purpose of female existence. If a woman is unable or unwilling to provide such things, incels dub them to be worthless, stating that they should not even be afforded basic human rights, often speaking hatefully towards the women's suffrage movement. An example of this within my data set comes from a thread posted in April 2022,

> User 1: Why do we call women foids? It just sounds strange calling women "femoids[3]", "foids" or "holes". Is there a specific reason for this?

> User 2: Because fuck them. They no give me sex and love. They no deserve rights.

> User 3: They are worth much less than us. This is to exemplify that.

> User 4: Because "woman" has a neutral connotation while "foid" has a negative Connotation. We don't hide that we hate women here.

---

[3] Femoid is the same as foid, a slur used by incels to describe females/women

User 5: Because it's dehumanizing which fits because women don't deserve human rights

This thread exemplifies how users on incels.is purposefully utilize their own discursive creations in order to properly represent women how they see them – as lesser than. They explain that they purposely use words with negative connotations when referring to women, because they want to signal their hatred for the gender. Their hatred for the gender, as stated in the thread example, stems from when women do not provide them with sex and love, acts they believe women naturally owe men. As explained by Sarah Banet-Weiser (2015), this rise in popular misogyny, an anti-feminist expression, contributes to a normalized misogynistic political and economic culture, one that incels believe to be a more natural society.

The discourse surrounding naturalness and gender essentialism is woven throughout the three other themes in this analysis. Concerning utilizing "fuel" as an extreme descriptor, this innate anger is considered "natural" within men. When examining ambiguity in discourse, incels evade breaking the law by framing their conversations to center around natural desires. And finally, looking at the discursive idolizing of Elliot Rodger, his manifesto stems from a deep belief in gender essentialism that played role in his rage against women, bonding all those who look up to him.

"Fuel" Dominated Online Expression

Users on incels.is operate and communicate through the online forum that connects them through discursive means. The incel community has their own form of unique discourse that includes variations, shortenings and combining of words to create new terms meant only for the community. Some of the most popular include 'Chad' which refers to men who are sexually successful by being naturally charismatic, handsome and clever, and 'Stacy' which refers to a

woman who is stereotypically beautiful, promiscuous, and unintelligent (Squirrel, 2018). Of the 322 posts collected for this data set 22 (6.8%) of them utilized the word "fuel" as a descriptor of emotion. To incels, 'fuel' is specifically used in order to provoke particular emotions in other users, using it is purposeful (Squirrel, 2018). To categorize these 22 comments, 9 were Life Fuel, 6 were Rage Fuel, 4 were Suicide Fuel, 1 was School Shooting fuel, 1 was Coom (cum) Fuel and 1 was JFL (Just Fucking LOL) Fuel. While 6.8% may not appear to be overtly overwhelming significant, qualitatively it demonstrates that through discourse, users are actively looking to provoke and manipulate certain emotions within others. All of these emotions having a negative connotation. Observing the discourse within the incel community is key to understanding their overarching beliefs and intentions behind what is communicated and how it is categorized, specifically when identifying what is intended to symbolize rage.

All of these words on their own have a far lesser meaning than when the word "fuel" is added after them, as it is a signifier of how a certain scenario, conversation or action makes them feel. In Ryan C. Martin and Lauren E. Vieaux's (2016) chapter, "The Digital Rage: How Anger is Expressed Online," they identify that while there is a large gap in research surrounding online angry expression, it is proven that those who express their anger online via rant-sites (e.g., incels.is) are more likely to experience maladaptive anger in other facets of their life. Furthering this point, Ganesh (2020) discusses the grouping of online emotion within social media sites, and how algorithmically, platforms prioritize the most common emotive content identified. For this reason, groups such as incels partake in what is classified as 'shitposting', where they flood different social media platforms with the same emotion or emotive idea knowing these sites algorithms prioritize emotive sentiments (Ganesh, 2020). They do this in order to try and hijack public opinion. Using the term 'fuel' as a descriptor places emotive connotation to a post,

specifically, negative emotive connotation. These types of emotive content aggregation algorithms are used on popular social platforms such as Twitter, where the specific incels.is community exists as an extension to their original forum (@IncelsCo). Ganesh notes that the overarching alt-right audience on Twitter is directed specifically to elicit rage, anger and synthesize a sense of "white victimhood using coded language" (2020, p.897), making the incel community a popular and vocal group on the site.

Users on incels.is take what they have noted algorithmically from sites such as Twitter and transfer it to the way they post and communicate on their own forum, in this instance, utilizing the descriptor 'fuel'. This is demonstrated through their online expression of anger. Societal gender norms place females as the more passive gender, and males as the more aggressive gender (Costrich, et, al., 1975). By default, anger is reserved as being a more masculine emotion, and is considered out of character if demonstrated by a woman (Costrich, 1975). Therefore, the word "fuel" being used on incels.is as a strong emotive descriptor is viewed as being synonymous with aggressive emotion. When observing through a feminist poststructuralist lens, it is identified how much feminist poststructuralism is influenced by the Foucauldian ideas of language and how it is located in discourse (Gavey, 1989). Traditional discursive constructions of femininity are passive and agreeable, rather than argumentative and aggressive in language, those descriptors are reserved for the more traditional discursive construction of masculinity (Gavey, 1989).

"LifeFuel", being the most used type of "fuel" within this data set, is exemplified when the user is discussing different topics that provide them with the will to keep living. This sounds innocent enough, but 100% of discussions linked to "LifeFuel" within this data set surround the topics of women being murdered, women being assaulted, women killing themselves, or women

51

being made to feel uncomfortable due to the actions of fellow incels. Many incels express their desire to die due to hating their life and their situation of being undesirable to the opposite sex, therefore their expression of what provides them with the fuel to live is important since it is an example of some of their greatest desires. Some examples of the tag 'LifeFuel' being used on incels.is is as follows,

> Post 1: LifeFuel. It's so satisfying seeing foids get killed by their "badboy" boyfriends. It's pretty clear from the data that women would rather die than date nice law-abiding men. Watching them suffer the consequences of their actions is like sweet karma.

> Post 2: LifeFuel. Roastie kills herself because Chad didn't want her. Lmao stupid bitch. I wish I could link this thread to her parents. Just imagine that slut's parents seeing their dear daughter's death being celebrated gives me happiness. This made my day tbh.

> Post 3: *Posted video that user took of under the skirt of a girl at a public bus station* LifeFuel. Summer is a nice time to take creepshots. I wanted to grab her by the pussy (in gta 5) for having the nerve to breath in my presence, although she probably didn't even notice me.

Alessia Tranchese and Lisa Sugiura (2021) explain in their article, "'I Don't Hate All Women, Just Those Stuck-Up Bitches': How Incels and Mainstream Pornography Speak the same Extreme Language of Misogyny," how "the 'real' and the virtual are not separate experiential realms; activities that take place in the virtual world are still experienced as reality, with material consequences" (p. 1465). When men express online how the thought of women being murdered, assaulted and humiliated brings them joy, it is normalizing and accepting a societal sentiment concerning violence against women. As demonstrated in the "Post 3" example above, the user was not just partaking in discussion concerning taking creeper shots of

unsuspecting women in public, but he had actually taken a video up a girl's skirt and posted it online, further normalizing this foul and dangerous behavior. The use of the term "LifeFuel" being synonymous with the sentiment of hurting women within the incel community allows for individuals to feel justified in deriving pleasure from others pain. Similar to how it has been identified that consuming violent pornography is linked to individuals believing that being sexually violent (without proper consent from all parties) is appropriate and acceptable, normalizing online conversations that suggest hurting women to remain happy will continue to translate to acting on these beliefs in the physical world (Tranchese and Sugiura, 2021).

