

THE BLACKPILL AND THE SUFFERING APPARATUS: SCIENCE, MASCULINITY, AND
RACE AS REPRESENTED ON INVOLUNTARY CELIBATE (INCEL) VIRTUAL FORUMS

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Summary Abstract

This virtual ethnography considers the apparent motivations leading men to embrace involuntary celibacy (incel) as an ideology and a mode of existence. Incel describes an online community whose members define themselves as perpetually undesirable, which they attribute to genetic determinism and a disturbance of patriarchal norms in the West. The setting for this study is incels.co, the primary online forum for mutual engagement of self-proclaimed incels. Using mixed-methods discourse analysis, I assess representations of scientific literature, masculinity, and race in incels.co discourse. In particular, I demonstrate how incels.co users invoke contemporary scholarship to authorize their beliefs on biological determinism and female mate choice. I contend that centering on women's appraisal of male desirability allows incels to construct masculine ontologies distinguished by sexual appeal. Incels.co users reinforce these masculine boundaries through positive and negative identity practices, by positively framing inceldom as a negation of agency and negatively distancing themselves from "top-tier" men. Finally, I demonstrate how racial logics variously embed in incels.co users' construction of the incel ontology, either recursively distinguishing its members from one another along racial lines or uplifting inceldom as an identity that transcends racial categorization. Collectively, each investigative category—science, masculinity, and race—entangles with the suffering apparatus, a term I apply to the discursive machinery that evaluates, legitimizes, and valorizes expressions of suffering on incels.co.

Introduction

On February 24, 2020, a 17-year-old boy broke into a Toronto massage spa and murdered one woman, maiming another. The gruesome attack quickly fell out of public discussion until May 22nd, when Canadian authorities announced the homicide was being treated as a terrorist attack. According to Canadian officials, the subject took inspiration from an online subculture defined by an intense hatred of women, the “incel movement” (Culver 2020).

The February spa murder was not the first incel-related killing. In April of 2018, a 25-year old Toronto student rented a van and began striking pedestrians in the city’s business district. Despite the chaotic manner of his attack, the killer’s targeting was relatively precise. Eight of the ten murdered and the majority of the additional 16 injured were women (Beauchamp 2018). Moments before taking to the streets, the killer posted a manifesto on his public Facebook account: “The Incel Rebellion has already begun!” (Beauchamp 2018).

I begin with these anecdotes because they grant an immediacy to my work. In the broadest sense, this project seeks to understand incels on their own terms; that is, what makes inceldom a compelling ideology and ontological category for its adherents. An ethnographic approach makes these questions permissible by prioritizing the articulations of experience on incel forums.

A Brief History of Inceldom

A portmanteau of “involuntary celibacy,” the term incel describes an online community whose members define themselves as being irrevocably undesirable. The incel worldview, conceptualized as the blackpill, rests on two mutually constitutive tenets: that society is best understood as a hierarchy of attractiveness and that women are responsible for male stratification

within the hierarchy (Hoffman et al 2020). In incel canon, women are innately shallow and lust after men possessing attractive physical characteristics, which arise exclusively from genetics. The supposed easing of cultural restrictions on premarital sex in recent history has allowed these “top-tier” men to monopolize the sex market, leaving those with worse genotypic quality to suffer from romantic rejection. Incels are those who fall so low in the attractiveness hierarchy that they become doomed to languish in sexual and romantic isolation. “Taking the blackpill” acknowledges that life is a genetic lottery, that Western society is defined by societal misandry for “low-tier” men, and that the possibility of “ascending” out of incelism is unimaginable.¹

Inceldom takes its name from a 1997 blogsite created by a Canadian undergraduate student “Alana”, who founded a virtual outlet to vent her difficulties with dating. “Alana’s involuntary celibacy project,” later shortened to incel, became a sanctuary for people of all genders to share their experiences of sexual and romantic alienation (Hoffman, et al 2020). From her own perspective, Alana considered the site a rehabilitative group for the shy and awkward who struggled in a romantic field: “[site users] were kind of lacking those social skills and I had a lot of sympathy for that because I had been through the same situation” (Kassam 2018). Alana stopped participating in her online forum around the year 2000, and with her departure passed site ownership to a follower of the page (Kassam 2018). In her wake, the term incel spread diffusely across cyberspace, finding uptake on sites like Reddit and 4chan, or inspiring offshoots of its own. Inceldom began to diverge into two, mutually unintelligible factions: one that provided advice for the romantically frustrated as originally envisioned, and another that

¹ The Blackpill represents a more sinister ideology than the Redpill, a uniting belief of virtual antifeminist groups that purports Western society is defined by misandry. The Red Pill analogy refers to the 1999 film *The Matrix*. Near the end of the film, the protagonist Neo is offered the choice of a red pill and a blue pill. Taking the red pill would allow Neo to “wake up” and live in the “truth of reality,” which is a cruel but honest life. The blue pill would allow Neo to continue in a state of ignorant bliss.

increasingly centered on militant declarations of antifeminism (Hoffman et al 2020). The more supportive variety found a home on the website IncelSupport, which branded itself as a gender-inclusive, feminist space for sexual and romantic novices. Though popular in the late 2000s, membership on IncelSupport decayed until the site closed permanently in 2013 (Bratich and Banet-Weiser 2019). The more hostile strand of inceldom emanated from love-shy.com (LoveShy), an overwhelmingly male province whose moderators were less stringent in removing misogynistic posts. LoveShy forums became a precursor to contemporary expressions of inceldom, focusing on the features that prohibited men from attaining sex through a grammar of biological determinism (Hoffman et al 2020). Incel identity began to solidify with more violent contours, and this new brand increasingly settled on Reddit and 4Chan. By 2014, Reddit emerged as the preferred platform for incels after LoveShy's moderators became stricter in censoring content (Bratich and Banet-Weiser 2019). The subreddit r/incels boasted 40,000 active members before its closure in 2016 for violating Reddit policies against inciting violence (Ribeiro et al 2020). Incels.me (now incels.co)—a privately administered forum—and r/Braincels were born out of this closure, but r/Braincels later suffered the same fate as r/incels in October of 2019.²

Inceldom first entered popular discussion in the wake of a 2014 murder spree, when 22-year-old Elliot Rodger killed six people in Isla Vista, California near UC Santa Barbara. Prior to the killing, Rodger posted an online manifesto to his YouTube page in which he outlined his motives for the attack (Larkin 2018). Here, Rodger promised vengeance upon all women as punishment for those who scorned his romantic advances: “I don't know what you don't see in

² The r/Braincels subreddit was closed in the weeks leading up to the release of the *Joker* movie in North America and Europe. The US Military and FBI released a warning to personnel that the film could incite incel-inspired mass violence, given the Joker's veneration among incel forums as a societal outcast who challenges authority (Cameron 2019)

me. I'm the perfect guy and yet you throw yourselves at these obnoxious men instead of me, the supreme gentleman" (Garvey 2014). At the time, the term "incel" was still unfamiliar to mainstream circles, but Rodger's manifesto generated wider public scrutiny. Although not involved in incel forums himself, Rodger became a martyr-like figure to budding incel forums on Reddit. Site users glorified the "supreme gentleman" for initiating the "incel rebellion" and lauded his kill count (Ging 2017). At times ironic and other times earnest, these eulogies attracted widespread censure for incel communities, which flowered in Rodger's memory (Hoffman et al 2020).

Inceldom constitutes one point in the present constellation of "Manosphere" communities. Broadly, the term Manosphere represents a collection of "niche" virtual forums, blogs, and websites that hold a common interest in preserving masculinity from perceived feminist attacks (Ribeiro et al 2020). Scholars tend to treat the Manosphere as the online expression of the Men's Rights Movement (MRM), which emerged in tandem with the Women's Liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s as a parallel critique of the "male sex role" (Coston and Kimmel 2013, 368). While initially an exploration of the ways in which masculinity constrained and limited men, the Men's Liberation movement eventually fractured into a series of ideologically distinct factions. The most radical of these groups would reorganize in opposition to feminist critiques of rape culture, domestic violence, and male privilege. Since the surfacing of the internet, MRM has increasingly concentrated in virtual space, inspiring the name Manosphere as a descriptor of online MRM sensibilities (Ribeiro et al 2020). Although diffuse in explicit motives, the distinct groupings of the Manosphere hold in common the belief that feminism propagates a pervasive untruth. Manospherians believe men are not actually privileged but oppressed by feminist hegemony. This belief of "male oppression" coalesces into the

“Redpill” ideology, which broadly characterizes the Manosphere’s orientation toward feminism and the world (Ging 2017). Though united by a common perception of masculine threat, the Manosphere can be deconstructed into four disparate groupings: Men’s Rights Activists (MRA), pick-up artists (PUAs), Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW), and Incels. Scholars treat incelism as the most hostile of these manosphere taxonomies, and Ribeiro et al (2020) find in their digital archaeology of Manosphere sites that users are abandoning tamer groups like PUAs in favor of incelism and MGTOW.³

Motivations for Studying Inceldom

Why study incels? For one, academic engagement with incelism remains sparse despite an explosion of mainstream coverage. Since 2014, journalists and bloggers have increasingly scrutinized online incel communities, offering headlines such as: “Our incel problem: How a support group for the dateless became one of the internet’s most dangerous subcultures” (Beauchamp 2019) and “Men are in Trouble. ‘Incels’ are Proof” (Emba 2019). The term “incel” has recently appeared in popular media to describe pathetic or creepy boys and men, like in HBO’s series *Euphoria* (2019). Despite growing popularity among mainstream circles, this coverage has not coincided with a parallel rise in academic theorizing. As of 2020, few academics have engaged directly with incel communities. Scholars who study online antifeminism and misogyny tend to conceptualize the Manosphere more broadly, rather than focus on particular factions like incels or MGTOW (Ging 2017, Ribeiro et al 2020, Lilly 2016). Others (Hoiland 2016, Jaki et al 2019, Hoffman et al 2020) are beginning to assess incelism

³ MRAS focus on men-related social issues and institutions, which they argue discriminate against men. MGTOWs believe Western society is rigged against men, and they advocate that men should abstain from relationships with women. PUAs are interested in the techniques, strategies, and mindsets that help men pick up women (Ribeiro et al 2020).

more specifically, but this scholarship tends to focus on the incidence of extreme language on incel forums, rather than how blackpill epistemologies become constructed from interaction. Missing from this analysis is attention to the affective surges that charge incel writings with emotional salience. If we are interested in why certain men are attracted to incel ideology, greater emphasis must be placed on individual articulations of experience found on incel forums.

Some might question the value in studying purportedly “extremist” communities. Why study a group so obviously formed as a backlash to feminist advancement: one that is uniquely violent but ultimately inconsequential to more “normal” flows of society? Such reasoning relegates inceldom to the position of a “fringe” discourse, which is an artificial designation that I challenge in my thesis. Certainly, inceldom can be extreme in its misogyny and racism, and this rhetoric undoubtedly produces material violence, but such framings obfuscate how the same discourses that legitimate inceldom manifest in the popular majority. Using sexual competence as a measure of masculine worth is not unique to inceldom. Categorizing Asian men as desexualized is not unique to inceldom. Shaming women for their sexual preferences is not unique to inceldom. The goal of this project is—in part—to understand how more mainstream understandings of evolution, attraction, masculinity, and race take shape in incel communities. Studying inceldom presents a unique opportunity, given the ideology refracts boarder discourses of power that become sanitized in more popular circles. It is this process of refraction that I investigate in my project: how mainstream discourses bend as they filter in and out of the incel world.

Research Aims and Project Outline

My inspiration for this project was born out of a desire to understand the *why* of incelism: why is the blackpill an attractive ideology for its adherents? Part of this engagement must answer, not only the *why*, but also the *how*: how is incelism represented on its own terms? To this end, I investigated how incelism is presented in its own communities, and I deconstructed this inquiry along three lines: science, masculinity, and race.

- 1) How is scientific literature—on evolution, genetics, partner preference psychology— instantiated in incel discourse? How does scientific discourse catalyze incel conceptions of the self and society?
- 2) How is masculinity represented in incel discourse? How do incels view themselves in relation to other men, how are these boundaries constructed, and to what degree do they take on emotional salience?
- 3) How do broader narratives on race embed in incel conceptions of the self? How do these narratives interface with the blackpill's fatalism and evaluation of incels' suffering?

Outlining the broad representations of incelism makes the diversity of individual attachments to its tenets visible. My goal is to oscillate between global representations of incelism and the apparent internal motivations of those who find solace in its prescriptions.

