

Author's statement:

This writing project was my final for my Gender & Sexuality anthropology course. In it, we were asked to delve into ANY topic related to gender & sexuality in a creative way. In this paper, I attempted to incorporate the different approaches to writing from different anthropologists we've read and to lean into the ethnographic study angle of anthropology. I believe that using compassion and understanding is primordial to approaching and studying a group of people to whom you are an outsider, so I attempted to do so in this paper.

October 7th, 2022

ANTH 113

### Entering the Incelosphere

Growing up in the Internet age, and being “chronically online”, I am fascinated by the niche and obscure subcultures and phenomena of the internet. From “Bronies” (adult My Little Pony fans), four-hour time-lapses of professional carpet cleaners turning dirty rugs brand new, to the “eel pit guy”, who built an eel ecosystem under his garage and had his viewers name them, I have gone down many internet rabbit holes in search of entertainment. With each deep dive into what the YouTube algorithm Gods bestowed upon me, I collected more badges as a self-proclaimed internet detective. This search to find the strange corners of the internet is how I first came across the incel community.

#### Part 1. Introduction to Inceldom:

Prior to the 2014 Isla Vista killings, where 22-year-old Elliot Rodger murdered six people after releasing a 7-minute-long YouTube manifesto, few people had heard of “incels”.<sup>1</sup> The term incel, short for involuntary celibate, was first coined in 1997 in an online discussion board created with

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<sup>1</sup>Bloom, Mia M. “First Incel?: The Legacy of Marc Lépine.” *The Journal of Intelligence, Conflict, and Warfare* 5, no. 1 (2022): 39–74. <https://doi.org/10.21810/jicw.v5i1.4214>.

the intent of building a space for people who struggled to form sexual relationships.<sup>2</sup> Although the anonymity of the internet poses problems in getting a full perspective on the demographics of these incel discussion boards, in 2001, an investigation interviewing 82 incel respondents over the internet sought to gain more knowledge on the subject.<sup>3</sup> This Georgia State University research indicates that of the participants interviewed, 73% were male, 85% white, and 89% heterosexual, with a broad range of educational backgrounds, from no high school degree to graduate-level education. Although this data demonstrates that a majority of these incels were white men, still, some were women and people of color, presenting the idea that all types of people could find themselves being an incel. However, within the last ten years, the label incel has acquired a new meaning. Instead of a harmless label for lonely men and women struggling to find love, the term incel is now congruent with far-right politics, misogynistic ideas, and violent attacks.

Although websites like Reddit, YouTube, and Facebook, are dedicated to banning all incel dialogue, there are still many more concealed areas of the internet where incels can converse. Notably, websites such as Discord, 4chan, Discussion.app, Incels.wiki, and Incels.is, make up the incelsphere and allow for organized discussion about this new radical form of inceldom amongst people who are, perhaps like myself, chronically online. Within the subsection “Must read content” of the forum Incels.is, a 2018 discussion thread rated 5/5 stars defines being an incel as the following:

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<sup>2</sup> Daly, S.E., Reed, S.M. “I Think Most of Society Hates Us”: A Qualitative Thematic Analysis of Interviews with Incels. *Sex Roles* 86, 14–33 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-021-01250-5>

<sup>3</sup> Donnelly, Denise, Elisabeth Burgess, Sally Anderson, Regina Davis, and Joy Dillard. “Involuntary Celibacy: A Life Course Analysis.” *The Journal of Sex Research* 38, no. 2 (2001): 159–69. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3813706>.