Following "LifeFuel", "SuicideFuel" was the sentiment found within the data set that demonstrated aspects of incels lives that specifically made them suicidal. The common theme amongst these "SuicideFuel" posts surrounded a girl to whom the user could not acquire, and an action that either she or a peer enacted that the incel saw as an attempt to humiliate them. In thread 36 of the data set collection, a user posted:

> User 1: Mogged by foid sister daily: My foid sister brings over 9 friends and her Boyfriend to our house every single fucking day. I cant even leave my room without being height mogged and surrounded by whores and white chads that are all a year younger than me, its fucking over

This post emphasizes two aspects of violence towards others for just existing. Firstly, the user is mad at his sister for having a boyfriend and friends. He feels angry that she gets to live a life with people who choose to love her while he is alone. In Jilly Boyce Kay's (2021) chapter, "Abject desires in the age of anger: Incels, femcel and the gender politics of unfuckability", she highlights this internalized belief within white male incel cultures that assumes they are uniquely

disadvantaged as a population as a result of globalization. Incels believe that women could never be involuntarily celibate due to the misogynistic assumption that women will never struggle to find sexual partners (Kay, 2021). This assumption only creates greater hatred towards women from the incel point of view, so much so that it affects their sentiments towards any and all women in their lives, including family members. The data suggests that incels with sisters view this sibling as a burden as they are stuck sitting front row to watch a life, they wish they could have, internalizing violent anger against them. While on the other hand, incels without sisters demonstrate a sort of jealousy through their online comments as they consider female siblings as easy prey for their sexual desires, projecting an appetite for intrafamilial sexual violence. Some of the comments left in response to the original post included:

> User 1: When they are home, definitely do not disable the carbon monoxide detectors in your house, steal your parents car keys and start the car while you go for a nice stroll in the park

> User 2: Stop complaining. I wish I had a sister so I could rape her whenever I want to

> User 3: Throw burning hot latte on them

All of these comments demonstrated violence towards the sister and her friends in one manner or another, highlighting that in the mind of an incel, just existing as a woman is reason enough to be subject to harm in attempts to turn "SuicideFuel" into "LifeFuel". The first comment suggests killing, the second comment suggests sexually assaulting, and the third comment suggests maiming, all because females are simply hanging out at a house.

Secondly, the user demonstrates anger towards his sister's friends. He mentions that they are whores, that he is being height mogged[4] and that they are all a year younger than him, making him angry. Incels project their own insecurities onto others so that they are able to create a narrative in their head that suggests they are not the problem, everyone else around them is. In their article, Masculinity Threats, "Incel" Traits, and Violent Fantasies Among Heterosexual Men in the United States, Maria Scaptura and Kaitlin Boyle (2020) identified how incel traits are associated with violent fantasies about rape and using powerful weapons against enemies. In this situation, the user's sister's boyfriend and male friends are viewed as the "enemies" since they are "height mogging" the user, meaning, that by being taller they are viewed as the alphas and more masculine, and therefore, more desirable to women, so they are considered a threat to incels (Ging, 2019; Scaptura and Boyle, 2020). The user's sister's female friends are also a source of anger as he refers to them as "whores". The incel's use of this word as a descriptor suggests that in order to diminish his own insecurities surrounding not being able to interact with women, he must belittle their existence and convince himself that they are whores, a conative word for disgusting or dirty (Ging, 2019). In these examples, the incel user is enacting a sense of self-delusion tactic through purposely chosen descriptive discourse in order to not only make himself feel better, but to also convince others on the forum that his rage is justified, that his "SuicideFuel" is justified (Ging, 2019; Axelsson, and Persson Lindgren, S, 2021).

Next there is "RageFuel", a categorization that carries similar comments as those found under "SuicideFuel". Posts and comments found under the "RageFuel" tag encapsulate incels prime suspects of discontent; mainly, women and "chad-like" men. Ganesh (2020) writes in his paper, "Weaponizing white thymos: flows of rage in the online audiences of the alt-right", how

---

[4] Height mogging is an instance wherein a tall person undermines another person purely by standing next to them. During an act of heightmogging, the heightmogger feels proud, whereas the heightmoggee feels humiliated

the alt-right (a categorization that incels fall under) are extremely effective at mobilizing emotion through digital communications. In his paper he argues that "emotive communication connects alt-right users and mobilizes white thymos to the benefit of populist radical right politics" (Ganesh, 2020, p.893) suggesting that online acts of rage are contagious to other online users with like-minded views. Ganesh's coining of the concept "white thymos" was meant to encapsulate how the "alt-right has weaponized affect and how the radical right has benefitted from it" (Ganesh, 2020, 895). When it comes to affect and regarding "white thymos", Ganesh explores the weaponization of affect on social media and how texts, images, and anything else found within the digital realm can have the potential to inspire "identity-based emotional responses", most commonly emotions linked to rage and anger (Ganesh, 2020). When users on incels.is utilize hashtags and categorizations of "RageFuel" they are signaling to others that what they have linked to this categorization should make them enraged as well. Rather than airing a grievance concerning women or needing a space to vent, they are automatically inflicting the emotion of rage to be synonymous with women. Drawing on Ganesh's argument, we can see how rage becomes part of one's identity as an incel since their affect of rage perpetrated online draws wanted attention and comradery from others who share in their ideologies. This creates a sense of support for incels by demonstrating rage discursively, and therefore is a prominent indicator for them when wanting to attract others.

These "fuel" categorizations are coerced identity based emotional responses that operate as a discursive framing on the site. As tags they categorize the post, inviting the reader to understand the post through the affective lens of anger (Ganesh 2020). Drawing on Foucault, we may understand these posts as producing a shared knowledge about women that become "truth" as they circulate and accumulate comments. For example,

User 1: RageFuel – Every time I complimented a foid she would just ignore me and not say anything back. So fuck these bitches. From now on, im gonna start insulting foids.

User 2: Women only like being complimented by chads, no point in complimenting them as an incel. In fact, complimenting a foid as an incel might even get you thrown in prison for sexual harassment

User 3: Why bother? They just view us as insignificant wastes of space. Complimenting them is just inflating their egos. Stop wasting your time.

In this online conversation, users on incels.is are using discourse to assume that all women hate them and encourage others in sharing in this sentiment through expressing their own experiences or feelings. They have opened up the discourse of suggesting that women will only reject any compliment they give them, therefore, they reserve the right to hate all women and to try and compliment any of them would be a waste of time. Incels draw on an obsession with hyper-masculine ideologies, ones also displayed in alt-right groups, where they believe men should have dominant power over women within society as per traditional norms. They believe that when complimenting women, this should be viewed as an honor for the receiving party, not an opportunity for women to reject them. Their discursive rage is linked to menial things such as a woman not returning their interest, which makes them more relatable to others, not just incel extremists. In this way, they grow their reach and work at creating a bigger more robust online community through discursive means.

Ambiguous Discourse x Anonymity

Freedom of speech and expression has become an ongoing issue within the online realm for law makers as they try to navigate the ever changing and growing schema of social media platforms, especially because of the option to remain anonymous when posting. Under section

2(b) of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Charter),* it is stated that Canadians are free to peacefully express opinions and ideas contrary to those held by the government, subject only to such reasonable limits as may but justified in a free and democratic society. Additionally, sections 318 and 319 of the Criminal Code state that it is a criminal offence to advocate genocide, publicly incite hatred, and willfully promote hatred against an "identifiable group" (*Criminal Code, 318 & 319).* An identifiable group is defined as any section of the public distinguished by race, color, religion, national or ethnic origin, age, sex, sexual orientation, or mental or physical disability (*Criminal Code, 318 & 319).* In this regard, women as a whole, would be considered an "identifiable group". It is made clear that these regulations are not meant to govern private conversations, only those that are deemed public. Because the internet is a public network, conversations posted on public forums, such as incels.is would fall under the categorization of "public space" which is governed by these rules.

Incels.is is advertised as being an incel forum for those who lack a significant other, are lonely, and are just looking to have a space where they can talk to like-minded individuals and share their experiences and thoughts on being incels. This description identifies the forum as being compliant with the Canadian Criminal Code since it is not meant to be a space dedicated to hate speech, rather a community that encourages vulnerability, but data collected for this project says otherwise.

An ongoing trend found on this site is the outward desire and encouragement of doing harm upon identifiable groups of people such as women and "chads". When analyzing the 322 threads collected for this project, it was found that 25 of them (7.7%) directly commented about wanting to hurt or be violent towards women, therefore not complying with the Canadian Criminal Code. However, an additional trend concerning wording and the date posted of the thread emerged. All 25 threads that talk about violence towards women were posted between the

years of 2018 and 2022, but there is a significant change in wording from threads that were posted 4 years ago (2018) to threads that were posted within the past year (2021-2022).