My project is parsed into five chapters. Chapter I outlines my methodological approach— virtual ethnography—and gives consideration to the ways in which cyberspace unsettles conventional modes of ethnographic inquiry. Chapter II addresses the incel scientific canon, the blackpill, and how incels.co users invoke scientific discourse in their forum writings. Chapter III looks at incel conceptions of masculinity and focuses on how incels create ontological categories

of existence rooted in masculine desirability. Such inquiry examines how incels.co users negotiate the torturous experience of submitting to the female gaze, which organizes the purported hierarchy of attractiveness that underwrites Western society. Chapter IV focuses on racial narratives circulating on incels.co, and how these ideologies embed in the incel discursive machinery that valorizes suffering. Chapter V concludes my project and offers future directions in the study of inceldom.

Theoretical Orientations

I offer four theoretical pillars to contextualize my engagement with incels: community, performativity, subjectivity, and affect. These orientations offer a brief overview of how I define the boundaries of the incel community, and how I interpret the actions, behaviors, and apparent motivations of its members.

Community

Part of the difficulty in defining inceldom stems from its diffuse manifestation across cyberspace. Virtual blackpill forums crop up and disappear in short order, and blackpill expressions distill into more popular sites like Facebook and Twitter. Over the course of its lifetime, inceldom has mutated across numerous sites, such as Reddit, 4Chan, LoveShy, and now incels.co. Each of these developments brings new transformations to blackpill ideology and local community practices. These considerations trouble efforts to demarcate the incel community, given its wide and variable breadth.

To account for this range, I define inceldom as an imagined community with dense sites of interaction. I understand imagined communities in roughly the same terms offered by

Benedict Anderson to describe the nation state as an imagined political nexus. For Anderson, nation is imagined because “the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (1991, 6-7). Here, imagination is useful in defining identities and groups that become detached from mutual engagement. Beyond imagined, nations also represent communities because they describe a horizontal camaraderie despite inequalities of power. “Community” frames how national identity can offer a sense of belonging to its citizens against the hierarchical and widespread distribution of the nation state. In light of Anderson’s theorizing, inceldom emerges as an imagined community that diffusely manifests across the internet, which unites men by a fraternal bond rooted in a common experience of perceived undesirability. Of course, inceldom is more than (just) imagined because its members mutually engage on particular sites like incels.co. The discrete boundaries of webpages, then, offer a means of locating inceldom in “place” (Boellstroff 2015). These considerations of setting are elaborated in Chapter I and Chapter II.

Performativity

In the broadest sense, the incel identity represents a discursive position of masculinity that individuals embrace through prescribed social resources. I understand masculinity in the terms provided by Kimmel and Bridges (2011), as a socially constructed set of behaviors, social roles, and relations that describe “what it means to be a man” and “how one becomes a man.” These understandings of masculinity take lead from Judith Butler’s (1999) seminal work on performativity, which describes how social and linguistic acts create gender identity against a backdrop of structural constraints. By rejecting gender as an essential ontological category,

performativity detaches gender from something one possesses, and emphasizes the acts and signifiers that create an impression of gender as fixed. Language figures heavily into this process of defining the self, as it offers the primary mechanism by which individuals claim discursive positions of gender. Put differently, gender does not precede its articulation through language and interaction (Cameron and Kulick 2003).

To say individuals “do” masculinity does not imply the existence of one global masculine model to which people assimilate. Masculinity is better conceptualized as a multiplicity of performances enacted by different people across and within cultures (Kimmel and Bridges 2011). These diffuse performances can vary along four axes: over history, across culture, intra-personally, and contextually (Kimmel and Bridges 2011). More than recognizing the diversity of masculinities, such framings emphasize how masculine performances gain meaning through the relationships between them. This notion invites inquiry into a more intersectional analysis: how various masculinities become meaningful through alliances, domination, or subordination of others, and how “being a man” interfaces with race, class, ability, socioeconomic standing, and other features of identity.⁴

This project is rooted in a performative reading of gender, which understands that masculinities are made comprehensible through signifiers and are reproduced at the individual and institutional level. Questioning how incels represent masculinity and carve its various boundaries calls attention to the expressions on incel forums that normalize masculine

⁴ The diffuse manifestations of masculinity are ultimately subordinate to the hegemonic man. As Kimmel writes, “hegemonic masculinity is the standard against which other masculinities are judged: it frames white, middle or upper-class, early middle-aged, heterosexual, and able-bodied men” as naturally superior (Kimmel 1994, 125). Hegemonic masculinity emerges as a means of maintaining, legitimating, and naturalizing the interests of certain men while subordinating others, notably women gay men (Coates 2001). Of course, different models of hegemony exist within local communities of practice. In this sense, it is critical to pay attention to local practices of masculinity and how these performances borrow from or challenge broader understandings of “hegemonic masculinity.” These ideas will be addressed in Chapter III.

categories. Performativity orients this research, as it attunes to the mechanisms through which incelness is represented as discursive position of masculinity and how individuals agentively claim this position through language.

Political subjectivity

Most research on incel communities has focused on the incidence of violent language within forum postings (Jaki et al 2019 and Hoffman et al 2020). While these analyses produce important conclusions on incel rhetoric, they tend to subsume individual motivations and sentiments in relation to incelness under broader cultural abstractions. To remedy these globalizing perspectives, I highlight political subjectivity to orient my research. Political subjectivity examines the embedded nature of subjective experience within broader cultural scripts. Biehl, Good, and Kleinman offer a compelling case for the necessity of such a concept in

Subjectivity: Ethnographic Encounters, arguing:

Theories of subjectivity are too often overstated, obscure, and even dehumanizing. People who are subject to the most profound human experiences- suffering massive violence and incomprehensible cruelty, the routine degradation of poverty and despair, the terrors of madness and life-threatening disease, or even facing the impossible dilemmas of providing care... have too often been transformed into remote abstractions, discursive forms, or subject positions (2007, 13).

As a theoretical orientation, subjectivity links lived experience to broader political, economic, and historical forces. It serves as a foundation for assessing the entanglement of abstract cultural patterns with the intimacy of lived experience. Rather than veil lived realities under the guise of discourse or abstraction, political subjectivity attends to what matters most to individuals: how people construct meaning and significance in their lives against structural constraints (Biehl, Good, and Kleinman 2007). In this sense, subjectivity invites ethnographic inquiries that privilege lived reality—in all its complexities—over discourse.

In this project, I pull from political subjectivity as a means of vitalizing incel ideology. In analyzing the articulations of experience on blackpill forums, I emphasize how individuals actively construct incel epistemologies and identity from online interaction. There is an element of irony here, given that incel status is explicitly defined by a striking absence of agency. The blackpill purports that genetics and societal misandry have essentially shackled “low-status” men to a condition of imprisonment. Ascension—transcending the life of incelhood—is treated as an impossible reality for those bound by terminal genetic constraints. In my thesis, I consider how incels discursively construct themselves as lacking agency, and what they do with this information.

Affect: The discursive and affective machinery that legitimates incel suffering

The affective turn in social theory describes the movement away from studying culture as it is literally and semantically represented, and toward assessing how the world is understood outside of cognition. Affect theory considers the “forces of encounters” that constitute what is “beneath, alongside, or generally other than conscious knowing that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought, and by extension, can likewise suspend us” (Gregg and Seigworth 2010, 1). By pointing to the ways in which bodies are culturally situated, affect theory attends to how broader forces impact the body and its affective surges to the world. It appreciates the way sentiment, affect, and emotion reflect how people are entangled in broader cultural paradigms.

I invoke affect theory to orient my research toward the articulations of suffering on incel forums. Inceldom—at its core—is a desperate attempt to make sense of lives deemed inherently meaningless. It starts with the realization that incels’ dejection will inevitably persist, that there exists little hope of overcoming the genetic and societal obstacles from which incelhood arises.

An approach centered in affect theory turns to how this suffering is represented in incel writings, how it is valorized, and how it is deployed to construct the incel community. It prompts questions of how scientific literature, race, and masculine ideals embed within this negotiation of psychic misery. I define this discursive machinery that permits, evaluates, and valorizes expressions of suffering as the “suffering apparatus.”

Chapter I: Methods

Background on Ethnography

The method I have chosen is virtual ethnography, a qualitative approach to data collection in online communities. Like its offline equivalent, virtual ethnography aims to untangle the deeper reasons for behaviors and sentiments within specified groups (Skageby 2011). In this sense, virtual ethnography offers an effective means of collecting data on incel rhetoric and community interaction. This virtual ethnography engages with the online forum incels.co.

Without ethnography, cultural anthropology as a discipline lacks vibrancy. Any attempt to represent human behavior and culture requires an appreciation of complexity, contradiction, and the inexplicable. Ethnography—as a method, writing practice, and theory—is an attempt to contend with the diversity of ways people live in and understand the world. (McGranahan 2018). Carole McGranahan provides a compelling framing of this “ethnographic” ethos in

“Ethnography Beyond Method: The Importance of an Ethnographic Sensibility.” She writes

The ethnographic is a culturally-grounded way of both being in and seeing the world. It is both ontological and epistemological. It is all that goes without saying in terms of what is considered normative or natural, and yet is also the very rules and proclaimed truths – about the way things are, and the way they should be – that underlie both everyday and ritual beliefs and practices. The ethnographic consists of the rhythms and logics through which we, in socio-cultural groups, collectively make, and make sense of, the world. In terms of theory, the ethnographic drives theory through its attention to disjuncture, to things that cannot be translated, to conceptual excess that is both taken for granted and expected in local contexts. As such, it precedes and responds to theory, and is not merely fodder for it. (2018, 2)

All this is to say that ethnographic engagement is more than (just) a method, but something that strikes at the essence of anthropological thought. Ethnography grapples with the complexities and ambiguities of life as it is culturally situated. It attends to the messy, the contradictory, the ethically challenging, and it succeeds when it makes these complexities visible on the page or the

screen. Rather than represent culture in stark, overly positivist terms, ethnography amplifies the intricacies of ways in which people move through their communities and their worlds.

As a method, anthropological ethnography is rooted in participant-observation, wherein researchers' practice of community immersion generates the "data" for analysis. Ethnography is dependent on cultivating a sense of "being there," of participating fully in communities of study rather than just observing from the margins (McGranahan 2018). Interpersonal relationships and engagement constitute the basis of the ethnographer's knowledge-production, as participant-observation requires researchers to implicate their subjective selves in the research process (McGranahan 2018). Sherry Ortner (1995, 41-42) outlines this positioning as an "attempt to understand another life world using the self – as much as it of possible – as the instrument of knowing." Ethnography thus blurs the borders between epistemology and ontology, as it constitutes both a means of "knowing" and a way of "being" that become mutually interdependent (McGranahan 2018).

The Challenges of Virtual Ethnography

Virtual ethnography transcribes conventional strategies of ethnographic inquiry into a cyberspace setting (Skageby 2011). The problem with such a methodological transformation is undeniable: forum conversation does not represent a perfect recapitulation of offline intersubjective experience. So much of what constitutes meaning offline—tone, embodied gesture, pitch, affective expression—is erased in the jump to cyberspace. Into its place steps a suite of novel unspoken signifiers—profile pictures, memes, emojis—that creates new ways of imbuing messages with significance. Virtual forum conversation detaches from the immediate, incorporating the voices of tens, even hundreds of people in an asynchronous stream of

communication. Most notably, virtual ethnography presents a challenge to the ethnographic practice of “being there.”⁵ This is especially true for my engagement with incel culture, as I did not speak with any incels.co users in any capacity. Although I wished to, such a task would have been nearly impossible to undertake and could have proved dangerous. As an ethnographer, this challenge is immediately apparent: I am not embedded in the community that I study. Instead, I remain an outsider, a silent observer of incel culture. Such positioning recalls images of the removed, arm-chair anthropologist parsing through traveler’s accounts in order to construct an understanding of others. Describing this type of engagement as ethnography is thus unsettling. If ethnography is dependent upon the researcher’s commitment to intersubjective experience, how can such a task be accomplished with this requirement of anonymity?

Rather than treat this distance as an obstacle to overcome, I see it more as an opportunity that matches the unique nature of the virtual community I have chosen to study. As an epistemologist, I take the role of “lurker”, or an eavesdropper privately scrolling through incels.co threads like any curious onlooker might do. I sit alone at my computer, haphazardly moving through walls of text in search of items that catch my attention. This situated position is not dissimilar from what site users might experience in their browsing of incels.co. Most users remain completely anonymous behind usernames with no connection to an offline identity. Save for the moderators and frequent posters, most individuals are unrecognizable to those with whom they are mutually engaged. There is no mechanism of direct messaging on the forum (except to notify moderators), and no manner of communication outside of asynchronous forum posting. So

⁵ Perhaps the most comprehensive example of virtual ethnography is Tom Boellstorff’s *Coming of Age in Second Life*, which engages with the Second Life (SL) virtual world. SL users create virtual representations of themselves and are able to interact with places, objects, and other users. They can explore the world, meet other residents, socialize, and participate in group activities. In this sense, SL more closely approximates a synchronous offline community than an asynchronous virtual forum does, so Boellstorff’s work is of limited use in shaping my virtual engagement.

while I am not “embedded” in incels.co interaction, I believe I am still “immersed” in the community in a way that might mimic some of its user base. I believe there is a comfort in this relative anonymity, as it facilitates more intimate conversations about self-hatred, disappointment, and anger that might not manifest in a less private setting.