*“a person who wants to be in a loving relationship but is unable to find a partner despite his best effort. Incels want to be loved and give love back. Being ‘incel’ is a state of being, not an identity. It is not a movement, ideology, or behavior, and there is nothing political about it.”<sup>4</sup>*

The gender-neutral terms “a person” and “a partner” that create the illusion of an inclusive space are automatically rendered pointless once the phrase “his best effort” is pronounced. Indeed, despite the disclaimer within the definition above, only a specific kind of person is “allowed” to be incel: a man. Although this definition attempts to refute the claims that being an incel comes with a specific ideology and identity, it also omits a relevant piece of information: online incels have created an entire doctrine through which they view the world. In fact, only five paragraphs down, this very same discussion post also defines various incel theories like “Bluepill”, “Redpill”, and the focus of this paper, “Blackpill”:

*“The Blackpill is a comprehensive, science-based perspective on what matters most in male-female sexual/relationship dynamics. It attempts to describe the objective truth about what men and women truly value most, even when it is not polite to discuss publicly.”<sup>5</sup>*

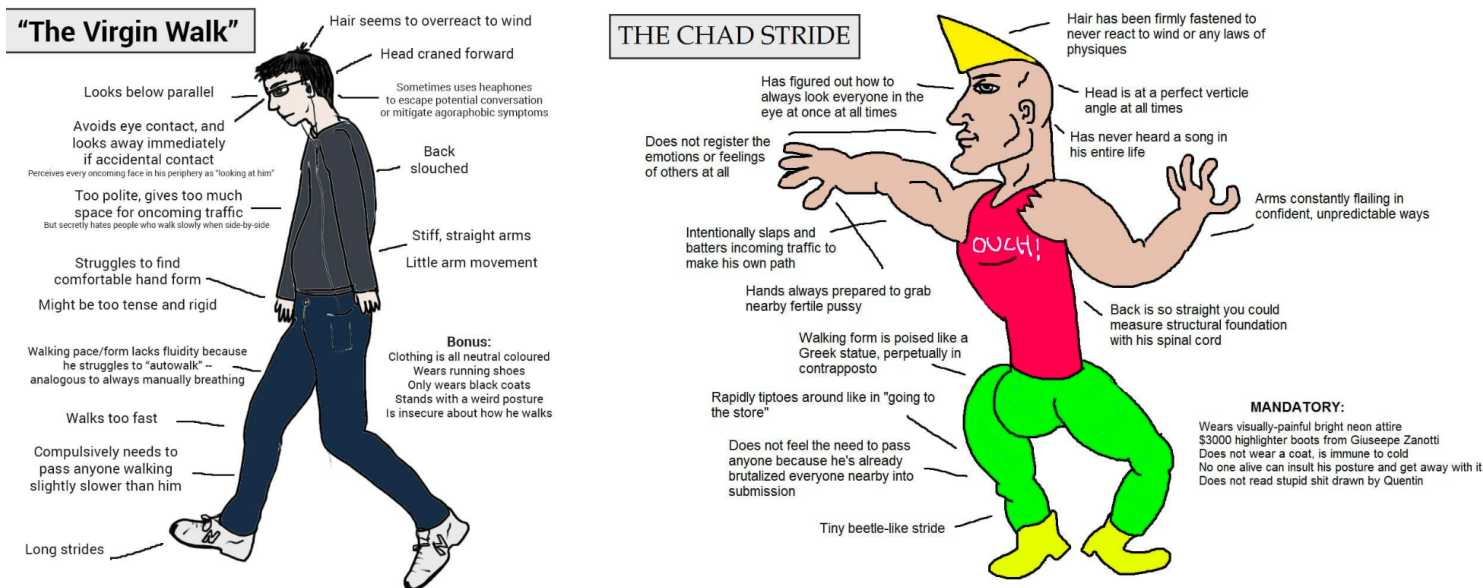
Incels attempt to create “science-based”, “objective truths” about men and women, and use them to fuel their understanding of their own involuntary celibacy, despite the ambiguous and ever-changing nature of the terms “man” and “woman”. A significant and valuable primary source for this research project is the website: incels.wiki. This website is incredibly popular, with 1,379 articles, accessed a total of 6,772,386 times. This Wikipedia copycat provides insight into what a large majority of incels view as objective and scientific.