Two examples of a threads posted in 2018 that specify wanting to enact violence towards women are:

User 1: There is three outcomes of virginity for us as incels. 1. Fuck a meathole[5] hooker which has STD's and EBOLA. 2. Fuck a meathole against her will. 3. Go mad and end yourself

User 2: Not a day passes without me dreaming about beheading 'em all. Women that is.

Vs. threads posted in 2022 that specify wanted to enact violence towards women:

User 1: She went too far. Literally all that happened was that someone grabbed her ass. And she decided to ruin his life over it just because he is sub8[6] man. She should have gotten raped (in Minecraft)

User 2: Her face was disgusting from the beginning. Look at this arrogant bitch, deserves to be shot down (in arma 2)

User 3: It may sound brutal, but you must kill him, then rape the bitch, chop her up and throw into acid (in peppa pig the video game)

The significant change in wording from four years ago vs. today is an attempt at still relaying the violent thought, without personally taking ownership for it by insinuating that the incel encourages this violence in a video game, not in the physical world. While both sets of post examples contain the same level of violent intent, the posts made in 2022 utilize a created video game context in order to insinuate innocence on behalf of the incel.

---

[5] A meathole is a derogatory term used for women, signifying that they are only valuable because of their vagina
[6] Sub8 human is an individual that is so useless, so stupid, and so heinous that they are below the human race

Furthermore, User 1's example from 2018 mentioned Ebola, a rare and deadly disease located primarily in the sub-Saharan Africa (Korolczuk and Graff, 2018). This user's example can be interpreted as having underlain racist connotations since Ebola is known as being most prominent in people with black skin tone because of its global location of prominence. Incels.is demonstrates many different racist suggestions, such as identifying different races by generalized racial stereotypes, such as Currycel, meant to identify incels of Indian heritage, Ricecel, meant to identify incels of Asian heritage, and Blackcel, meant to identify incels of sub-Saharan African heritage. At the end of the day, the incel community identifies white heterosexual males as being superior to all. This racist mind frame carries over to their heightened hatred against women who are not white, suggesting that to be rejected by a white woman is bad, but to be rejected by a woman of a different race is unacceptable and embarrassing. Additionally, the same logic is applied to men that they view as alphas. They hate men who can communicate with women and develop romantic relationships with women because they are jealous, but they especially hate if these men are not white, as white incels consider their Caucasian heritage as an indicator of superiority.

In a 2020 article published by Ryan Scrivens, Thomas W. Wojciechowski and Richard Frank titled, "Examining the Developmental Pathways of Online Posting in Violent Right-Wing Extremist Forums", they examined two violent right-wing extremist forums to try and identify trends in users posting habits. They identified that habits did not increase or decrease at identifiable rates, but were rather unpredictable (Scrivens, Wojciechowski and Frank, 2020). In their discussion, they explained that they believed there were hardly any predictable trends in posting habits since when users are posting content in such open access spaces, they are aware that they could become subject of an investigation from anti-hate watch-organizations, journalists, or even law enforcement, which influenced them to be sporadic with their violent

posts (Scrivens, Wojciechowski and Frank, 2020). This is one way to evade law enforcement as individual users are less likely to be flagged as posing a violent threat if their posting is not escalating. Similarly, users on incels.is utilize the method of adding a parenthesize with a video game name inside of it at the end of their violent thought in order to diminish the grounds in which they can be flagged as being a danger. Examples of video games used as scapegoats on incels.is range from "GTA" (Grand Theft Auto", to "Mind Craft", to even "Peppa Pig the game", demonstrating mockery by being exceedingly outlandish in attempts at ambiguity. While their thought may still very much be intended for individuals in the physical world, law enforcement: can only judge based on what is written, and in these cases, the violence is made to look like it is intended for video games.

In the article, "Monitoring racist and xenophobic extremism to counter hate speech online: Ethical dilemmas and methods of a preventative approach", by Andrea Cerase, Elena D'Angelo and Claudia Santoro (2016), they identified that White Supremacist movements online try and disguise the intent behind their violent posts by wording them in such a way that it comes off as "common sense" or "rational", therefore making it less likely to be flagged by law officials. They rely on the rule of understanding ambiguity and polysemy, in that the same words and phrases can have a variety of different meanings (Cerase, D'Angelo and Santoro, 2016). Spring-Serentiy Duvall (2020) also explored this phenomena in their article, "Too Famous to Protest: Far-Right Online Community Bonding Over Collective Desecration of Colin Kaepernick, Fame and Celebrity Activism, stating that", "strategic ambiguity both shields populists from criticism and represents a kind of folksy realism because if their messages are then met with criticism and hostility, this is paradoxically seen as evidence that those who really speak in the name of ordinary people are being censored and attacked" (Kramer, 2017; Duvall, 2020, p.258).

Because the incel community on incels.is market themselves as a safe space to chat with likeminded individuals, not a space dedicated to violence and hate speech, any criticism about their postings are met with arguments defending the intention behind their words. Investigations concerning suspected hate speech online must take into account all available information surrounding the source and context, in which case, when incels add that they are referring to a video game when posting their want to perform violent acts against women, they are providing reasonable doubt that the hate speech was directed to women in the physical world. For example,: in the data set a user is insinuating that another user should "blow her head off with a Bravo. MG34 (in CoD)" when referring to the other users female crush who started dating another boy. Because this act seems so outlandish and is followed by the video game in parenthesis, the user is providing reasonable doubt that they actually wish to enact violence upon someone, which is their exact intent in their methodical posting. Users on incels.is want to discuss violence and insinuate being violent towards women, as seen earlier in the analysis, it plays into their LifeFuel.

This change in verbiage is meant to evade being flagged by law officials and provide reason to discredit any belief that they are a threat to people in the physical world. Users on incels.is are aware that by dubbing themselves an "incel" and posting on this forum, they are under scrutiny of possibly being deemed a threat. Examples of the blatant self-awareness of being monitored are as follows;

> User 1: FBI or IT porvocators. FBI, we are not pedos. It's absolutely natural to be attracted to a girl that has all the physical characteristics of a grown woman, in other words, if a 13 yo girl is 5'9 130 pounds large breasts its absolutely healthy to want her, and no 99% of us are law-abiding people, we will not touch her. Put your efforts into catching real terrorists. Or even 12. I just came across a 12 year old loli[7] that I'd absolutely ravage (if it was legal of course) hopefully I can groom and impregnate on 14th birthday (perfectly legal keep seething roasties and agecucks[8])

User 2: IT reported you to the FBI btw idk if you saw... I told you to be careful and don't post illegal stuff. I make sure everything I post is legal and cops really cant say shit about it because its literally just me talking about my life...

A key factor playing in the brazenness of violent postings made by users on incels.is is their awareness of being anonymous within this forum, being only identifiable by the username they choose when signing up for the site. While when sharing my data within this chapter I refer to all posters as "User 1", "User 2" or "User 3" in order to respect privacy laws, I would not even be able to identify any of these users outside of their made-up usernames. As discussed by Massanari (2017), having the option of appearing anonymous on a platform adds to the persistence of toxic techno cultures online. Incels.is is no exception to this. Because its users are able to appear under an anonymous/made up persona, it is observed that their choice in opinions and words are discursively much more aggressive, violent, and harmful. For example, users on the platform suggest some of the following violent acts,

User 1: If I could I would behead them all and play soccer with their heads (in GTA)

User 2: murdering foids is a stress relieving activity (in CoD)

User 3: lmaoooo imagining her being gang raped by a bunch of Tyrone's[9] makes living Worth while. She will be ruined for every chad and probably die of pain

---

[7] Loli is a young girl or a young-looking girl, mainly used to describe the body type of a young girl
[8] An agecuck is someone who believes that women under a certain age are not appropriate for men over a certain age to be attracted to Users identification of being aware of the FBI and other law officials shows that they are cognisant when they post that they are being monitored as potential violent threats, therefore, concurring that the change in their wording and phrases is to ensure that what they are saying cannot be proven to be hate speech without at least some doubt

Because these users are able to hide behind an anonymous persona, they are more likely to be more vile, cruel and aggressive (Massanari, 2015). If these words and sentiments were linked to their official government issued identities, a cautiousness in expression of speech would be much more taken into consideration. Because being anonymous is an option on the incels.is forum, the community is able to grow, and arguably attract more members because of it. Even men who harbor minimal distain towards women and would not classify themselves as true "incels" may be attracted to these types of sites as it permits and encourages them to air any grievances without consequence. The discursive freedom that anonymity allows incels.is users largely contributes to the growing outreach within this community. Anonymity allows incels.is to operate as an online discursive community, by encouraging unfiltered thoughts, with minimal risk of serious consequence.