Although my engagement does not rely on participant-observation, I seek to cultivate an “ethnographic sensibility” in my writing. By ethnographic sensibility I mean that I attend to incels.co users’ complexities, expectations, contradictions, suspicions, and possibilities as grounds for animating incel culture (McGranahan 2018). Rather than represent inceldom in global terms (though this is at times necessary), I seek to find the diversity of access points through which individuals embrace its tenets and grapple with its prescriptions. My task is to piece together a coherent narrative from the fragmentary articulations of experience on incels.co, to show how inceldom comes to embed in the psychological experience of its heterogeneous members. Occasionally, this effort leads to more conclusive findings about the nature of inceldom, about the language and sentiments that circulate on incel forums and build the incel identity. But the conclusions I draw are always partial and constructed from my own experience in “reading” the online engagement of complete strangers. Thus, I preempt my analysis with a note of caution: ethnography is never final, and the findings I present are in part limited by my lack of intimate engagement with incels.co members.

Positionality: The Body Project

As Rosaldo (1993) and numerous others have shown, what an ethnographer “reads” is—in part—inseparable from their own embeddedness in the community of study. That I did not speak directly with individuals does not circumvent this reality. My own biases and experiences

inform my “reading” of the selected documents, and the conclusions I am able to draw are contingent upon my own set of experiences in the world. Personally, I cannot remember when I first learned of the term “incel,” but I remember feeling abhorred by rhetoric I perceived as so clearly connected to manifest violence. The at times extreme misogyny, racism, and homophobia of incel writings has made it difficult to appreciate the complexity of articulations on incels.co, and this is a challenge I have struggled with throughout the project.

The more I learned about inceldom, however, the more it became recognizable to me on a personal and societal level. The blackpill offers a diagnosis for one’s perception of undesirability; it confirms the worst suspicion that self-worth is tied exclusively to the body, and those bodies that do not align with gendered ideals are doomed to a life of suffering. Likely, many can commiserate with these feelings of disappointment in our own bodies, which are catalyzed by broader cultural pressures that treat the body as a project of identity and self-worth.

As Shilling (1993, 5) writes:

In the affluent West, there is a tendency for the body to be seen as an entity which is in the process of becoming: a project which should be worked at and accomplished as part of an individual’s self-identity ... [this] entails accepting that its appearance, size, shape and even its contents, are potentially open to reconstruction in line with the designs of its owner ... this involves a practical recognition of the significance of bodies; both as personal resources and as social symbols which give off messages about a person’s self-identity. In this context, bodies become malleable entities which can be shaped and honed by the vigilance and hard work of their owners.

These “body project” discourses align with gendered sets of expectations across time.

Historically, the body project has been treated as an exclusively female province, as bodily improvement assimilates self-worth under the male gaze (Coupland 2007). In recent history, these same discourses are increasingly targeting men, partly driven by emerging markets of male cosmetics (Coupland 2007). Though broad, these discourses demonstrate that bodily improvement operates on the risk of failure that one’s body does not conform to a gendered

ideal. Undoubtedly, many people across the globe are tied in these body projects. The blackpill does not reject this notion of the body as a site of individual worth and labor, it just advances that incels' genetics mark them perpetual losers in this game of improvement.

Research Outline

Virtual ethnography proceeds through a clearly defined protocol: definition of the setting and research prospective, entrance in the community, qualitative data collection, and analysis (Skageby 2017).

Setting

The setting for this project is the website <https://incels.co>. Incels.co is an independently run web forum that is separate from any larger organizing entity like Reddit or 4Chan. The website was created in November of 2017, just hours after the subreddit r/incels was banned for violating Reddit's policy against inciting violence (Hoffman et al 2020). Although other forums dedicated to incelism exist across the internet, I chose incels.co because it appears to be coalescing as the primary center of virtual incel engagement. Currently, the site boasts more than 11,000 individual accounts, with upwards of 3,000,000 posts created since 2017. To create a profile and participate on comment threads, users submit an application that requires a username, email, and personal statement as to why applicants consider themselves an incel. It is not clear what criteria are used for denying or accepting membership except that all women are automatically barred from the community. Six staff members oversee the admission of new members. Once approved, users can upload a profile photo and add a quote that appears

underneath their username in comment threads. Users can further affix a title, such as “New Recruit,” to their username.

In travelling to the homepage, users are greeted with three options for communication: inceldom discussion, off topic, and media (Figure 1). I chose to focus exclusively on threads found in the “inceldom discussion” forums for data collection. Here, featured posts are those that generate the most views and comments, which are listed numerically next to each post. Users can use a filter to search for desired content by selecting specified “prefix” options. Most posts are tagged with a prefix, like [Blackpill], to provide a general descriptor of the content (Figure 2). Other prefixes include: [ToxicFemininity] or [SuicideFuel], among others. The content is overseen by moderators, and the rules of the site are relatively flexible. On the rules page, the moderators report that they generally do not censor content, given incels.co purportedly represents a community with more freedom of expression than sites like Reddit (“Rules” 2020). This does not prevent the moderators from discouraging several actions, which include bragging, trolling, race baiting (condemning people of a certain race), posting misinformation, or white-knighting (defending women). Disallowed content includes asking for ratings on looks (users are directed to the website looksmax.me), trans or gay content of any kind, cherry-picking data, or discussion of illegal activities. Violating any of these actions can result in a ban, which is overseen and administered by the moderators (“Rules” 2020).

The discrete boundaries of webpages offer one means of identifying the setting, but Eckert and McConnel-Ginet’s (1992) conception of “communities of practice” amends this notion of place. Communities of practice define settings by mutual engagement through language toward a joint endeavor. The theory of community of practice roots analyses of gender and language in more immediate circumstances, rather than broad abstractions that detach from

local interaction (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992). Here, incels.co may be seen as belonging to a community of practice centered around the incel ideology at large. This concept is further explored in Chapter II to assess how the blackpill is essential in defining the incels.co community of practice.

Welcome to Incels.co
Wanting to join the rest of our members? Feel free to sign up today.

[Sign up](#)

Incels

 **Inceldom Discussion**
Discuss your experiences, vent, or share anything related to Inceldom.

117.4K
Threads | 2.7M
Posts

 **[New]** Unattractive men are g...
1 minute ago · [REDACTED]

 **OffTopic**
Talk about your day, lifestyle, or anything else.

59.3K
Threads | 1.2M
Posts

 **[Experiment]** Do you like Invert...
1 minute ago · [REDACTED]

 **Media**
Share any memes or any other photos that you have.

Meta

 **Meta & Feedback**
Share your ideas, give us feedback, and discuss site-specific topics.

1.2K
Threads | 31.7K
Posts

 **Ban Discussion Megathread**
1 minute ago · [REDACTED]

 **Ban Appeals**
Do you want to rejoin the community? Read the sticky and tell us why.

564
Threads | 1.3K
Posts

 **Can I get unbanned?**
Friday at 6:04 PM · [REDACTED]

New Threads

 **[LifeFuel]** Self improvement can really make you happy
Started by [REDACTED] · 3 minutes ago · Replies: 2
Inceldom Discussion

 **[LFL]** Simpung taken to new levels
Started by [REDACTED] · 9 minutes ago · Replies: 6
Inceldom Discussion

 **[Serious]** Virtue signaling can end lives
Started by [REDACTED] · 9 minutes ago · Replies: 0
Inceldom Discussion

[Lvl](#) [Statistics](#)

Figure 1. Incels.co Homepage. Retrieved April 2020. Private usernames are censored.

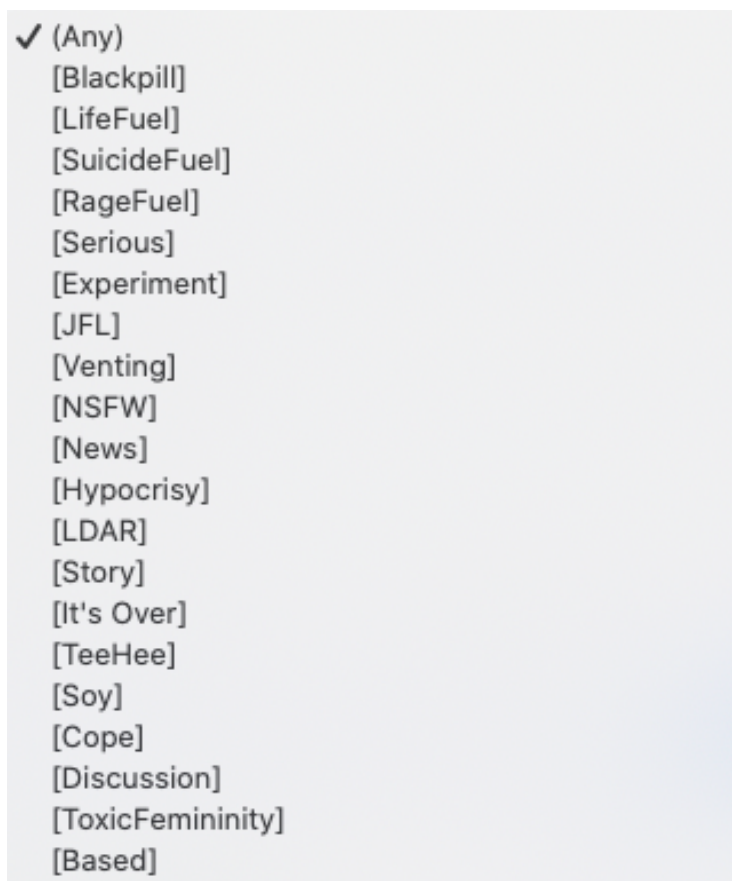


Figure 2. Incels.co content descriptors. Retrieved April 2020.⁶

Making an Entrance

It is not always possible for researchers to reveal their positions when conducting online ethnographies. Scholars who have previously conducted ethnographies on incel forums such as

⁶ JFL = just for laughs/just fucking lol, NSFW = not safe for work, LDAR = lie down and rot , Soy = men who support feminism, Fuel = content that increases sentiments of “life,” “suicide,” or “rage”

the subreddit r/Braincels did not publicly reveal themselves, but rather “lurked” (Hoiland 2016). I followed this procedure of anonymous data collection, given the potential volatile nature of online engagement with incels.co users. I collected data throughout December of 2019 and January of 2020. Each day, I scrolled through the recent batch of posts found on the popular discussion thread and read content that generated more than 50 comments. Many of these posts reemerged from earlier dates, all the way back to late 2018, because some users had “necroposted” (generated discussion on an old post).

Data acquisition: popular content

There are three principal means of acquiring data from virtual communities: interviews, engaged online observation, and document collection (Skageby 2011). Because I did not interact with incels.co users, I used document collection to acquire data. Document collection generally refers to the gathering of “archived” data (Chapelle 2013). This material is considered “archived” as it usually results from discussion threads, which represent asynchronous communication. Collected materials are thus textual in nature, but may include photos, memes, or linked videos. The precise selection and quantity of data collected falls to the discretion of the researcher, and the process of collection should be guided by the principal research questions (Skageby 2011). In virtual ethnographies of forum conversation, scholars have tended to select five to eight comment threads, each consisting of at least 50 comments, as the raw data for their analysis (Hoiland 2016). In following with this procedure, I selected eight comment threads that relate to my research questions on science, masculinity, and race, but only included five in my analysis. I chose posts that center on race, valorize certain masculinities, or invoke scientific discourse and academic publications as the principal “documents” for my analysis. These documents include:

1. It is impossible to get ripped unless you have Godly genetics or use massive roids (which will make you bald)
2. Slut shaming is a cope
3. I always wanted to stop playing video games and “grow up”, but people like us cannot grow up
4. SCIENTIFIC PROOF that the order of importance is Race > Height > Face > Money
5. Racial Allegiance is an Extremely Blue Pilled Cope.

These posts were found in the daily featured section on incels.co throughout late 2019 and early 2020. Some posts date back originally to 2018, but they generated further discussion and reentered the featured discussion forum as I was collecting data.

In addition to the selected documents, I also contextualized incels.co forum postings by analyzing more global incel texts, like the Scientific Blackpill page on the incels.wiki page. This website is linked on the homepage of incels.co as a means of familiarizing members with the incel vocabulary and tenets (Figure 1, top bar). Users frequently reference pages within the wiki as a means of invoking some type of intellectual authority. As a note of caution, just because ideas are represented on these incel texts does not mean they have purchase within the incels.co community of practice. The challenge is to oscillate between these broader texts and the ways in which they become invoked in actual writings of individuals.