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<sup>4</sup> “Introduction to Incels”, Must read content, Incels.net, January 18, 2018, <https://incels.is/threads/introduction-to-incels.15406/>

<sup>5</sup> “Introduction to Incels”, 2018

A part of incel nomenclature that will aid our comprehension of incel “blackpill” ideology are the terms: “Chads” and “Betas”. The “Chad”, a derogatory term created in Chicago in the 1990s, is the archetypal handsome, tall, muscular, hypermasculine man who encounters no difficulties in attracting a sexual partner.<sup>6</sup>



This incredibly popular meme sarcastically drawing the distinction between a “Chad” and a “virgin” first appeared in /r9k/ sub on 4chan in 2017

The incel community has attempted to deconstruct Chads in a pseudoscientific, almost physiognomic way. The incel.wiki website lists “hunter eyes with little to no upper eyelid exposure”, “positively or neutrally tilted eyes”, “prominent high cheekbones”, “a large skull”, a “compact midface”, a “long vertical ramus”, and a “gonial angle of approx. 120 degrees”,<sup>7</sup> among many, many, other measurements and specifications for the ultimate “chadlike” face.

<sup>6</sup> Don. “Virgin vs. Chad.” Know Your Meme. Know Your Meme, January 2, 2023.

<https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/virgin-vs-chad>.

<sup>7</sup> “Chad,” Incels.wiki, August 22, 2022, <https://incels.wiki/w/Chad>

The difference between Chad and non-Chad (incel) is literally a few millimeters of bone.



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This is a popular incel diagram used to demonstrate the importance of face structure in the identity of a chad or incel

The “Beta” or “Normie”, unlike the “alpha” Chad, is an average male who is said to “exchange loyalty to alphas in return for alphas not hoarding all of the women”.<sup>9</sup> The Incel Wikipedia lists countless terms, labels, and subcategories with the goal of classifying men within a hierarchy of masculinity.

Within the incelosphere, this hierarchy of masculinity translates into a hierarchy of perceived desirability, and thus their inability to attract a sexual partner is directly linked to their masculinity, which is biologically predetermined. The theory of the “blackpill” can therefore be seen as a type of biological essentialism. These incels have identified and accepted their subordinate role in what they perceive to be an immutable society of hegemonic masculinity,<sup>10</sup> and believe they will forever be undesirable as a result of their biology.

<sup>8</sup> Layko, Alexander. *The First Millimeters of Bone Meme*. Twitter. Twitter, April 21, 2016. <https://twitter.com/alexlayko/status/767454203182657536>.

<sup>9</sup> “Chad,” 2022, <https://incels.wiki/w/Chad>

<sup>10</sup> Ging, D. (2019). Alphas, Betas, and Incels: Theorizing the Masculinities of the Manosphere. *Men and Masculinities*, 22(4), 638–657. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X17706401>

So how does this self-victimization turn into contempt and violence towards women? The link between loneliness and misogyny is not obvious, and yet these incel forums are riddled with posts such as “Women have always been manipulative sluts,”<sup>11</sup> “Women ... are mere machines to make children”,<sup>12</sup> or memes with captions like “To judge thots<sup>13</sup> is up to God, but to send them to him is up to me”<sup>14</sup> attributed to Elliot Rodger (the incel who killed 6 people). Incels have also created terms to classify women: “Stacys”, “femoids”, and “landwhales”. However, unlike their male counterpart, all women (referred to as “femoids” or the contracted “foids”), regardless of their attractiveness are said to be able to form sexual relationships due to their status as women. This perceived privilege is thus the source of the incel’s hatred against women. Incels’ identity is based on their rejection by women, which is paradoxically maintained by their misogynistic attitude.

A point of interest in my research into the incel community was to find at what stage of the incel journey, women turn from an object of desire and longing into a physical manifestation of their hate for society. To answer this question, I decided to ask real incels themselves.