Additionally, not only is their conversation above aggressive towards women, but their discourse when addressing men who are not white carries deep racist undertones. Incels.is notes very clearly on its FAQ page that it is a community meant only for straight men, banning women and members of the LGBTQ+ community. While they do not specifically identify white men as being viewed as superior, their discourse surrounding males of different races and ethnic backgrounds throughout the forum suggests a clear racist frame of mind. Through the lens of intersectionality, this forum exhibits a racial hierarchy, placing white men at the top, and men of color beneath them, using terms such as curries[10], chinks[11] and tyrones to racially profile and categorize (Massanari, 2017). While the community claims to exist for all men who are deemed "incels", their online discourse clearly suggests that all incels are not equal, and they consider white males as the alphas of the incels community.

---

[9] Tyrone is a black man who is a Chad equivalent, though the term is used with racist and classist undertones as majority of incels consider Caucasians the superior race

Through ambiguous discourse and online anonymity, incels.is presents itself as a growing online discursive community.

"Saint Elliot" an incel hero

In addition to being violent with their words, a common theme identified within a variety of contexts throughout the forum was the discussion of Elliott Rodger, also known as "Saint Elliott." Rodger was the perpetrator of the 2014 Isla Vista massacre that left 6 dead and 14 wounded (Witt, 2020). His actions were dubbed as being ideologically motivated and the massacre was deemed an act of terror, making Rodger a terrorist (Witt, 2020). Of the 322 threads collected for this data set, 25 of them (7.7%) contained mention of Elliot Rodger in some capacity. 24 of these threads spoke about Rodger in a positive and inspirational way, while one presented itself as an outlier, something that will be analyzed throughout this section.

Rodger referred to himself as the "supreme gentleman", a classification greatly used within incels.is when users refer to him, as they consider him an example of hegemonic masculinity in which they aspire. Hegemonic masculinity is described as a man who demonstrates traditional masculine traits such as heterosexuality, heroism, physical prowess and risk-taking behaviors (Hearn, 2004). Ging (2019) explores the complexities of masculinity and uses describers such as "alphas" and "betas", which coincide with language expressed within the incel community. To be an alpha would mean that a male would be considered to demonstrate these hegemonic traits, therefore, incels' deep hatred towards "Chads" typically derives from the idea that they are the alphas in an alpha/beta dynamic, and therefore control the power. However, Rodger appears to be an exception to this rule, which is theorized to be because incels can identify with Rodger, while also dubbing him of superior hegemonic status.

---

[10] Curries is a derogatory term used to identify a person of Indian background
[11] Chinks is a derogatory term used to identify a person of Asian background

65

I analyze the ways in which users discursively position Rodger as representative of this idealized form of masculinity Incels view themselves as subordinate, which is why they so greatly aspire to be like Mr.Rodger, as he too belonged to the incel community, but characteristically, classified himself as hegemonic in nature, a classification that users on incels.is agree with. Posts referring to Rodger as the supreme gentleman are not only plentiful, but contain great admiration, as per these examples,

User 1: Rest in Peace, supreme gentleman. How I wish I could talk to you today.

User 2: St Elliot day is always a reminder of how much I hate society. This should be an International holiday, once Incels get into power we'll put his face on banknotes. A Warning to society what loneliness does to men. If even the supreme gentleman with a Driver's license cant find love, why could any of us?

User 3: Rest in peace, king! We incels would continue what you, the supreme gentleman Always advocated for! We know and understand female's true nature

All of the posts above exemplify great admiration for Elliot Rodger, one even noting that because he had a driver's license this made him superior as a man. Although in the opinion of the general public, Rodger appeared to be a very average 22-year-old male. Users on incels.is however, actively discursively place Rodger at the forefront of supremacy, suggesting that he is a "king", should be the "face on banknotes", and even so much as noting that the day of his massacre should be considered an international holiday. Their displayed hyper admiration of Rodger is concerning, as the only notable thing differentiating Rodger from any other incel is the fact that he did good on his online violent threats that predated the Isla Vista killings.

In this case, the highly talked about praising of Elliott Rodger is something that not only inspires users, but bonds the members of this group together, and to talk negatively about him would be to go against the groups rules and therefore risk turning yourself into an outcast of the community. Duvall (2020) specifically identifies far-right forums as hypermasculine media

spaces, in which identifying a base line belief (in this case, Elliott Rodger's misogynistic

manifesto) then contributes to framing all topics and arguments from that perspective, bonding

and conditioning the members in one overarching frame of mind. The hypermasculine media

spaces encourage a discourse that focus on giving power and praise to those who have

committed violent acts towards those they view as problematic, in the case of incels this is

women and men who they identify as being superior to themselves. Because Rodger notably

committed one of the largest misogynist-based acts of terror, these hyper masculine incel online

spaces have created a discourse that places him at an indisputable position of power and

knowingness, meaning that arguing against his manifesto or beliefs/actions automatically places

you in a position of being wrong, the following thread exemplifies just that,

> User 1: I have read Elliot Rodgers manifesto more times than I can count and I look up to
> Him in every way but even HE called himself someone with a dorky haircut with plain
> Clothing so why is he any different than any of us

> User 2: you should be ashamed questioning the great gentleman himself clearly your to
> Fucking stupid to recognize his supremacy he died for us

> User 3: HE ONLY SAID THAT SO PEOPLE LIKE YOU AND ME WOULD FEEL
> BETTER! HE WAS THE MOST DESERVING MAN OF ANY WOMAN HE
> WANTED! HE ONLY CALLED HIMSELF DORKY BECAUSE HE WAS SMART
> AND APPARENTLY WOMEN LIKE SMART MEN SO YOUR STUPID POST
> MAKES NO SENSE

> User 4: anyone who questions ER[12] should just kill themselves.

While incels.is adamantly classify their site as a community, it is easy to see how quick

they are to alienate one of their own for dismissing what they consider to be "supremacy". The

original user of the thread barely critiqued Rodger, rather he asked a question to the rest of the

community concerning their classification of Rodger vs. one line from Rodgers personal manifesto. Admittedly, Rodger's depiction of himself is greatly hypocritical as he consistently refers to himself as "tall", "attractive" and "superior" when discussing why women should be drawn to him. Yet, he also plays the side of self-pity, where he talks about being half Asian and scrawny, two characteristics he hyper-fixates on when justifying why he deserves to hate society for its unfair bias against him. However, because users on this hypermasculine forum have dubbed Rodger as the epitome of hegemonic masculinity, they will defend their beliefs and who they consider to be their "supreme gentleman". To allow for any conversation that questions Rodgers masculine status is to disrespect who they consider to be their overarching leader as a community. Without Rodger as a martyr, the faith they put in what they consider to be the "incel movement" will delegitimize itself as they would have no one greater to have come before them, they would have no overarching cause to fight for. Rodgers status within the community coupled with his lengthy manifesto, is what users on incels.is consider to be their purpose and their blueprint to living life.

When users on incels.is talk about Rodger they often discuss how he is a saint and their savior, insinuating that he is their version of a god, and his actions are law. May 23rd is considered Saint Elliot's day within the incel community, marking the day that he went on his killing spree. My data set for this project contains some posts from this year's May 23rd celebrations. A few examples of posts from Saint Elliot's day are as follows,

> User 1: May Saint Elliot bless you all on this holy day, and may we in turn remember his valiant sacrifice. He layed down his life, and the lives of several worthless normies[13], so that the sexhavers the disgusting perpetrators of debauchery of this world, would finally experience a fraction of the pain we incels go through on a daily basis. ALL HAIL SANT ELLIOT!