Discourse Analysis: Broad Theory

Discourse analysis is the primary mechanism by which virtual ethnographers examine their data (Skageby 2011). The term “discourse” takes on distinct meaning in various academic traditions. For linguists, “discourse” describes language in use: the way meaning is produced

when language is used in certain contexts for particular purposes (Cameron and Kulick 2003). For critical theorists, “discourse” refers to sets of propositions in circulation about particular phenomenon. Michel Foucault described discourse as “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (2002, 54). These two definitions of “discourse” are not discrete but mutually dependent. The “practices that form objects of which they speak” are frequently language-dependent, and “language in use” must be attuned to the social situation (or discourses) that are perquisite to give words meaning. In this sense, the different uses of “discourse” can be understood collectively as language-practices that make phenomenon become “reality” (Cameron and Kulick 2003).

Erving Goffman has made significant contributions in the field of discourse analysis. The central question of his work in *Frame Analysis* and *Forms of Talk* (1986) is a seemingly innocuous inquiry: “what is *it* that is going on here?” For Goffman, this question addresses the conditions under which a particular “reality” is legitimated, or put another way, how we come to know certain things are “real.” “Frames” are Goffman’s means of assessing how individual perception of an event is structured. Briefly, primary frameworks are ways of organizing experience. Frames imbue meaningless events with significance; they represent the cultural or discursive baggage that participants bring to conversation to make them meaningful. Discourse analysis addresses how “framing” manifests through conversation: it provides an orientation for assessing how meaning is produced through interaction.

My purpose in including Goffman’s theories is to pull out concepts that best contextualize my analysis of incels.co documents. In particular, I focus on two central arguments of Goffman’s work. First, framing takes shape as individuals offer their interpretation on a set of

circumstances or conditions. Goffman interrogates this process through which frames solidify by focusing on informal conversation. He writes:

“ [...] what an individual spends most of his spoken moments doing is providing evidence for the fairness or unfairness of his current situation and grounds for sympathy, approval, exoneration, or understanding, or amusement. And what his listeners are primarily obliged to do is to show some kind of audience appreciation. They are to be stirred not to take action but to exhibit signs that they have been stirred” (1986, 503).

Each incels.co post I have selected represents an attempt to validate a particular interpretation of incelism. Incels.co site users initiate forum discussion by providing evidence on their understanding of the blackpill or their own life circumstances. The responses generated by the post can be seen as a way of negotiating the fairness or the validity of such narratives. Although these posts often invoke broader incel texts, they also reproduce, challenge, and structure incel discourse through interaction.

Second, framing through conversation is complicated by the distinct roles a speaker may perform. For Goffman, the term “speaker” is not a fixed category, but one that can have many meanings depending on the source of the “utterance.” As such, it becomes necessary to index a more precise terminology to clarify the role of the “speaker.” Goffman's answer to this dilemma lies in the concept of the “participation framework,” which conceptualizes the three roles necessary in the act of speaking: the animator, the author, and the principal. The animator is conceptualized as the “sounding box” through which words are spoken. Simply put, the animator is usually a person. The author is an individual who constructs the words articulated by the animator. Of course, there may be frequent overlaps between the author and the animator, but it is important to separate these roles for moments when the animator does not coincide with the author. The principal is the individual or group whose worldview is represented by the spoken

words. Again, the principal could be the same person as the animator and the author, but this is not necessarily the case.

On incel forums, these speaker roles are essential in teasing apart how particular utterances gain authority. Assessing who “authors” speech acts—whether cited scholars or broader cultural texts like the scientific blackpill page—and who is represented by these utterances—all men, all incels, or particular types of incels—become important considerations in assessing how inceldom is legitimated. I highlight these considerations in Chapter II to assess how the scientific blackpill page imbues incels.co forum postings with credence.

Discourse Analysis: Strategies

Beyond participant frameworks and frame construction, I draw upon Mary Bucholtz’s (2001) articulation of entextualization to guide my analysis. In “Reflexivity and Critique in Discourse Analysis,” Bucholtz describes entextualization as the process by which discourse solidifies as “text” through iterability. Under this model, the reproduction of discourses in various textual contexts reveals how particular signs operate in the service of power. Entextualization is thus entangled in power-making, as it represents a means by which repeated discourses gain legitimacy in categorizing and defining objects. In my own project, this principle guides my understanding of the incel discourse as it appears on incels.co, the scientific blackpill page, and scientific literature across a diversity of publications. I pay particular attention to the contexts in which certain phrases and words are repeated in incel writings, how these ideas are mirrored in the blackpill canon and cited publications, and how this chain of entextualization grants inceldom legitimacy. In Chapter II, entextualization guides my tracking of scientific

discourse in incel writing. Later in Chapter V, I use the framework of entextualization to demonstrate how fragments of historical discourse related to race circulate in incel contexts.

Additionally, I use Barbara Johnstone's (2016) writings on enregisterment to trace language use on incel forums. The process of enregisterment is built upon "indexical links" made between particular phrases or words with other semiotic signs like actions, behaviors, or signifiers of group identity. This linking comes to be recognized with a culturally significant "register," which describes sets of personas, styles, identities, places, or groups. Enregisterment thus describes how linguistic variation comes to map on with social context; it is a useful framework for understanding the process by which ways of speaking come to define particular social groups (Johnstone 2016). Critically, these ways of speaking become performable acts that are markers of group identity. In investigating incels.co forums, I focus on the deployment of particular phrases and words in various contexts to see how the incel glossary marks incel identity. Enregisterment is mostly discussed in Chapter III in the context of incel conceptions of masculinity, primarily in regard to how incel masculine identities are created through various terms that mark the incel register. Across my project, I show how morphemes like "cel" and "pill" and words like "cope" are used to construct the boundaries of inceldom and recursively distinguish its members.

Discourse Analysis: Mixed-Methods

Mixed-methods discourse analysis can be splintered into a quantitative analysis, or content analysis, and a qualitative analysis, or frame analysis. Content analysis examines the presence or absence of major themes in conversation and is often conceptualized as a "thematic" analysis. This methodology typically involves counting the number of times particular themes, or

“codes,” are mentioned online (Chapelle 2013). As such, the themes a researcher is looking for must be carefully indexed. Within each analyzed thread, I selected themes relating to the context of the discussion. For posts related to incel understandings of genetics, for example, I parsed comments into their alignment with the various interpretations of genetic determinism taking hold in the thread. I then identified the number of times these codes are mentioned in posts and comments to generate conclusions on forum consensus related to the discussion topic. Of course, this method is inherently teleological, as the researcher identifies the particular posts to use for content analysis based on a theme, and then weights these posts by the amount of times the aforementioned theme is used. Still, the goal is to characterize the content on a virtual community, and this can be achieved through this quantitative method.

All forms of communication are arranged around a frame, which is a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events. Framing tends to be both subconscious and selective in that it requires the amplification of some aspects of a perceived reality over others. As such, frame analysis, the qualitative portion of mixed-methods discourse analysis, offers a means of accessing this process of framing. To conduct frame analysis, a transcript of each comment thread must be read in its entirety so that the researcher can become familiar with all verbal elements. Frames are then assessed by paying attention to keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, and sentences that systematically reinforce “clusters of facts or judgements” (Chapelle 2013, 1750). Generally, multiple researchers cross-check their frame analyses to root out individual biases and subjectivities. In this project, I will perform frame analysis on the selected comment threads to assess clusters not captured by my preselected codes (Chapelle 2013).

Because forum discussion is asynchronous, presenting comments as they literally appear on incels.co would confuse my analysis. Discussions often deviate from linear communication, as commenters frequently stray from the topics of interest in my study. To remedy this, I remove comments out of the flow of conversation and cluster them according to similar interpretation of the topic. Different commenters are distinguished by letters placed next to each response.

Chapter II: Incel Science and Blackpill Madness

Abstract

Journalists and scholars alike interpret the “blackpill” as an antiscientific set of principles born from incels’ anecdotal rejections by women. Such framings fail to connect incel ideology with larger trends in scholarly research around mate choice, sexuality, and sexual selection. Contemporary academic literature, particularly from evolutionary psychology, comes to be represented in the incel cultural canon of the scientific blackpill, which offers self-proclaimed incels a vocabulary for diagnosing their life experiences as rooted in genetic injustice. In this chapter, I analyze two comment threads discussing muscle-gaining capacity and slut shaming to highlight the blackpill’s role in outlining the incel condition. These examples reveal how the blackpill legitimates the diversity of incel identities within the community of practice and further shapes the affective experience of its adherents.

The Scientific Blackpill and Female Hypergamy

Frequent comparisons have been drawn between incelism and so-called “pseudoscience.” Vox news released an article in 2018 entitled “Our Incel Problem,” which describes the blackpill as a “...distinctive ideology, a pseudoscientific sociology of sex with its own complex jargon...” (Beauchamp 2018). Scholars have likewise connected incel language surrounding chin, jaw, and forehead metrics with outdated, discredited theories about human biology (Hoiland 2016). While there is no doubt that incel rhetoric borrows heavily from “dated” understandings of human variation, to call the blackpill “pseudoscience” obscures the critical

link between incelism and contemporary academic research. The blackpill is not an inherently antiscientific understanding of human courtship and social relations, but one that pulls significantly from peer-reviewed, “credible” scholarly literature. This suggestion is not intended to validate incel principles; instead, it calls into question the methods and interpretations of current scholarship surrounding apparent gendered difference along mate choice, attraction, and sexuality.

Purported academic support for incel rhetoric is framed under the philosophy of the “scientific blackpill.” Various definitions of this term exist across the incelsphere, but the most rigorous articulation of the blackpill is found on Incels Inside, a wiki page dedicated to incelism. Here, in a 207-page document citing over 200 research articles, the scientific blackpill is defined as:

...an understanding of the nature of human social and sexual behavior, especially female mate choice. (...) The blackpill highlights the role of largely immutable traits in social and sexual exclusion. These traits include physical attractiveness, stature, muscularity, race, personality, ability, health, neurotypicality, as well as social and economic status” (BlackpillScience 2020).

The foundational truth organizing the scientific blackpill is the notion of “female hypergamy.” In the social sciences, hypergamy refers to the practice of “marrying up” in socioeconomic status (SES). The blackpill’s interpretation of hypergamy replaces SES with an individual’s rank in an immutable, genetically determined hierarchy of attraction. Accordingly, hypergamy for incels refers to the act of engaging in sexual or romantic practices with an individual in a higher “attractive” tier. This possibility of hypergamy is only granted to heterosexual women, which is justified through Darwinian models of sexual selection. By virtue of sexual differences in resource and time allocation during reproduction, women are purportedly conditioned to be “choosy,” while men have been hardwired to have a high sex drive. This leads to a scenario in

which all women compete for the “top 20 percent” most desirable men (“Chads”), and because men are naturally promiscuous, the top 20 percent can essentially monopolize the sex market. As people settle into monogamous unions, some women must “compromise” for men falling outside the top 20 percent if they desire long-term relationships. These men are labeled “betas,” and they manage to court women by offering resources and stability to those who have been mistreated by Chads. This phenomenon is framed as the “betabux theory” which holds that women who desire stable marriages will settle for a “beta,” who will finance her illustrious life once she’s finally sworn off all Chads. Incels, then, are those who fall so low on the hierarchy that no woman, regardless of her own position, would ever resolve to be with him.

To substantiate their belief that some men are terminally undesirable, incels develop a specific language that describes the traits that constitute incelism. As such, the scientific blackpill tracks various biological and social traits that women use as markers of a man’s worth. These topics include personality, mental health, race, looks, face, height, body, penis, voice, and age (BlackpillScience 2020). On the blackpill page, scores of academic publications are listed to support incel notions about this suite of immutable traits. One cited publication from the University of Chicago and MIT schools of economics (Hitsch 2006) categorizes the desirability of traits like race and facial attractiveness in monetary terms. The study reports being an Asian man requires \$247,000 extra income per year compared to a white man to get equal interest from a white woman (Hitsch 2006). The study further claims that the bottom 10 percent of men in terms of facial attractiveness require \$40,000 extra income per year compared to an average man or \$186,000 extra compared to a top 10 percent man. Similar findings are reported for short men in comparison to median and tall men (Hitsch 2006).⁷ These cited conclusions then become

⁷ This publication is highlighted in Chapter V to discuss how race embeds in the incel worldview.

essentialized to the individual, who uses the blackpill's outlined features to define their experiences of nonsexuality. Heightcels, for example, are those whose small stature marks them terminally undesirable. Currycels believe their South Asian heritage makes them incapable of finding love in Western context. Chincels credit their nonsexuality to a feminine jaw which does not appeal to the purportedly hardwired, evolutionary preferences of the female brain. "Cel," here, becomes a productive means of categorizing undesirability by affixing the suffix to any trait outlined in the blackpill. Other features not explicitly outlined on the wiki are also used in conjunction with the "cel" morpheme. In this sense, the suffix provides a means of creatively defining incelism according to an individual's sense of his own nonsexuality.