## Part 2. How to Become an Incel (or at least pass as one):

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<sup>11</sup> Paxie, “Women have always been manipulative sluts”, Incels.is, Oct 7, 2022 <https://incels.is/threads/women-have-always-been-manipulative-sluts.416773/>

<sup>12</sup> Deleted member 23450, “Timeless quotes on women” Incels.is, March 24, 2020 <https://incels.is/threads/timeless-quotes-on-women.188582/>

<sup>13</sup> Thot is a slang term for women who are deemed promiscuous and stands for “Thirsty Hoe Over There”

<sup>14</sup> Deleted member 22904 “You forgot the greatest quote of all” Incels.is, March 24, 2020 <https://incels.is/threads/timeless-quotes-on-women.188582/#post-4093069>

To conduct my interviews with incels, I determined that online interviews and forms are the most straightforward ways to connect with incels. Given the comfortable anonymity that comes with being an incel, it is unlikely that any incel would agree to be interviewed in person.

One of the most powerful tools at the disposal of the incel community is its accessibility and anonymity: no country, city, location, or specific time is required to meet and interact with people who identify as incels. If you have access to the internet, you can be submerged in the incelosphere. It's this same accessibility that makes the community of incels vulnerable: anyone can infiltrate their space, regardless of their intentions and identity. Incels have been blocked and chased off many corners of the internet, partly because of people reporting their harmful content. This fear and shame of being discovered and reported by non-incels is the reason this ethnographic study has proven to be difficult, despite the seemingly accessible nature of the incelosphere.

There are many barriers to entry into incel culture which attempt to prevent this intrusion. And so, in my first few efforts to speak with incels, I made many errors. I first created a Google form with questions from “how old are you” to “What role do women play in your identity as an incel?”. I then shared the link to my website on multiple Reddit pages and Discord servers, but I received no responses. Here is the ultimate (and in hindsight obvious) lesson I learned about talking to incels: to interact with members of and contribute to the incelosphere you need to be trusted.

You first need to create an account. In registering your account, answering questions about gender, sexual orientation, and whether you are “bluepilled”,<sup>15</sup> “redpilled”,<sup>16</sup> or “blackpilled”,<sup>17</sup> are required. And yet, this account is not enough to grant you access to posting on the forum, as the computer-generated message: “You have insufficient privileges to post threads here” will appear if you attempt to. Instead, the incels.net website (which has now been banned from the internet) insists you “Visit Bluepill Discussions to gain trust!”. Gaining trust is primordial to have access to the incelosphere, this takes a long time and requires lots of effort to forge. Therefore, it would seem that money, an invitation, or a high status are irrelevant in entering the community of incels, but the willingness to spend time and effort in gaining the trust of others are the real indicators of a true incel.

Given the short time frame of this study, time proved to be the biggest challenge in interacting with incels. Incels in specific Discord servers and forums have been communicating with each other for months, even years, they know each other’s personality, have inside jokes, and remember each other's schedule. This is why, when I naively assumed I could insert myself into the Discord server “it’s ovER” (which is now banned for violating community guidelines), labeled with the tags “incelcore”, “columbine” and the warning “no rules”, asking people to participate in my aforementioned Google Form, I was vehemently rejected. Users were immediately suspicious,

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<sup>15</sup> The Bluepill is an ideology in which an incel believes that everyone is capable of love if they choose kindness and respect when approaching women

<sup>16</sup> The Redpill proposes that people inherently follow a natural order where women are attracted to “alphas” (hypermasculine, wealthy men). Incels, therefore, believe that acquiring wealth, power and going to the gym will increase their status and allow them to find a partner.

<sup>17</sup> People who are blackpilled believe that biology and genetics predetermine your ability to find love

typing “no pfp”<sup>18</sup>, “That’s SUS” and “ip grabber”. Needless to say, the server did not trust me and no one chose to participate. Instead, I was met with “n----” and “jew”, coupled with a picture of BLM protesters raising their fists. Clearly, the “no rules” warning is not decorative.