---

[12] ER is a short term for Elliot Rodger commonly found on incels.is

User 2: My plans for Saint Elliot day? Go to a starbucks and buy a triple vanilla latte. Name I give? Elliot R. Misspelling his name is sacrilegious. If the barista does that, I'm throwing the scalding hot coffee on the wagies[14] face (in gta San Andreas using the hot coffee mod)

User 3: Happy Saint Elliots Day! One of us who suffered the injustices and cruelty of life. A true gentleman, nice, elegant. In the words of ER "NO SEX, NO MERCY" the only words I live by

User 4: RIP ER. He was a based-looking[15] kid who the world mistreated #toogoodforhistime

Each one of these posts reference Elliot Rodger in a sacrilegious type fashion, and as an overarching theme, incels make it known that his actions back on May 23rd, 2014 are considered heroic to them, and that his manifesto is the way that they too view this world. Because this is such a large overarching belief within the incel community, it is concerning in that individuals who are lonely and looking for somewhere to belong can be manipulated into agreeing with these world views in order to fit in.

Krzystof Wasilewski (2019) considers this type of discourse within alt-right media platforms to play part in constructing a counter-collective memory within those who consume these types of forums. A counter-collective memory is a set of fabricated beliefs designed by alt- right media to counter mainstream media discourses, which in this case refer largely to actively countering feminist media discourses (Wasilewski, 2019). Wasilewski explains that "the perception of history impacts the way the present is perceived, by creating a counter-collective memory (of history), the alt-right media challenge the contemporary political and social status quo" (2019, p.78). Incels on this forum use Rodgers story to create this counter-collective memory of the past, as exemplified in the following posts,

User 1: Saint Elliot is an example of why there is no use in respecting women. Even his Own father chose a woman over his own son and she MADE him do that. If women Respected saint Elliot for the supreme gentleman he was then he would have never had To kill anyone.

User 2: its not his fault his sister clout mogged[16] him just because shes a slut. Hapa[17] Females are always favoured and hapa males are treated like scum just for being part Asian

User 3: His failure of a sister should be roped[18]. She hated him for no reason and made Her friends hate him to. She should be GRATEFUL to have a brother like him. He should Have raped her and killed her along with all the other normies he took out. I salute ER These examples discursively place blame on women for the violent fate of Elliot

Rodgers, specifically, his stepmother and his biological sister. However, both women reported incessant disrespect, threatening language and inappropriate gestures being made towards them by Rodger (Witt, 2020). It went so far as for his own father, Peter Rodger, to cut verbal communication with his son until he apologized to his sister and stepmother and agreed to enter counselling for his concerning violent behaviour towards women (Witt, 2020). Users on incels.is do not portray this as Rodgers story, rather they discursively create a counter-collective memory of Rodgers past by falsely placing blame on the women in his life. This counter-collective memory creates further disdain towards women within the community as those who read these threads identify women as the reason their hegemonic masculine hero, Elliot Rodger, died a miserable virgin just like them. This discursive tool is used to build and strengthen users' identity through indicating enemies in order to explain contemporary issues (Wasilewski, 2019).

---

[14] A wagie is someone who hates their job, but works in order to live even though their life is miserable
[15] Based-looking refers to someone who good looking based on societal norms

The incel community is misogynistic extremism that can appear very attractive to men who feel scorned by women or men who they perceive as superior to themselves. As demonstrated in situations such as Gamergate and Men's Rights Activism groups, it is just as important to discursively identify a common leader as it is to identify a common enemy (O'Donnell, 2020). During Gamergate, militaristic type discourse was used to bond those dedicated to the cause, and while they all identified Zoe Quinn, the independent female game developer, as their enemy, they utilized discursive strategies to follow the lead of Adam Baldwin, famous American actor as well as the brains behind Gamergate (O'Donnell, 2020). Identifying a figure of power within a hyper masculine community is important theoretically since they act as a sounding board to all others engrossed in that community's discourse, ensuring that their beliefs align.

Users on incels.is relate to each other by sharing their love and devotion for Elliot Rodger. The users present under anonymous identifiers but signal to others, and to new members, that their baseline for beliefs fall under those shared by Elliot Rodger.

The analysis of the data set selected for this project focuses on four overarching themes: (1) Gender Essentialism, (2) "Fuel" as an idealized masculine emotional response, (3) Ambiguous Discourse x Anonymity, and (4) "Saint Elliot" an incel hero. All of these identified themes have the underlying use of hypermasculine discourse to bolster their intent of justifying anti-woman narratives. They stem from the archaic gender norm beliefs that place women as passive actors, and men as superior (Knight, et. Al., 2012). Incels.is serves as a breeding ground for this hypermasculine discourse to evolve and grow, allowing passive intent of violence against women

---

[16] Clout mogged refers to being more popular than someone else under the same circumstances as you
[17] Hapa refers to people of mixed racial heritage with partial roots in Asian and/or Pacific islander ancestry
[18] Roped refers to being hung by your neck with a rope

to become more normalized, and therefore adding to misogynistic extremism in North America. Through critical discourse analysis of this projects data set, the themes identified display how the forum incels.is operates as an influential online community.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

As of November 2022, the online forum, incels.is, cohesively maintains 18,535 active members, who have cumulatively created over 9 million posts since 2017. These members successfully operate as an influential online discursive community, through perpetuating gendered discourse through an anti-feminist / anti-woman belief system. It is difficult to pinpoint when exactly a once innocent inclusive involuntary celibacy project was co-opted into the violent misogynistic extremist group it is today, but there is no doubt that one of the community's main goals is to continue growing and pushing their twisted incel ideology.

The primary goal of this research project has been to examine the discursive construction and existence concerning gender norms within online incel forums, specifically the site, incels.is. Based on my critical discourse analysis of the online community, I identified four dominant themes that were advanced through discursive methods within this forum: (1) Gender Essentialism, (2) "Fuel" as an Idealized Masculine Emotional Response, (3) Ambiguous Discourse x Anonymity, and (4) "Saint Elliot", an incel hero. These themes identified the legitimization of concern surrounding the ongoing perpetuation of harmful gendered discussions, ones that primarily place women as the target of misogynistic beliefs and the receivers of possible violent acts.

Through a belief in gender essentialism, this community pushes otherwise insulting and archaic gendered stereotypes onto women. Insinuating that women who do not adhere to this perceived "naturalness" of femininity are dangerous to the hegemonic status of men. Concerning the use of "Fuel" as a categorized emotive response, the users on this forum utilize this as a discursive signaling method for others, in order to invoke a predisposed emotion, commonly that of rage against women. The meticulous use of ambiguous discourse within users posts on the forum identifies that the violent undertones of their messages are purposeful, highlighting

women as the object of their anger. Coupled with the security blanket of online anonymity, the users of incels.is exist under the guise of being allotted the privilege of spewing violent misogynistic extremism with minimal chance of serious repercussion. And finally, the community's blinding obsession with Elliot Rodger, otherwise referred to as Saint Elliot or The Supreme Gentleman, signals to an overarching fixation on what they consider to be the face of hegemonic masculinity. To them, he is a martyr in which they can dedicate themselves to in the name of retribution against those who they view as the enemy. Regardless of conflicting and hypocritical messages on his end, incels have discursively placed him as their blueprint of greatness. Exemplifying immediate dismissal against anyone in the community who goes against the unwritten rule of never questioning his incel ideology.

My overarching takeaway from this project is the concerning realization of how online communities condition the emergence of particular misogynist discourse to make sense of gendered social life. This project adds to existing scholarship surrounding platforms and platform affordances through acknowledging tactics implored by incel users in order to spread misogynistic extremism in popular online spaces. It challenges the overarching understanding of the "manosphere" by identifying the normalization of misogynistic information being spread feverously, therefore, adding to the ever-growing popular misogynist world views within our society. Information is more readily available than ever before, giving autonomy to anyone with internet access to spread their personal opinions, no matter how violent or dangerous they may be. Doing research surrounding the topic of the online incel community is important, as it helps us become intricately aware of how easily words can manipulate beliefs, and better monitor how these ideologies are progressing throughout our modern society. For those whose belief systems are not grown through misogynistic undertones, the thought of such a widespread violent extremism existing within North American society seems unpalpable. But the unfortunate truth is

that incels and their beliefs are much more common than we think, covertly existing in the online realm.