Inceldom as a Condition of Modern Feminist Hegemony

Incels trace the origins of incelism to the erosion of patriarchal norms that historically kept female hypergamy in check. The blackpill holds that romantic relationships prior to the Women's Liberation Movement (1960s and 1970s) resulted from unions between members who fell on the same rung of their respective hierarchy. In this context, social ostracizing and her dependence on men for economic support dampened a woman's "natural" desire to ascend above her "rightful" position (BlackpillScience 2020). Second and third wave feminism, however, began to violate this model of courtship by releasing women's hypergamy from the constraints of a patriarchal society. The theory follows that feminism and liberalism have allowed more women to enter the workforce and surpass men in educational and socioeconomic status, rendering more men unattractive to women due to their hypergamous preference to "date up." Freed from these social and economic constraints, the modern woman is now unrestricted in her ability to reject men who desire relationships; her "choosiness" manifests as a type of sexual gatekeeping against

men. Inceldom, thus, solidifies as modern society distances itself from cultural norms that suppressed women’s supposedly impulsive propensity for hypergamy.

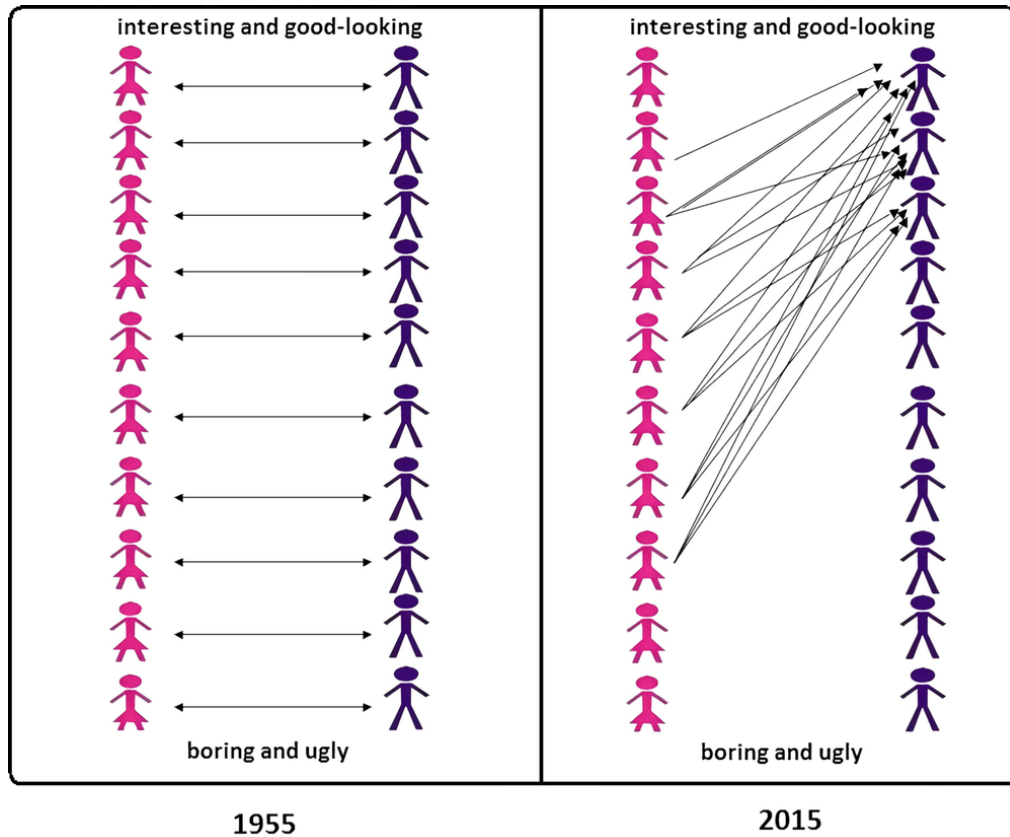


Figure 1. *Female Hypergamy*. Incels Wiki. Retrieved January 2020.

Support for these conclusions on hypergamy is drawn primarily from dating website data on profile clicks and matches. One commonly cited finding on the incel wiki comes from an OkCupid study released in 2009, showing women using the platform tended to rate 80 percent of men as “below average” in terms of looks. This finding contrasted with preferences of men using the dating service, who viewed women’s attractiveness along a relatively normal distribution (Kirkegaard and Bjerrekær 2016). Although the data itself was not peer-reviewed, the findings have sparked more rigorous investigations into female preferences as proxied by dating service

behaviors. Since 2009, similar findings were reported in more recent studies of Tinder swiping habits. A 2016 publication (Tyson et al) concluded women on Tinder are 15 times more likely to receive a match than men, which the authors took as evidence that women are naturally more selective and withholding in desiring relationships and sex. Notably, this study did not offer a mechanistic explanation linking dating app habits with gendered practices surrounding mate choice, as the authors frame their findings as universal differences between men and women. Interpreting these data as representative of mate choice broadly is problematic. Significant influences from culture and the environment remain uninterrogated: Is the sample population indicative of the general population? Are these habits consistent in a cross-cultural perspective? Which cultural narratives and discourses might influence norms and expectations around dating for men and women? None of these considerations are given weight in the publication's analysis or the secondary interpretation on the scientific blackpill page. Instead, flexible behaviors like Tinder swiping are taken to represent monolithic, evolutionarily determined programs that unconsciously control women and men.

While academic authors are explicitly cited on the wiki itself, the scientific blackpill page remains relatively authorless. Clicking on "page information" reveals that the site was created by three users with anonymous names, but the content of the page can be edited by any user. Goffman's (1986) speaker roles—the animator, author, and principal—are useful here for interpreting how blackpill ideas distil from the wiki page into the actual writings of incels themselves. As animators, Incels.co users bring to life these discourses by invoking the blackpill to interpret their life experiences. The author of this content may be a specific researcher listed on the wiki but could also be the blackpill page itself. The principal, then, is the collective body of incels represented by the ideas set forth on the blackpill page. That the blackpill cannot be

readily attributed to any one individual may contribute to its perception as an objective truth that represents all of incel-dom.

The Blackpill in Defining Incel Membership

To describe incel-dom as an ideology is at odds with incels.co users' conception of their celibate status. Incels reject the notion that they are adherents to particular set of principles, instead favoring to view their celibacy as a "social phenomena" akin to homelessness (BlackpillScience 2020). Both incels.co users and the wiki describe "incel" as an academic term that defines a condition of undesired "nonsexuality" for a period of six months. Under this logic, incel-dom emerges as a condition precipitated by modern feminist hegemony, rather than a "belief system" with a set of aims. Critically, this framing of incel-dom seeks to root blackpill ideas as undeniable facts of existence, instead of a series of contestable conclusions.

Despite incel attempts to describe incel-dom as a condition, these framings fail to account for the common social practices of those who mutually participate on incel forums. Among these online communities, the blackpill must be considered as a foundational set of principles that organize incel experiences and identity. In this sense, incels.co can be understood through Eckert and McConnell-Ginet's (1992) articulation of "communities of practice," which organizes group membership around mutual engagement in a joint-enterprise. Communities of practice highlight the shared repertoire of social acts, such as a common vocabulary, used by members to establish group identity (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992). Under this conceptual framing, incels.co users share a common orientation toward the fatalistic principles of the blackpill, and they accomplish this adjustment through a shared lexicon and set of social behaviors. The scientific blackpill is essential in outlining which traits and words individuals can employ to interpret their

life experiences as self-proclaimed incels. Critically, this prescribed vocabulary comes to take psychological significance in shaping the desires, anxieties, and fears of individuals who accept the incel title.

Communities of practice incorporate difference within the limits of the group, focusing on the diverse social and linguistic resources individuals use in constructing identity. Because identities emerge from action and behaviors, communities of practice can capture the multiplicity of heterogenous identities in a specific context (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992). Inceldom, then, is not just a condition of involuntary celibacy, but a wider embrace of genetic determinism that diversely positions its adherents in alignment with biological absolutism. The blackpill becomes a means of both validating and denying membership to the diverse performances of inceldom. In carefully cataloging the desirability of particular traits—height, race, facial structure—the blackpill provides individuals a language for accepting or excluding individuals from the incel mantle. Some claim, for example, that those over 5’11 cannot be considered incels due to the supposed preference women hold for taller men. Similarly, this shared lexicon allows individuals to shame certain acts that go against the blackpill’s prescribed tenets. “Copes” are any action an individual performs to temporarily alleviate the debilitating reality of inceldom, like exercising, playing videogames, or eating healthily. In this way, “copes” are generally seen in conflict with the principles of the blackpill: lifting weights will not allow incels to ascend if muscle mass is genetically determined and if women value facial attractiveness over body fitness. Labelling another user’s actions as a “cope,” is common mechanism for shutting down conversation or questioning an individual’s status as an incel. Thus, “copes” can be seen as a sort of taboo that positions individuals in opposition to the beliefs incels should ostensibly hold in common. Copes are often specified by attaching the suffix “pill” to whatever deluded act an

individual does to alleviate suffering, like “gyp pill” to describe exercising. Like with the morpheme “cel,” “pill” becomes a productive means of categorizing another’s futile attempts to contend with the reality of incel-dom.

Invocations of the Blackpill on Incels.co

If the scientific blackpill represents a sort of cultural “canon” for incel-dom, there remains considerable variation in how individuals invoke this canon their writings. This section will detail the ways in which incels.co users reproduce, challenge, and call upon the scientific blackpill to interpret their life circumstances. I have selected two incels.co comment threads in which users frame their experiences surrounding muscle-building capacity and the act of slut shaming using blackpill principles. These categories represent only two of the several topics covered on the blackpill, but both threads offer rich narrative details surrounding incel science and individual subjective experience.

Genetics >>> Everything: Muscle Mass

The scientific blackpill includes a section devoted to muscle gain and its genetic correlates under “The Body.” Here, muscle building capacity is attributed primarily to a man’s genetics, with little intervention from environmental influences. Support for this conclusion is drawn from a series of publications (Hubal et al 2005 and Carpinelli 2017) that assess muscle growth in response to weight resistance training. Findings across these publications hold that individuals exhibit significant variation in muscle hypertrophy when exposed to the same weight-training programs, including some responders who experience no muscle gain or even muscle loss. Cited authors conclude individual variation in muscle growth arises from genetic

correlates, despite little data to support this claim. All publications lack basic controls for nutrition, stress, sleep, and lifting form, thereby ignoring important environmental influences on observed outcomes. Despite these methodological shortcomings, Carpinelli (2017), who did report a small, statistically significant association between a single locus (angiotensin-II converting enzyme) and muscle hypertrophy concludes:

Many of us have experienced delusional expectations regarding expected outcomes from resistance training. The question is whether trainees should wallow in the delusion that they can somehow overcome their genetic limitations by obsessively experimenting with time consuming, highly complex, structuring training protocols [...] There is very little compelling-evidence ... that obsessing over any or all of these training variables can alter an individual's specific adaption ... or override the limitations of their genetic potential.

It is not difficult to see how such language fits into a larger view of biological tyranny. Excerpts from this publication (2017) are included on the Incels Inside scientific blackpill page to authorize the notion of terminal genetic restrictions (BlackpillScience 2020). Here, blackpill rhetoric coalesces as a direct result of academic writing.

One incels.co post calls upon this research from the scientific blackpill to interpret individual experiences regarding exercise. In a post titled "It is impossible to get ripped unless you have Godly genetics or use massive roids (which will make you bald)," the original poster (OP) articulates his frustration with weight-training exercise and his lack of visible results:

A. I've been eating healthy and exercising for years and I have nothing to show for it except that I don't look any worse in my 30s than I did in my 20s. [...] 'Just work out bro' is a fucking scam. 'Getting ripped' is a fucking scam. Genetics >>> Everything. Standards today are ridiculous and some of our bodies just don't work properly. I still work out and eat healthy because it mostly feels better. But it does nothing visually. Never has. Likely never will.

Language used in this post invokes blackpill discourses surrounding genetic determinism, body type, and individual agency. The notion that “‘Getting ripped’ is a fucking scam” links directly with the blackpill’s articulation that muscle building-capacity is largely genetic in nature. This fatalism is not limited to the discussion of muscle growth but spills over into every aspect of life, as the OP writes: “Genetics >>> Everything.” Notably, the idea that genetics shape all life outcomes does not prevent the OP from exercising, as he notes working out “mostly feels better.” He later clarifies the various diets and training programs that have failed to produce his desired results:

A. I've adjusted my diet between 1200 cals a day and 3000 cals a day. Nothing works. Caloric excess (bulking) turns me into a lardo. Caloric deficit (cutting) leads to me wasting away all my muscle and rapidly losing strength. I've tried every macro too - low carb, isocaloric, low fat - you name it. I tried gluten free. I tried dairy free. I tried high protein. I tried keto. I've tried just doing weights. I've tried just doing cardio. I've tried doing combinations of both. Again, no difference. Nothing works.