Instead of creating an external link for people to click on, which seemed to garner suspicion, switching to in-server questions proved to be more successful (also, I learned from my mistake and added a pfp). Sandwiched between the lines of slurs, memes, and pictures of Jeffrey Dahmer, in total, two users responded to my questions, and one of them was particularly generous with his answers (both full interviews are included in the Appendices).

### Part 3. Interviews with Incels:

Anon the 21st (his username implying he has been banned and needed to restart an account 20 times) is an incel from Australia and a self-proclaimed intellectual. He is a frequent participant in the “ask-incels” subsection of the Discord server “Debate incels”. He learned about incels through the online forum “4chan,” one of the most popular anonymous non-censored websites. Despite his reactionary opinions like “the real danger is teens being exposed to porn and lgbtq subversion,” Anon the 21st had some unexpectedly insightful responses to my questions.

**Q:** “I sometimes wonder if the inclination to label and categorize everything we read and see irl kind of reinforces the incel mindset. do you feel like over time it flattens our concept of reality?”

**A:** “yeah you're right, after a few months of being an incel you can't help but see all your irl relationships through the incel lense and categorize them as the various types of high/low tier

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<sup>18</sup> Pfp is an acronym for profile picture

normies<sup>19</sup> i guess. over time it definitely skews your view of the world, same as any other ideology. i am discriminately averse to all female now, scoff at any female problems and refuse contact with them, i guess this pushes me into a bubble further where the mindset can be reinforced”

This surprisingly introspective answer acknowledges inceldom as an ideology and one that is reinforced by the constant categorization of the world and people. Despite this self-awareness, Anon uses the term “pathologically lying npc<sup>20</sup> gender” to refer to and categorize women, who, he deems, have “undeserved privilege”. When I asked him at what point women turned from an object of desire to a target of their hate in the eyes of an incel, Anon started with a disclaimer: “i can't answer for all incels”. Then, he explained clearly, and in detail how “for a lot of other incels it's simply a matter of believing that females are consciously choosing to deny them the key to their happiness (a loving relationship or sex)” which conflicts with the image of “females as the object of giving love”. After providing very introspective comments on the nature of incels and their relationship to women, Anon the 21st and the other discord users returned to their usual conversations, memes, and slurs, unsettlingly carrying on with their identity as online incels without addressing the truth bomb dropped: inceldom skews your world view, actively pushing you deeper into a bubble of misogyny.

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<sup>19</sup> Normies = normal, non incel everyday people

<sup>20</sup> NPC = acronym for non-player character. It suggests that people who are npc's lack critical thought

#### Part. 4: Incels & Violence:

As my introduction to Inceldom revealed, this online radicalization transcends the boundaries of the internet and manifests itself into violence in real life. Since Elliot Rodger's violent attack and suicide in 2014, there have been 24 reported cases of incel violence in North America alone.<sup>21</sup> Of these, 17 happened in the United States, 5 in the United Kingdom, and 2 in Canada. On April 23rd, 2018, Alek Minassian, committed one of the deadliest incel attacks. Before killing 11 women, Minassian posted a message on Facebook in which he wrote: "The Incel Rebellion has already begun! We will overthrow all the Chads and Stacys! All hail the Supreme Gentleman Elliot Rodger!".<sup>22</sup> Given this written motive it is clear that the online incelosphere with its incessant misogyny and reinforcement of a hierarchy of masculinity can be effectively defined as a cesspool for radicalization. Just like Anon the 21st (our incel interviewee) described, the incelosphere pushes you deeper into a bubble and skews your world view.

An even more prevalent form of incel violence is that of suicide. According to a 2020 online survey performed on the website incels.co, where 665 respondents answered over 40 questions, 74.1% responded that they experienced "anxiety, stress or emotional distress 'in a constant manner'".<sup>23</sup> In an earlier 2019 poll, 67.5% of incels had reported having "considered suicide in a serious manner".<sup>24</sup> These bleak statistics paint a grim but unsurprising picture of the effects of incel radicalization,

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<sup>21</sup> "Incels (Involuntary Celibates)." ADL. Center on Extremism, September 29, 2022. <https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounder/incels-involuntary-celibates>.