Study Limitation and Future Research Consideration

While this study acknowledges that the incel community was once meant to be for all genders, it does specifically identify that the modern day incel community is assembled of only heterosexual males. The forum of study, incels.is, notes on its rules page that only "single straight men who have trouble finding a significant other" (2022) can be considered an incel. Additionally, is singles out women and LGBT individuals as being prohibited from the site, stating that it is a "heterosexual male-only forum" (2022). In this regard, all discursive analysis done on the posts within the data set collected from incels.is was completed with an assumption that all users were straight men. However, I consider it important to note that the official government identity of the users whose posts I collected from this site are unknown, as they all present under anonymous usernames. For this reason, I cannot guarantee without a shadow of a doubt that all opinions on this site are those from heterosexual men, although they have been analyzed as such. To the best of my ability, I can only operate with the understanding that the rules of the site will be followed, in which case all posts collected should in theory be those of heterosexual male users.

Additionally, my data set collected to make this project feasible was only a miniscule fraction of the content posted in incels.is. As of May 23rd, 2022, the official final day of my data collection, the site was made up of a total of 9,040,608 posts, in which I selected a total of 322 to make up my data set. Although this is only a small fraction of the total content available, I can confidently say that the data set collected is unbiased and accurately representative of primary themes found within the forum.

I recommend continued research surrounding how incel forums operate as discursive

online communities since these conversations are constantly evolving, becoming more violent in nature every day. Furthermore, there is a myriad of other incel forums existing in the online realm. Many in open access spaces, but others on the daunting hidden dark web. These communities most likely contain additional key themes of focus, ones not as prominent on incels.is, but important to identify all the same if we want to create a more cumulative understanding of incel ideology. In conclusion, it is important to continue to ask ourselves why these communities exist? How does an individual find themselves a self-identifying incel? And are their personal violent misogynistic beliefs avoidable? Or even, reversable?

REFERENCES

Aldera, S., Emam, A., Al-Qurishi, M., Alrubaian, M., & Alothaim, A. (2021). Online extremism detection in textual content: A systematic literature review. *IEEE Access*, *9*, 42384-42396.

Axelsson, R., & Persson Lindgren, S. (2021). The Languages of the Involuntary Celibate: A Study of Online Incel Communities.

Azzopardi, A. (2011). Conceptualising discursive communities: developing community in contemporary society. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, *15*(1), 179-192.

Banet-Weiser, S., & Miltner, K. M. (2016). # MasculinitySoFragile: Culture, structure, and networked misogyny. *Feminist Media Studies*, *16*(1), 171-174.

Banet-Weiser, S. (2018). *Empowered: Popular feminism and popular misogyny*. Duke University Press.

Benigni, M. C., Joseph, K., & Carley, K. M. (2017). Online extremism and the communities that sustain it: Detecting the ISIS supporting community on Twitter. *PloS one*, *12*(12), e0181405.

Bivona, J., & Critelli, J. (2009). The nature of women's rape fantasies: An analysis of prevalence, frequency, and contents. *Journal of sex research*, *46*(1), 33-45.

Bizina, M., & Gray, D. H. (2014). Radicalization of Youth as a Growing Concern for Counter-Terrorism Policy. *Global security studies*, *5*(1).

Blanchard, R., Lykins, A. D., Wherrett, D., Kuban, M. E., Cantor, J. M., Blak, T., ... & Klassen, P. E. (2009). Pedophilia, hebephilia, and the DSM-V. *Archives of sexual behavior*, *38*(3), 335-350.

Blommaert, J., & Bulcaen, C. (2000). Critical discourse analysis. *Annual review of Anthropology*, 447-466.

Bohan, J. S. (1993). Regarding gender: Essentialism, constructionism, and feminist psychology. *Psychology of women quarterly*, *17*(1), 5-21.

Bosley, D. S. (1992). Gender and visual communication: Toward a feminist theory of design. *IEEE transactions on professional communication*, *35*(4), 222-229.

Bratich, J., & Banet-Weiser, S. (2019). From pick-up artists to incels: Con (fidence) games, networked misogyny, and the failure of neoliberalism. *International Journal of Communication*, *13*, 25.

Bruns, A. (2019). After the 'APIcalypse': Social media platforms and their fight against critical scholarly research. *Information, Communication & Society*, *22*(11), 1544-1566.

Butler, J. (1990). Gender trouble, feminist theory, and psychoanalytic discourse. *Feminism/postmodernism*, *327*, x.

Butler, J. (2002). *Gender trouble*. routledge.

Canadian Security Intelligence Service. (2019). *CSIS PUBLIC REPORT 2019*. Government of Canada. https://www.canada.ca/en/security-intelligence-service/corporate/publications/2019-public-report.html

Cerase, A., D'Angelo, E., & Santoro, C. (2016). Monitoring racist and xenophobic extremism to counter hate speech online: Ethical dilemmas and methods of a preventive approach. In *VoxPol Workshop*.

Chen, Q., Chan, K. L., & Cheung, A. S. Y. (2018). Doxing victimization and emotional problems among secondary school students in Hong Kong. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, *15*(12), 2665.

Cho, D., Kim, S., & Acquisti, A. (2012, January). Empirical analysis of online anonymity and user behaviors: the impact of real name policy. In *2012 45th Hawaii international conference on system sciences* (pp. 3041-3050). IEEE.

Chu, A. (2014). From SWIL-ly to Celebrity: The Unlikely Rise to Game Show Success of a Swarthmore Misfit.

Clarke, M. (2009). The discursive construction of interpersonal relations in an online community of practice. *Journal of Pragmatics*, *41*(11), 2333-2344.

Colombo, M., & Senatore, A. (2005). The discursive construction of community identity. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, *15*(1), 48-62.

Costello, M., Hawdon, J., Ratliff, T., & Grantham, T. (2016). Who views online extremism? Individual attributes leading to exposure. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *63*, 311-320

Costrich, N., Feinstein, J., Kidder, L., Marecek, J., & Pascale, L. (1975). When stereotypes hurt: Three studies of penalties for sex-role reversals. *Journal of experimental social psychology*, *11*(6), 520-530.

Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory, and antiracist politics. The University of Chicago Legal Forum, 1989 (1), 139-167. *Chicago, IL*.

Crenshaw, K. (2013). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. In *Feminist legal theories*(pp. 23-51). Routledge.

Dinner, D. (2016). The Divorce Bargain: The Fathers' Rights Movement and Family Inequalities. *Va. L. Rev.*, *102*, 79.

de Coning, A., & Ebin, C. (2022). Men's Rights Activists, Personal Responsibility, and the End of Welfare. In *Male Supremacism in the United States* (pp. 142-163). Routledge.

Dematagoda, U. (2017). Revenge of the nerds: Recidivist masculinity, identity politics and the online 'culture wars'. *Journal of Extreme Anthropology*, *1*(3), 139-148.

Dewey, C. (2014). The only guide to Gamergate you will ever need to read. *The Washington Post*, *14*.

Dignam, P. A., & Rohlinger, D. A. (2019). Misogynistic men online: How the red pill helped elect trump. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, *44*(3), 589-612.

Duvall, S. S. (2020). Too famous to protest: Far-right online community bonding over collective desecration of Colin Kaepernick, fame, and celebrity activism. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, *44*(3), 256-278.

Dynel, M. (2020). Vigilante disparaging humor at r/IncelTears: Humor as critique of incel ideology. *Language & Communication*, *74*, 1-14.

Easteal, P., Holland, K., & Judd, K. (2015, January). Enduring themes and silences in media portrayals of violence against women. In *Women's Studies International Forum* (Vol. 48, pp. 103-113). Pergamon.

Elman, R. A. (1997). Disability pornography: The fetishization of women's vulnerabilities. *Violence Against Women*, *3*(3), 257-270.

Entman, R. M., & Rojecki, A. (1993). Freezing out the public: Elite and media framing of the US anti-nuclear movement.

Farrell, T., Fernandez, M., Novotny, J., & Alani, H. (2019, June). Exploring misogyny across the manosphere in reddit. In *Proceedings of the 10th ACM Conference on Web Science* (pp. 87-96).

Farrell, T., Araque, O., Fernandez, M., & Alani, H. (2020, July). On the use of Jargon and Word Embeddings to Explore Subculture within the Reddit's Manosphere. In *12th ACM Conference on Web Science* (pp. 221-230).