Here, the OP provides evidence for the unfairness of his situation. Framing the diverse protocols that have failed to produce muscle growth casts his effort as a biological injustice. All his labor has gone unrewarded, which he attributes to bodily incompetence (“some of our bodies don’t work properly”) and absurd societal expectations (“standards today are ridiculous”). The blackpill grants legitimacy to these sentiments, given the incel condition rests on genetic determinism that affords individuals no hope of improvement and liberated female hypergamy as a basis of women’s impossible standards. These notions appear to take on emotional significance, as the OP’s frustration with muscle growth manifests as a type of defeated anguish.

By providing evidence of his unsuccessful bids at gaining muscle, he presents himself as an abject failure incapable of self-improvement, repeating “nothing works.” His desperation mutates into a type of compulsory fatalism that projects onto any commenter who disagrees with his original claim.

Nearly 26 percent of commenters agree with the OP’s interpretation that “Genetics >>> Everything.” Commenters in this group generally subscribe to the notion that life is a genetic lottery, and incels are burdened with abysmal genetics. Most commenters in this category do not offer additional anecdotes or science to validate the OP’s claim, and instead provide brief confirmations of the original post. Others provide more personal evidence that falls line with the OP’s interpretation of poor genotypic quality:

- B. *Genetics are EVERYTHING. Absolutely nothing else in the world even matters. Thinking that anyone can get fit and muscular from exercise is like thinking that anyone can become intelligent by reading a lot. Putting a retard in a library and making him read all the books isn’t going to somehow make him smart. You are born with your IQ (which is essentially just neuron activity in the brain). Same with body tissue.*
- C. *[quoting the OP’s claim that Genetics >>> everything] the horrifying, nigh impossible to accept, bottom line truth.*
- D. *Well effort is also genetic, so genetics (plus environment out of your control) = literally everything.*
- E. *I lifted for years and received almost nothing in terms of strength gains. [...] It’s all genetics, every bit of it. My parents constantly nag me to go back to the gym. I keep telling them it’s pointless, though I still exercise*

F. You lost the genetic lottery and suicide is the only way out

Here, commenters generally understand genetics as a pernicious force underwriting individual experience. All measurable traits and outcomes—muscle gaining, intellectual ability, even effort—become subsumed under genetic omnipotence, which establishes an unfair set of conditions for those with apparently poor genetic quality (“I lifted for years and received almost nothing in terms strength gains... It’s all genetics, every bit of it.”) Those who would deny this purported “truth” are considered deluded (“Thinking that anyone can get fit and muscular from exercise is like thinking that anyone can become intelligent by reading a lot”). Individuals within this category, however, respond differently to this embrace of genetic determinism. Some continue to exercise because it provides relief even with the knowledge that muscle gains are impossible and cannot provide a means of ascending incelism (“I keep telling them it's pointless, though I still exercise”). Others take a more defeated approach in the face of such determinism, advocating self-destruction as the only viable response (“...suicide is the only way out”).

Other commenters in the thread challenge the OP’s original claim, rejecting the notion that muscle-building capacity is as genetically limited as suggested. Nearly 35 percent of comments fall within this group, but most differ in the attitudes they hold toward the OP. A minority of these posters appear genuinely interested in helping the OP develop a better workout program. Some commenters suggest the OP could try intermittent fasting or different weight-resistance programs. Most respondents in this category appear less supportive and instead hold contempt for the OP’s suggestion that genetics have restricted his strength-training:

G. That is a fucking retarded diet and exercise routine though. You need to eat more (breakfast is so important), train more if you want significant improvement.

H. I was thinking why the hell is OP eating less than a 3 year old girl in rural africa?

And on top of that he is also doing lots of cardio.

I. This sounds like way too much cardio if you want to get bulky. Cut back on the cardio and eat twice as much while lifting heavy 5 times a week

J. ...Anyone can get ripped, especially with the proper nutrition protocol. (...) But YES, you're right, genetics play a huge role but are not the end all....

Insults levied at the OP tend to draw upon expressions that purportedly subvert developmental processes. Commenters describe the OP as “retarded”—conveying intellectual disability—or as a “3 year old girl in rural africa”—perhaps suggesting food scarcity or stunted growth. Although most of these comments seek to insult the OP, many do not deny the essential role genetics play in shaping muscle-building capacity. Instead, they view genetics as playing a significant, but not exclusive, role in determining muscle gain (“genetics play a huge role but are not the end all”). These respondents tentatively uphold the blackpill’s understanding of muscle-growth, but perceive the OP’s statements as overgeneralized and unsubstantiated.

In response to these challenges, the OP directly calls upon scientific support to buttress his claims. Most critics of the OP target his purported exercise and dietary routines, arguing that his programs are insufficient to build muscle mass. In response to these challenges, the OP repeatedly highlights the diversity of weight-training and nutritional programs that have failed to produce his desired results. The OP then pivots by invoking blackpill science that supports his argument when these anecdotal defenses fail. Pulling from a 2015 Journal of American Medical Directions Association publication (Churchward-Venne et al) on “nonresponders” to weight-resistance training, the OP states:

A. ...[some] people LOSE MUSCLE from controlled weight lifting programs. Studies like this suggest that while almost everyone will get a bit strong from weight training, 10-20% of people who do controlled weight lifting will have a neutral or negative muscle hypertrophy response. ie. No change or DECREASE in muscle mass in response to the exercise....

Responses to the OP's statement appear relatively supportive. Most commenters accept the claim that OP could be a "nonresponder" ("[you] could be a non responder to exercise") while others continue to evaluate the merits of his exercise regime. Here, calling upon scientific discourse to validate claims appears to be relatively successful strategy.

A third category of responses reconciles the differences between the first two groups, arguing genetics play a significant role in muscle growth, but that muscle mass does not affect the incel condition. Comments of this type make up 20 percent of total commenters' opinions. Many of these comments label "gymcelling" (the act of exercising) as a "cope," in that having large muscles does not matter to women if not accompanied by an attractive face, tall stature, or broad frame. This argument reflects beliefs outlined in the scientific blackpill page, which holds that women value facial attraction over body fitness. Support for this notion is drawn from psychology publications (Jonason et al 2012) that claim facial attractiveness is a more reliable cue of "genotypic quality" than bodies, as faces are purportedly less likely to change with environmental stimuli. Most comments that invoke this notion of facial superiority offer brief responses in their comments. Other commenters seek to build consensus between the disparate perspectives taking hold in the thread by arguing disagreements on muscle-building potential obscure the actual limits incels face.

- K. *even if you have great frame and muscle genetics if you are sub 5'7 it is over. gymcelling as a manlet is cope.*⁸
- L. *It doesn't matter. Gym won't fix your height or your face.*
- M. *Muscles are copes anyway. Femoids don't care about muscles.*⁹
- N. *If you don't have an average or above average face then don't bother working out*
- O. *Of course your genetics play a big roll, but most people with 'shit genetics' have either shit abs (which nobody needs, unless you want to impress 14 year old girls) or they're framecels. Bad thing, but girls like tall and slender guys too. Framecel + Manlet will lose here tbh.*
- P. *You won't have a body like 10/10 genetic chad but everyone can get ripped without roids. It just [isn't] worth the effort as an incel.*

Here, arguments over the extent to which genetics influence muscle mass are reconciled over a more fatalistic interpretation of the blackpill. Commenters of this group argue physical health is futile if one's face, frame, or height already categorize him as undesirable. Conflict is thus settled by reorienting the group of commenters toward a more hopeless recognition of incels' undesirability and capability. Even the OP, the staunchest defender of genetic absolutism in muscle-building capacity, eventually concedes that muscles are a cope, even though exercising grants him some semblance of worth: “[muscle-building] is a cope. But it feels better to be better in some ways than worse in all”).

The last category of comments, representing just four percent of all responses, explicitly reject the notion of genetic totalitarianism:

⁸ “Manlet” describes a small man

⁹ “Femoid” is a portmanteau of “female humanoid” used to describe women

Q. Getting fit is a waiting game it will take years to have anything worth being proud over. Because it takes so long it feels genetic, but it is more of a life style choice than something instant.

R. Blame everything on genetics, sure lmao

Here, one commenter argues that the long-term nature of muscle growth makes it seem like exercise results are genetic, when in reality gains result from lifestyle choices. Notably, these denials of genetic tyranny receive no uptake in the flow of conversation. Instead of furious retorts, these commenters are met with relative silence. This seems anomalous within this particular comment thread, as slight disagreements over the precise role of genetics in muscle-building capacity generate more hostilities than overt rejections of genetic determinism.

The different positions taken up by commenters represent the diverse means by which individuals construct the incel identity within the community of practice. Collectively, these positions result from performable linguistic acts employed in comment threads on incels.co posts. This language stems directly from the scientific blackpill, which outlines the traits and vocabulary individuals can use to frame their life experiences. Critically, these performable acts appear to take on emotional salience for the individual posters. Labelling weight-training as a “cope,” for example, describes any desire to exercise as futile and roots inceldom in a perpetual sense of defeat. Similarly, purporting that genetics determine all aspects of life frames one’s experience around a sense of rage and injustice. These disparate positions are accommodated by the blackpill in large part due to its diffuse set of claims that do not always align to create internal coherence.

What emerges from these comments is a deep sense of suffering and defeat that underscores an incel’s perception of himself. The torment that materializes from these comments

is palpable: most comments are weighted with self-hatred over looks, body type, or capability. But what matters most to these commenters is not just to be desired: it is a deeper desperation to have agency over their lives. Across all categories, incels.co commenters mourn this lack of control, categorizing themselves as perpetually doomed to the status of humiliated, powerless men. These conceptions are not absurd exhumations of dated ideologies, but responses to peer-reviewed, contemporary scholarship in areas relevant to the incel imaginary. This research crystallizes into the sharp edges of the blackpill, which comes to limit the possibilities of existence for its own adherents.

Slut Shaming is a Cope

A second incels.co post invokes blackpill science to frame the act of slut shaming. “Sluts” is defined as its own category on the Incels Inside wiki page, and research cited in this portion of the blackpill details the sexual and life outcomes of “promiscuous women.” Conclusions in this section pull from a diffuse set of research articles but generally emphasize the underlying motivations of women who engage with multiple sexual partners. One cited publication, “Body Piercing, Personality, and Sexual Behavior,” examines correlations between piercings, tattoos, and choker necklaces with a woman’s number of reported sexual partners (Skegg 2007). Here, Skegg et al conclude women expressing these styling decisions tend to report having more sex with more people. Another cited publication (Blake 2018) finds that the aggregated number of “sexy selfies” posted in particular US cities correlates with the level of income inequality, but not the index of gender inequality. Here, Blake et al (2018) conclude: “Our findings raise the possibility that sexualization and appearance enhancement are markers of

female competition, occurring in environments in which incomes are unequal and status competition is highly salient.”

The common belief uniting these conclusions is the notion the women’s sexualization is not a patriarchal imposition, but an adaptive strategy that women employ to attract men in higher social tiers. Analysis from the Scientific Blackpill in the “Sluts” section concludes:

(...) in opposition to feminist theories regarding women's sexualization being a function of patriarchal norms being imposed on them by men, it is instead women that choose to sexualize themselves to compete with each other, in their competition for high-status mates in areas with high income inequality and permissive sexual attitudes. (BlackpillScience 2020).

Here, women’s sexualization is intimately linked with their supposed hypergamous nature. For incels, sexuality represents a resource women can leverage in order to lure men existing beyond their attractive tier. By extension, the more women’s sexualization is made permissible, the worse “low-tier” men will fare. The implication of this argument is that attempts to quell female hypergamy, like slut shaming, have been essential over evolutionary and historical time. By this reasoning, the apparent feminist embrace of women’s sexuality has eroded an evolutionary safeguard—itsself instantiated in patriarchal society—protecting “lower-tier men” against women’s hypergamous tendencies.

The conclusions from the “Sluts” section represent a point of tension against the blackpill’s prescribed hopelessness. Generally, the scientific blackpill page points to the inevitability of the incel condition, but the “Sluts” section offers a tentative possibility of dismantling inceldom. For incels, the question becomes: if slut shaming has historically held female hypergamy in check, could it achieve this feat again? As such, discussions of slut shaming on incels.co posts offer a unique look into the ways incels deal with the possibility of “ascension,” or rising above inceldom to become a “beta.” One incels.co addresses these sets of

questions, categorizing slut shaming as a “cope” born out of incels’ jealousy of sexual relationships. The OP writes:

A. Think about it rationally. Has there ever been a phenomenon more motivated by jealousy than slut shaming? A bunch of incels saying “you’re bad because you have sex a lot.” Fucking lol. It’s so obvious that I don’t need [to] make the thread any longer, or the arguments any more sophisticated. Slut shaming is a huge cope. What’s next? Slandering good looks and saying they’re actually bad somehow? Fucking lol. Think about it rationally.