<sup>22</sup> Bacon, John. "Incel: What It Is and Why Alek Minassian Praised Elliot Rodger." USA Today. Gannett Satellite Information Network, April 26, 2018. <https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2018/04/25/incel-what-and-why-alek-minassian-praised-elliott-rodger/549577002/>.

<sup>23</sup> "Online Poll Results Provide New Insights into Incel Community." ADL. Bias, Discrimination & Hate, September 10, 2020. <https://www.adl.org/resources/blog/online-poll-results-provide-new-insights-incel-community>.

<sup>24</sup> "Online Poll Results..." ADL. September 10, 2020.

and the Reddit user u/incegraveyard who collects and posts incel suicide notes can corroborate this image. This user, who uses a painting of Hitler with the words “It’s over” across it as his profile picture, has compiled over 94 incel suicide notes (although they have been inactive the last three years).<sup>25</sup> These notes range from just a few words to thousands of words, detailing their methods and motives for their suicide.

After all, the “Blackpill” ideology leads to a tunnel of hate and hopelessness. The incel community inherently attracts people who are insecure and lonely, but instead of providing a solution to their problem, the conclusion blackpill inceldom leads to is that they will never be loved because of the way they look and that is the fault of all women. There is no hope, no light at the end of the incel tunnel.

It would seem that in my endless search for internet entertainment, I unwittingly stumbled upon one of the darkest, most sickening, and most tragic sides of the internet. Perhaps the most terrifying part of it all is that finding it is easy and free: life-ruining content at the click of a mouse.

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<sup>25</sup> Daly, Sarah E., and Albina Laskovtsov. “‘Goodbye, My Friendcels’: An Analysis of Incel Suicide Posts.” *Journal of Qualitative Criminal Justice & Criminology*, November 3, 2021. <https://www.qualitativecriminology.com/pub/z1961qto/release/1#the-function-of-the-internet>.

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## Appendices

### 1. Interview with Anon the 21st on the discord server "Debate Incels"

**Q:** How did you come across incels?

**A:** "4chan lead me here i think"

**Q:** "I sometimes wonder if the inclination to label and categorize everything we read and see irl kind of reinforces the incel mindset. do you feel like over time it flattens our concept of reality?"

**A:** "yeah you're right, after a few months of being an incel you can't help but see all your irl relationships through the incel lense and categorize them as the various types of high/low tier normies i guess. over time it definitely skews your view of the world, same as any other ideology. i am discriminately averse to all female now, scoff at any female problems and refuse contact with them, i guess this pushes me into a bubble further where the mindset can be reinforced"

**Q:** "where do you think the initial desire for females turns into hate against them?"

**A:** "eh i can't answer for all incels, but i think the dedshire for females is what lead me to noticing them and paying attention to a collective of humans i'd otherwise have nothing in common with. after studying this group and realizing certain truths, i began to reflect on my intial idolization of females (and love) that was instilled on me by society. for example social values teach us that women are loving and empathetic, equal in ability to me, a prize meant to be chased and won over. after reserarch i discovered these tenants couldn't be further frmom the truth, and my confusion as to why this pathologically lying npc gender was held in such high regard by society and the males around me, combined with the notion that they held undeserved privilege made me begin to feel hateful"

**A:** "will admit for a lot of other incels it's simply a matter of believing that females are consciously choosing to deny them the key to their happiness (a loving relationship or sex)"

A: “i guess they conceptualize the duality of females as the object of giving love, but also as the ruthless.selectors(sic) who use their status to deny entire groups of low tier men the chance of ever reaching fulfillment”

2. Interview with user “flaws,” an administrator on the discord server “it’s ovER”

Q: How did you come across the term incels?

A: “my best friend was one

Is\*

Well

My ex best friend is one

That’s better”

Q: “So did you relate to what incels were saying? is that why you joined?”

A: “Yes I relate in a lot of ways”