Fernandez, M., & Alani, H. (2021). Artificial intelligence and online extremism: Challenges and opportunities.

Ferrara, E., Wang, W. Q., Varol, O., Flammini, A., & Galstyan, A. (2016, November). Predicting online extremism, content adopters, and interaction reciprocity. In *International conference on social informatics* (pp. 22-39). Springer, Cham.

Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings.* Pantheon Books

Foucault, M. (1981) *The History of Sexuality,* New York, NY: Pantheon Books

Foucault, M. (1984) "FOUCAULT." In *Dictionnaire des philosophes*, pp. 942-944. Retrieved from http://foucault.info/foucault/biography.html

Foucault, M. (1994). 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History' in J. Faubian (ed.), *Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984 Vol. 2* London: Penguin Books pp. 369- 392

Fox, J., Cruz, C., & Lee, J. Y. (2015). Perpetuating online sexism offline: Anonymity, interactivity, and the effects of sexist hashtags on social media. *Computers in human behavior*, *52*, 436-442.

Gabriel, K. (2019). Feminist Revenge: Seeking Justice for Victims of Nonconsensual Pornography through 'Revenge Porn'Reform. *Vt. L. Rev.*, *44*, 849.

Ganesh, B. (2020). Weaponizing white thymos: flows of rage in the online audiences of the alt-right. *Cultural Studies*, *34*(6), 892-924.

Gann-Bociek, M., & Harvey, R. D. (2020). Gender Stereotypes. *Stereotypes: The Incidence and Impacts of Bias*, 175.

Gavey, N. (1989). Feminist poststructuralism and discourse analysis: Contributions to feminist psychology. *Psychology of women quarterly*, *13*(4), 459-475.

Giele, J. Z. (2008). Homemaker or career woman: Life course factors and racial influences among middle class Americans. *Journal of comparative family studies*, *39*(3), 393-411.

Gill, P., Corner, E., Conway, M., Thornton, A., Bloom, M., & Horgan, J. (2017). Terrorist use of the Internet by the numbers: Quantifying behaviors, patterns, and processes. *Criminology & Public Policy*, *16*(1), 99-117.

Gill, R. (2009). Beyond the sexualization of culture 'thesis: An intersectional analysis of sixpacks', midriffs' and hot lesbians' in advertising. *Sexualities*, *12*(2), 137-160.

Gill, S. (1995). Globalization, market civilization, and disciplinary neoliberalism. *Millennium*, *24*(3), 399-423.

Gillespie, T. (2010). The politics of 'platforms'. *New media & society*, *12*(3), 347-364.

Ging, D. (2019). Alphas, betas, and incels: Theorizing the masculinities of the manosphere. *Men and Masculinities*, *22*(4), 638-657.

Ging, D., & Siapera, E. (Eds.). (2019). *Gender hate online: Understanding the New Anti-feminism* (pp. 45-67). Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Golan, G. J., & Lim, J. S. (2016). Third-person effect of ISIS's recruitment propaganda: Online political self-efficacy and social media activism. *International Journal of Communication*, *10*, 21.

Gotell, L., & Dutton, E. (2016). Sexual violence in the 'manosphere': Antifeminist men's rights

    discourses on rape. *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy*, *5*(2),

    65.

Greengard, S. (2012). The war against botnets. *Communications of the ACM*, *55*(2), 16-18.

Guadagno, R. E., Lankford, A., Muscanell, N. L., Okdie, B. M., & McCallum, D. M. (2010).

    Social influence in the online recruitment of terrorists and terrorist sympathizers:

    Implications for social psychology research. *Revue internationale de psychologie*

    sociale, *23*(1), 25-56.

Hall, S., & Du Gay, P. (Eds.). (1996). *Questions of cultural identity: SAGE Publications*. Sage.

Harp, D. (2018). Misogyny in the 2016 US presidential election. In *Mediating Misogyny* (pp.

    189-207). Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.

Hawdon, J., Oksanen, A., & Räsänen, P. (2015). Online Extremism and Online

    Hate. *NORDICOM*, 29.

Harvey, A. (2019). *Feminist media studies*. John Wiley & Sons.

Hearn, J. (2004). From hegemonic masculinity to the hegemony of men. *Feminist theory*, *5*(1),

    49-72.

Helmond, A. (2015). The platformization of the web: Making web data platform ready. *Social*

    media+ society, *1*(2), 2056305115603080.

Herdt, G. (Ed.). (2020). *Third sex, third gender: Beyond sexual dimorphism in culture and*

    history. Princeton University Press.

Hintz, E. A., & Baker, J. T. (2021). A performative face theory analysis of online facework by

    the formerly involuntarily celibate. *International Journal of Communication*, *15*, 20.

Hoffman, B., Ware, J., & Shapiro, E. (2020). Assessing the threat of incel violence. *Studies in*

    Conflict & Terrorism, *43*(7), 565-587.

Holland, J., Ramazanoglu, C., Scott, S., Sharpe, S., & Thomson, R. (1992). Risk, power and the possibility of pleasure: Young women and safer sex. *Aids Care*, *4*(3), 273-283.

Horne, B. D., Adali, S., & Sikdar, S. (2017, July). Identifying the social signals that drive online discussions: A case study of reddit communities. In *2017 26th International Conference on Computer Communication and Networks (ICCCN)* (pp. 1-9). IEEE.

Jones, C., Trott, V., & Wright, S. (2020). Sluts and soyboys: MGTOW and the production of misogynistic online harassment. *New media & society*, *22*(10), 1903-1921.

Kay, J. B. (2021). Abject desires in the age of anger: Incels, femcels and the gender politics of unfuckability. In *Imagining "We" in the Age of "I"* (pp. 29-46). Routledge.

Kelly, C. R., & Aunspach, C. (2020). Incels, compulsory sexuality, and fascist masculinity. *Feminist Formations*, *32*(3), 145-172.

Kendall, L. (2007). " White and Nerdy": Computers, Race, and the Nerd Stereotype.

Knight, R., Shoveller, J. A., Oliffe, J. L., Gilbert, M., Frank, B., & Ogilvie, G. (2012). Masculinities,'guy talk'and 'manning up': a discourse analysis of how young men talk about sexual health. *Sociology of health & illness*, *34*(8), 1246-1261.

Korolczuk, E., & Graff, A. (2018). Gender as "Ebola from Brussels": The anticolonial frame and the rise of illiberal populism. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, *43*(4), 797-821.

Krendel, A. (2020). The men and women, guys and girls of the 'manosphere': A corpus-assisted discourse approach. *Discourse & Society*, *31*(6), 607-630.

Lewis, R., Rowe, M., & Wiper, C. (2017). Online abuse of feminists as an emerging form of violence against women and girls. *British journal of criminology*, *57*(6), 1462-1481.

Lin, N. (2017). Building a network theory of social capital. *Social capital*, 3-28.

Mamié, R., Horta Ribeiro, M., & West, R. (2021, June). Are Anti-Feminist Communities

Gateways to the Far Right? Evidence from Reddit and YouTube. In *13th ACM Web Science Conference 2021* (pp. 139-147)

Manne, K. (2017). *Down girl: The logic of misogyny*. Oxford University Press.

Martin, R. C., & Vieaux, L. E. (2016). 9. The digital rage: How anger is expressed online. In *The Psychology of Social Networking Vol. 2* (pp. 117-127). De Gruyter Open Poland.

Marwick, A. E., & Caplan, R. (2018). Drinking male tears: Language, the manosphere, and networked harassment. *Feminist Media Studies*, *18*(4), 543-559.

Marwick, A., & Lewis, R. (2017). Media manipulation and disinformation online. *New York: Data & Society Research Institute*, 7-19.

Mary, W. (1792). A Vindication of the Rights of Woman. *With An Introduction by Elizabeth Robins Pennell. The Scott Library. London: Walter Scott*, 221-274.

Massanari, A. L. (2015). Participatory culture, community, and play. *Learning from*.

Massanari, A. L. (2016). Contested play: The culture and politics of reddit bots. In *Socialbots and their friends* (pp. 126-143). Routledge.

Massanari, A. L. (2016). "Damseling for Dollars": Toxic Technocultures and Geek Masculinity. In *Race and Gender in Electronic Media* (pp. 312-327). Routledge.