Here, the OP’s post advances two claims: sex and “good looks” are universally desired, and slut shaming is a “cope” that will do nothing to benefit incels. Although this specific post does not link directly with specific publications from the blackpill, the framing of incelism as an untreatable affliction aligns with the general sentiment of blackpill fatalism.

Nearly 20 percent of commenters in the thread agree with the OP, describing slut shaming as a cope that will never improve the lives of incels. Most of these commenters frame slut shaming as a hopeless endeavor that offers no material benefit to “low-status” men:

B. People are scared to confront the actual reason they despise women because the truth is that hatred is too valuable a form of cope and motivation for living to those who have absolutely nothing else, which is understandable.

C. Everyone else but op in this thread is coping, because if half you turned into chads tomorrow, you would be fucking stacies left right and center and have some dumb beta raise the kids.

D. It is indeed a cope. Getting mad at a woman for being a “slut” is like getting mad at someone for eating a cake because you are too poor to afford it. It doesn’t

make you better, because you would eat the cake too if you could. ... Just accept that you are genetic deadends.

E. High IQ post. Whether or not you shame them, they are living their best life, and they get chad and chad gets them, there is NOTHING you can do about it.

Comments here understand incelism as an absolute ontology with no possibility of change (“just accept that you are genetic deadends” and “... there is NOTHING you can do about it”). For these commenters, slut shaming is born from incels’ jealousy that others enjoy the fruits of sexual liberation, while incels remain sexually impoverished. Other interpretations recognize that loathing women emerges one of the only emotionally salient motivations for continuing to live, given it represents such a strong emotional attachment for many “copers” (“...hatred is too valuable a form of cope and motivation for living to those who have absolutely nothing else, which is understandable”). Comments like this sanitize slut shaming and misogyny as an “understandable” therapeutic for those who attribute their suffering to unfettered hypergamy.

A second category of commenters disagree with the OP, framing slut shaming as a potential means by which incels can ascend and become “betas.” Comments of this type represent 32 percent of post responses, and most appear to hold open disdain for the OP. Commenters in this category generally believe that “betabuxing” is a potential solution to their undesirability.

F. The way that sexual market functions is the same way real life markets function. The more sexually liberated women become, the harder it is for men to get laid. The only men that benefit from a more open sexual market are Chads. This is because women can continuously bang the top % of men without the need of monogamous commitment which they’d need to get from a beta man. ... slut

shaming HELPS beta men get laid. It is analogous to a regulation imposed on a business. While it decreases the amount of total sex had by women, it makes it so that they're more likely to be monogamous.

G. Being a slut shamer means you don't want to take chad's used leftovers. [Women] can't chase chads forever and will want to settle down with a cuck who will betabux for them eventually. So when they're slut shamed by many men they'll know that their past actions will make it hard for them to find a betabux, because most the men aren't cucks who marry used whores.

H. if women weren't whores, we wouldn't be incels. People who reject this are fakecels.

Comments here frame women's hypergamous tendencies as a potential obstacle to overcome, which casts slut shaming as a viable means of transcending the constraints of incelism. These appraisals link with the blackpill's understanding of incelism as resulting from destabilized patriarchal mechanisms that formerly managed female hypergamy ("if women weren't whores, we wouldn't be incels"). Those who reject this purported truth are excluded from the incel mantle, as "fakecels," which roots group identity in the recognition that hypergamy, and women more broadly, are to blame for incels' suffering.

A third category of respondents view slut shaming as necessary for the normal flow of society. Commenters in this group believe slut shaming is not just the exclusive responsibility of incels, but represents a common tactic used by Chads, Betas, and other women to contend with the dangerous of hypergamy. Roughly 22 percent of responses align with this understanding of slut shaming, and many of these comments explicitly draw upon scientific and historical data to validate their claims. One user cites data from the CDC's 1995 National Survey of Family

Growth, highlighting the purported effects of premarital sex on a number of life outcomes, like marriage stability, happiness, and depression. These data generally find that women and girls who have their first sexual encounter at a younger age tend to score lower in categories for happiness and marriage stability, and higher in categories for mental illness (“National Survey of Family Growth” 1995). Coupled with findings that female promiscuity is intensifying over recent history, the commenter frames women’s increasingly liberated sexuality as the ultimate source of modern malaise. Another user pulls data from a 2004 publication (Teachman 2004) which argues women who engage in more frequent pre-marital sex experience higher divorce rates:

I. This is one of the reasons divorce rates are at a record high, women are more sexually active now than ever before which decreases their ability to pair bond to any one male longterm.

Other comments in this category do not draw explicitly upon specific scientific texts, but instead frame their arguments as scientifically reasoned:

J. This is the reason why slut-shaming exists. It signals to other men that they should watch out, and this puts all of the other females on the defensive. Why that matters should be obvious. If they're slut-shamed, then Chad won't give them his resources and may even kick them out of the tribe. To a woman, this may as well be a death sentence (ostracization).

K. Slut shaming is a survival mechanism, that may sound like some cope but think about it. In a primal society, you couldn't know if the kid your partner had was actually yours, no men wanted to raise another men's offspring, so you (and the tribe, because promiscuity also fucks up the tribe in general) would shame women

so that they could remain faithful, thus increasing your chances of raising your own offspring. Moreover, sluts can't bond as well as virgin women (or women with a low number of partners, like 2 or 3), they get forever desensitized to it, that's why divorce rates are so high amongst sluts.

L. Slut shaming/ culturally enforcing monogamy is necessary for modern human society to function.

Comments of this type tend to advance a type of evolutionary “common sense” to support their claims on slut shaming. Respondents cue other incels.co users to “think about it” or describe their conclusions as “obvious” in a broader effort to naturalize their claims on hypergamy. These arguments seem to organize around the notion that slut shaming maximizes a man’s evolutionary fitness, and they call upon this discourse by centering their arguments around “primal society” or unspecified “tribes.” While not specifying particular academic works, these responses connect broader notions of evolutionary fitness and social ostracizing with the community of practice’s “common sense.”

What materializes from this set of posts is a commentary on how to live with the crushing reality that comes with taking the blackpill. As the fundamental ethos of the incel experience, the blackpill organizes an incel’s sense of self around incurable undesirability. The uptake of this fatalism, however, is problematized by the possibility of “ascension” through social ostracizing of women. In this sense, the “Sluts” section opposes other tenets of the blackpill by offering some sense of morbid hope: that recruiting more men to ridicule women could potentially “cure” the incel condition. Individual users on incels.co respond to this possibility through a diverse set of positions. Some reduce inceldom to an irredeemable fact of life; they see ascension as an unintelligible reality to those shackled by their undesirability. For others, the status of modern

inceldom is a question of politics. These members see incelism as just one diffuse manifestation of societal decay brought on by a disturbance of patriarchal norms. For these users, “blackpilling”) more men (encouraging others to slut shame hypergamous women) becomes a potential means of eradicating undesired nonsexuality. Put differently, universal slut shaming could erase the societal conditions that have allowed incelism to precipitate from liberated hypergamy. Common across these positions is a sense of outrage at the reality facing incels. Frequently, this anger is levied directly against women, and becomes an emotionally salient force in the lives of incels.co users. As one commenter bluntly writes: “maybe [slut shaming] is a cope, but I hate all women regardless and will slut shame them forever.”

How exactly slut shaming manifests in incels’ lived experiences is not clear. Some posts on incels.co denigrate particular women’s social media profiles on Twitter, Instagram, or Facebook, usually disparaging these women for their looks and purported sexual preferences. It remains unclear if these same users actually engage in slut shaming outside of confines of incels.co forums. If most of the slut shaming exclusively takes place on incel forums, these actions could be interpreted as a means of embodying incel frustrations. Words themselves, then, become one of the few means of contending with the psychic pain of incelism by channeling one’s suffering into violence against those deemed responsible.

Conclusion

Any cursory review of incels.co texts and forum postings will reveal that incelism is not based in “pseudoscience” but gains significant momentum from scholarly literature. Invoking scientific discourse in incels.co forums is a common practice in validating, challenging, and renegotiating incelism. This academic support itself coalesces into the scientific blackpill page,

which establishes a shared lexicon to support the diversity of legitimate incel experiences within the community of practice. Common across the diverse performances of the incel identity is a deep pain and frustration induced by the defeating weight of the blackpill. This suffering bubbles as a type of agitated madness, as many incels struggle to piece together meaning and agency in lives they have deemed unworthy of living.

To see the blackpill as a fringe ideology emerging in contrast to more mainstream understandings of sex and courtship would be inaccurate. The most basic assumptions of the blackpill—that sex and monogamous relationships determine a man’s intrinsic worth and that violence against women is restorative of masculinity—link explicitly with conventional understandings of hegemonic masculinity (Kimmel 1994). In this sense, incels.co operates as a specified community of practice that—in part—refracts broader discourses about sex, masculinity, and evolution. But inceldom is not just transcribing conventional hegemonies into novel performances of masculinity. Scientific research catalyzes new meanings of the self, by heightening attention to the immutable biological traits that grant men permission to inhabit particular masculine subjectivities. These ideas will be dissected further in the next chapter.

Chapter III: Masculine Ontologies of Desire

Abstract

Most scholars ground their engagement with incelism in the theoretical framework of “hybrid masculinities,” which outlines transformations in masculine performances that borrow identity elements associated with marginalization (Bridges and Pascoe 2014). Such theorizing rightly describes how men symbolically distance themselves from power, but it does not address how discourses on incel masculinity are structured from interaction and talk. By failing to account for the embodied experiences of incel masculinity, hybridity cannot address what makes blackpill ideology a compelling therapeutic for certain men. In this chapter, I discuss one incels.co post that illuminates how incels embody and negotiate discourses on masculinity from positive and negative identity practices. Commenters in this post view the incel condition as a negation of “progress” that prevents them from advancing in life. Here, positive identity framings define incelism as a meaningless, torturous existence, but one that ultimately resolves a psychic pain of expectation. With the realization that incel life is inherently worthless, incels.co users rely on negative identity practices to distance themselves from other men and attack the female gaze which marks them unworthy. Commenters in the thread use Chad, the incel imagined alpha man, as a foil for chastising female appraisal of masculine worth. The result is a series of attempts to imbue life with some small semblance of significance.

Blackpill Ontologies of Desirability

Incels Inside offers an effective means of assessing general beliefs about incel masculinity that come to be represented in incels.co writings. On the wiki page, “men” are defined as “...post-tween humans who have a y chromosome, a pair of testicles and a penis”

(“Men” 2020). Despite this emphasis on the purported universal sex characteristics of “biological” men, “man” does not appear to be a salient category of identity in incels.co writings. Instead, a man’s rank on a decile attractive scale is more readily employed to identify individual personhood (Figure 1). Those that land in the top 20 percent of the scale earn some variant of “Chad” as a designation, varying from the low-tier “Chadlites” to the ultimate “Gigachad.” Men in the fifth to seventh decile are “normies,” with a similar recursive grading that distinguishes “low-tier normies” from those who more closely approximate Chads. Normies are also referred to as “betas,” which highlights their secondary role in competing for women’s attention. The bottom four deciles describe those who fall on the incel spectrum, with the lowest “10 percent” receiving the title of “Truecel.” Similar categories of identity exist for women along the attractiveness scale, with “Stacey” as Chad’s female counterpart, “Becky” as the normie equivalent, and “femcels” describing undesirable women. Although these female rankings are outlined on the wiki, they manifest less frequently in comment threads on incels.co. Instead, “foids” or “femoids,” a dehumanizing portmanteau of “female humanoid,” is used to refer to women regardless of their attractive rank.