Massanari, A. (2017). # Gamergate and The Fappening: How Reddit's algorithm, governance, and culture support toxic technocultures. *New media & society*, *19*(3), 329-346.

Massanari, A. L., & Chess, S. (2018). Attack of the 50-foot social justice warrior: The discursive construction of SJW memes as the monstrous feminine. *Feminist Media Studies*, *18*(4), 525-542.

Massanari, A. L. (2018). Rethinking research ethics, power, and the risk of visibility in the era of the "alt-right" gaze. *Social Media+ Society*, *4*(2), 2056305118768302.

Masullo Chen, G., Pain, P., & Zhang, J. (2018). # NastyWomen: Reclaiming the Twitterverse from misogyny. In *Mediating misogyny* (pp. 371-388).

Mayberry, L., & Daniel, J. (2016). 'Birthgasm' A Literary Review of Orgasm as an Alternative Mode of Pain Relief in Childbirth. *Journal of Holistic Nursing*, *34*(4), 331-342.

Medina, J. (2014). Campus killings set off anguished conversation about the treatment of women. *The New York Times*, *27*.

Meleagrou-Hitchens, A., Alexander, A., & Kaderbhai, N. (2017). The impact of digital communications technology on radicalization and recruitment. *International Affairs*, *93*(5), 1233-1249.

Messner, M. A. (1998). The limits of "the male sex role" an analysis of the men's liberation and men's rights movements' discourse. *Gender & Society*, *12*(3), 255-276.

Moloney, M. E., & Love, T. P. (2018). Assessing online misogyny: Perspectives from sociology and feminist media studies. *Sociology Compass*, *12*(5), e12577.

Monson, O., Donaghue, N., & Gill, R. (2016). Working hard on the outside: a multimodal critical discourse analysis of The Biggest Loser Australia. *Social Semiotics*, *26*(5), 524-540.

Morris, W., & Bax, E. B. (1896). *Socialism: its growth & outcome* (Vol. 7). S. Sonnenschein.

Mortensen, T. E. (2018). Anger, fear, and games: The long event of# GamerGate. *Games and Culture*, *13*(8), 787-806.

Mullet, D. R. (2018). A general critical discourse analysis framework for educational research. *Journal of Advanced Academics*, *29*(2), 116-142.

Mulvey, L. (2013). Visual pleasure and narrative cinema. In *Feminism and film theory* (pp. 57-68). Routledge.

Naeem, S. B., Bhatti, R., & Khan, A. (2021). An exploration of how fake news is taking over

social media and putting public health at risk. *Health Information & Libraries Journal*, *38*(2), 143-149.

Nagi, K. (2018). New social media and impact of fake news on society. *ICSSM Proceedings, July*, 77-96.

Narayan, U. (1998). Essence of culture and a sense of history: A feminist critique of cultural essentialism. *Hypatia*, *13*(2), 86-106.

Núñez Puente, S., & Gámez Fuentes, M. J. (2017). Spanish feminism, popular misogyny and the place of the victim. *Feminist Media Studies*, *17*(5), 902-906.

O'Donnell, J. (2020). Militant meninism: the militaristic discourse of Gamergate and Men's Rights Activism. *Media, Culture & Society*, *42*(5), 654-674.

O'Malley, R. L., Holt, K., & Holt, T. J. (2020). An exploration of the involuntary celibate (Incel) subculture online. *Journal of interpersonal violence*, 0886260520959625.

Peddinti, S. T., Ross, K. W., & Cappos, J. (2014, October). " On the internet, nobody knows you're a dog" a twitter case study of anonymity in social networks. In *Proceedings of the second ACM conference on Online social networks* (pp. 83-94).

Post, J. M., McGinnis, C., & Moody, K. (2014). The changing face of terrorism in the 21st century: The communications revolution and the virtual community of hatred. *Behavioral sciences & the law*, *32*(3), 306-334.

Prasad, R. (2019). How Trump talks about women-and does it matter. *BBC News*.

Reilly, I. (2018). F for Fake: Propaganda! Hoaxing! Hacking! Partisanship! and Activism! in the fake news ecology. *The Journal of American Culture*, *41*(2), 139-152.

Salter, M. (2016). Men's Rights or Men's Needs? Anti-Feminism in Australian Men's Health Promotion. *Canadian Journal of Women and the Law*, *28*(1), 69-90.

Salter, M. (2018). From geek masculinity to Gamergate: the technological rationality of online

abuse. *Crime, Media, Culture*, *14*(2), 247-264.

Salter, M., & Crofts, T. (2015). Responding to revenge porn: Challenges to online legal
impunity. *New views on pornography: Sexuality, politics, and the law*, 233-256.

Savigny, H. (2020). *Cultural sexism: The politics of feminist rage in the# metoo era*. Bristol
University Press.

Scaptura, M. N., & Boyle, K. M. (2020). Masculinity threat,"incel" traits, and violent fantasies
among heterosexual men in the United States. *Feminist criminology*, *15*(3), 278-298.

Scrivens, R., Wojciechowski, T. W., & Frank, R. (2020). Examining the developmental
pathways of online posting behavior in violent right-wing extremist forums. *Terrorism
and Political Violence*, 1-18.

Showalter, E. (1988). The Other Bostonians: Gender and Literary Study. *The Yale Journal of
Criticism*, *1*(2), 179.

Smith, S., & Dines, G. (2012). Porn and the misogyny emergency. *Overland*, (207), 18-23.

Solanas, V., & Avital, R. (2004). *SCUM manifesto*. Verso.

Squirrell, T. (2018, May 31). *A definitive guide to Incels part two: the A-Z incel dictionary*. Tim
Squirrell, PHD.

https://www.timsquirrell.com/blog/2018/5/30/a-definitive-guide-to-incels-part-two-the-
blackpill-and-vocabulary

Sterba, J. P. (1998). *Justice for here and now*. Cambridge University Press.

Tracy, K., & Dimock, A. (2004). Meetings: Discursive sites for building and fragmenting
community. *Annals of the International Communication Association*, *28*(1), 127-165.

Tranchese, A., & Sugiura, L. (2021). "I don't hate all women, just those stuck-up bitches": How
incels and mainstream pornography speak the same extreme language of
misogyny. *Violence against women*, *27*(14), 2709-2734.

Tuchman, G. (2000). The symbolic annihilation of women by the mass media. In *Culture and politics* (pp. 150-174). Palgrave Macmillan, New York.

Van Dijk, T. A. (2015). Critical discourse analysis. *The handbook of discourse analysis*, 466-485.

Van Valkenburgh, S. P. (2021). Digesting the red pill: Masculinity and neoliberalism in the manosphere. *Men and Masculinities*, *24*(1), 84-103.

Verhagen, T., Nauta, A., & Feldberg, F. (2013). Negative online word-of-mouth: Behavioral indicator or emotional release?. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *29*(4), 1430-1440.

Wasilewski, K. (2019). US alt-right media and the creation of the counter-collective memory. *Journal of Alternative & Community Media*, *4*(1), 77-91.

Weimann, G. (2016). The emerging role of social media in the recruitment of foreign fighters. In *Foreign fighters under international law and beyond* (pp. 77-95). TMC Asser Press, The Hague.

West, C., & Zimmerman, D. H. (1987). Doing gender. *Gender & society*, *1*(2), 125-151. Witt, T. (2020). 'If i cannot have it, i will do everything i can to destroy it.'the canonization of Elliot Rodger:'Incel'masculinities, secular sainthood, and justifications of ideological violence. *Social Identities*, *26*(5), 675-689.

Woodhull, V. C. (1871). *A History of the National Woman's Rights Movement for Twenty Years: With the Proceedings of the Decade Meeting Held at Apollo Hall, October 20, 1870, from 1850 to 1870, with an Appendix Containing the History of the Movement During the Winter of 1871, in the National Capitol*. Journeymen printers' co-operative association.

Young, O. (2019). What Role Has Social Media Played in Violence Perpetrated by Incels?.

Young, R. (2017). *Personal autonomy: beyond negative and positive liberty*. Routledge.

Zhang, X., & Ghorbani, A. A. (2020). An overview of online fake news: Characterization, detection, and discussion. *Information Processing & Management*, *57*(2), 102025.

Zimmerman, D. H. (1998). Identity, context and interaction.