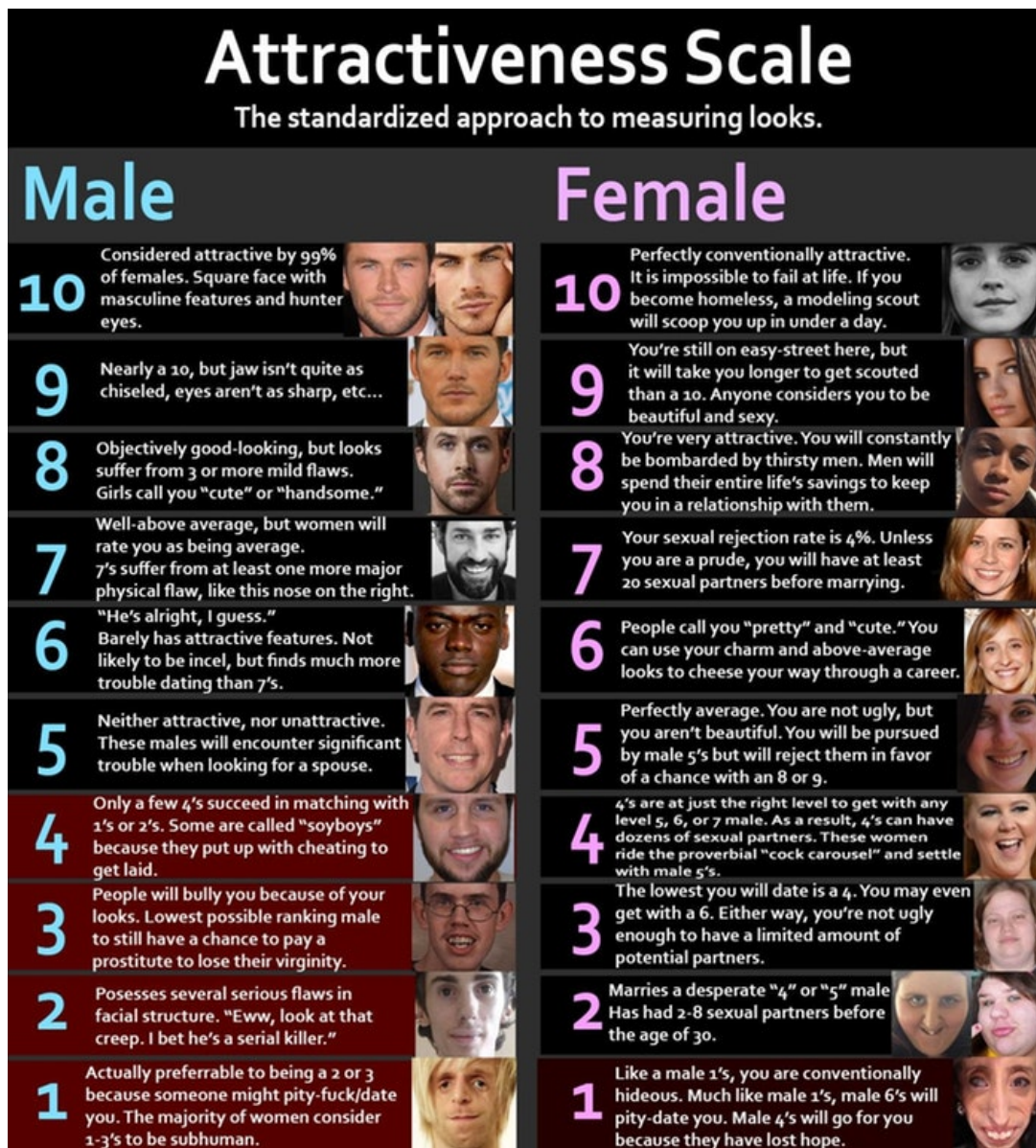


Figure 1. *Decile Attractiveness Scale*. Incels Inside. Retrieved April 2020.

How is individual attractiveness determined? Blackpill science purports that perceptions of beauty are universal and objective, rather than plastic across and within cultures (BlackpillScience 2020). This theory of beauty is buttressed by scientific literature assessing how test subjects evaluate facial attractiveness. One cited study on the blackpill page (Slater et al

1998) concludes newborns spend more time looking at photos of individuals categorized as attractive by adults. Another study (Palomares et al 2018) reports that individuals process and report beauty rankings in under one second, suggesting attractiveness is a subliminal experience honed by evolutionary impulses. By highlighting the conclusions, the blackpill reduces perceptions of beauty to a question of unconscious, biological computation. The result is that masculine identities—Chads, normies, and incels—emerge as an objective measure of personhood that are immediately apparent to any reasonable onlooker.

The blackpill distinguishes masculine identities by carefully cataloguing which physical features appeal to the nonconscious desires of women. Chads, for example, are characterized by tall stature, broad shoulders, chiseled chins, deep-set “hunter eyes,” and Caucasian ethnicity.¹⁰ These features collectively create an impression of dominance, which triggers women’s hypergamous preferences for a “high status” mate. Evidence for this conclusion stems from the “bodyguard hypothesis,” which holds women pair bond with the most dominant partner to secure resources and protection against other contending men (Wrangham 1979). Chads are privileged in this mating strategy, as they embody a “dark triad” of psychological traits—low empathy, narcissism, and manipulateness—that mark them as desirable partners (ScientificBlackpill 2020). By virtue of their domineering physical presence, Chads are orientated toward violence and domination; they require little empathy in securing romantic partners because women are programmed to lust after their aggressive physical presence. As such, Chads are considered to be abusive and arrogant, because they need not respect women to earn their attention. Betas who lack this exaggerated physical prowess must rely on other tactics to compete for women’s affection, like financial support and patience. The blackpill thus draws a tight concordance

¹⁰ Various non-white versions of Chad exist within the manosphere. Tyrone and Chadpreet, for example, are the black and south Asian equivalents of white Chad. This emphasis on race will be addressed in Chapter IV.

between bodily features, masculine identity, and psychological state. These labels such as “Chad” and “beta,” do more than distinguish individuals based on their looks, but they outline general personality orientations and strategies in a competitive romantic field.

Despite the diversity of male identities within blackpill ideology, all men are universally considered to be “disposable” in Western society (“Men” 2020 and “BlackpillScience 2020). Why the blackpill restricts male disposability to Western nations, or how the “West” is actually defined, remains unclear. Even with these gaps, the blackpill attributes male disposability to a societal apathy for men’s problems. That “false rape accusations” (FRA) against men and increasing male nonsexuality are not treated as epidemics worthy of state intervention is evidence of societal misandry. Beyond these “male-specific” issues, the blackpill advances men’s “secondary role” in reproduction as evidence of their expendability. The logic follows that men are not necessary for reproduction once copulation is complete, so few “high status” men can successfully monopolize the reproductive market. One cited study (Tierney 2017) finds that 80 percent of women throughout history have successfully reproduced, whereas only 40 percent of men achieve this same feat. This statistic offers evidence that men are removed from the “biological imperative of reproduction” (BlackpillScience 2020). Here, worthiness is intimately tied with mating success, which embeds in the language incels use to describe themselves as “low-rank.”

Scholarly Thought on Incels: Hybrid Masculinities

Recent transformations in masculine modes of conduct have sparked a growing body of research and theorizing on masculine identities. The rise in male grooming and vanity coupled with the general reduction in homophobia problematize conventional models of hegemonic

masculinity. Behaviors once coded as feminine or “gay” now figure into many masculine performances, creating new constellations of identity that mix hegemonic signifiers with ones associated with marginalized status (Shilling 1995 and Coupland 2007). As a theoretical orientation, hybridity was advanced by Bridges and Pascoe (2014) to make sense of these contemporary alternations that superficially appear to challenge hegemonic norms. In outlining hybrid masculinities, Bridges and Pascoe sought to theorize if these transformations represent challenges to patriarchal conduct or more insidiously compound existing hegemonies. Work in this area focuses on how privileged groups of men selectively incorporate elements of subordinate masculinities or femininities into their identity projects; that is, how young, white, heterosexual men blend elements associated with marginalization into their construction of the gendered self (Bridges and Pascoe 2014). Beyond highlighting aesthetic variation, hybridity conceptualizes how this “cultural mixing” discursively distances privileged men from hegemonic masculinity. By appropriating signifiers of “others,” these distancing transformations work to conceal existing systems of power and inequality. This appropriative distancing represents a type of “dialectical pragmatism,” which describes how hegemonic masculinities strategically borrow elements of subordinated “others” to maintain patriarchy (Demetriou 2001). The locus of patriarchal power, then, lies in its adaptability, as an opportunistic program that veils the origins of its dominion.

While not a term universally adopted among masculinities scholars, hybridity figures prominently into the analysis of those who study incelism. Ging (2014) and Hoiland (2017) both employ hybridity to reconcile the apparent contradictions of incel masculinity: how incels simultaneously “reify” and “repudiate” elements of patriarchal hegemony. The logic follows that incels’ posturing as victims of feminism and political correctness strategically distances the incel

identity from power (Ging 2017). In framing their undesirability as incompatible with holding social or political capital, incels mark themselves as casualties of feminism and female hypergamy. At the same time, incels fortify existing gender hierarchies by championing patriarchal dominion over women. They censure women's sexuality and slut shame those who indulge their purported hypergamous nature (Ging 2017). While originally intended to theorize transformations that appear to challenge hegemonic norms, hybridity is deployed to analyze how incels victimize themselves in a larger effort to control women. In this sense, hybridity describes patriarchy as a flexible system that strategically conceals power in historically novel ways (Bridges and Pascoe 2014).

Despite its potential strengths, hybridity is a poor model for interpreting how the incel mythology embeds in individual psychological experience. As a theoretical framing, hybridity fails to capture the diversity of lived experiences in relation to incel constructions of gender. It categorizes "masculinities" as discrete, bounded performances that miscegenate, rather than flexible identities constructed from interaction. In carving the boundaries of masculinities as discontinuous, it leaves gender performance as an array of monolithic abstractions. Such framings, then, risk prioritizing style and aesthetic variation over power. To overcome these limits, I turn to political subjectivity to emphasize the primacy of subjective reality. Attuning to the experiences and writings of incels.co users exposes the purchase these broader models of masculinity hold in their lives. What does it mean to be a man for incels? How do individuals negotiate masculine ideals through interaction, and how do these conceptions take on various forms of affective significance? Political subjectivity focuses on how global understandings of masculinity intermingle with individuals' experiences of inceldom; it gives vitality to concepts otherwise left as abstract frameworks that remain severed from an embodied reality.

Subjective Experiences of Masculinity on Incels.co Forums

Turning to the writings of incels.co users makes incel masculinity legible through the particular. This section will explore one incels.co post that reveals how individuals negotiate, embody, and reproduce incel masculinity from virtual communication. Mary Bucholtz (2009) has previously described how discourse practices index social identity, which offers a framework for interpreting how the gendered self emerges from interaction. Linguistic indices can be parsed into two forms: positive practices that actively construct a chosen identity from inherent characteristics, and negative identity practices that distance individuals from a rejected group. The highlighted post examines how incels.co users describe “growing up” and adulthood as incompatible with the incel condition. These positive framings tend to construct incel masculinity as an aimless, stagnant experience with no potential to “progress” in life. Such framings appear to resolve the suffering associated with expectations of progress but leave individuals with an empty life devoid of meaning. Incels.co users thus rely on negative identity practices to assign some semblance of worth to a life deemed unworthy of living. Commenters tend to use “Chad,” the exclusive male beneficiary of female hypergamy, as a foil for interpreting the “unjust” treatment of incels. By highlighting the defects of Chad and distancing themselves from his vanity, incels.co users attack the female gaze that finds them unworthy.

People like us cannot grow up

The Incels Inside wiki page tethers “manhood” to suite of essential biological features such as age, the Y-chromosome, and genitalia. These broader framings unsurprisingly reject a performative interpretation of gender, and instead favor the primacy of biological sex. Incels.co

commenters, however, do not discuss manhood as a static category endowed with age, but as an orientation to the world achieved through sexual and romantic acts with women. This discussion is highlighted in an incels.co post, which describes how the act of “growing up” is denied to incels. In a post titled “I always want to stop playing video games and ‘grow up,’ but people like us cannot grow up,” the original poster (OP) writes:

A. The looks that older people give me when they find out I still play video games: Its like I just told them I still watch sesame street or some shit. I cant say I blame them either since for a long time I've been contemplating why I still play video games anymore. I'm 19 and I always think that at this point I should have advanced through life and should be hanging out with guys and girls (jfl cant do that because I'm too high inhib incel), going around driving (cant even get my drivers license), and get a gf (lol obviously never gonna happen). I crave progression in life. I want to move on and start doing shit that people my age should be doing, but I just cant because of my circumstances. I'm forced to continue this teenage mindset for my entire life.¹¹

Here, the OP categorizes his experience of inceldom as a type of developmental frozenness. He attributes his failures to “advance through life” as a result of being an “inhib incel,” which is defined as an incel with high social inhibition. Notably, inceldom manifests in more ways than just sexual undesirability. All perceived signs of stagnancy—an inability to obtain a driver’s license or secure lasting friendships—are folded into the diagnosis of inceldom. In essentializing these outcomes to his incel status, the OP semantically constructs himself as lacking agency. He reports craving progression in life, but he is “forced” to persist in an ongoing state of

¹¹ JFL abbreviates “just for laughs” or “just fucking lol”

adolescence due to his circumstances. He proxies this frozenness by his continued playing of video games, which he compares to watching the children’s program Sesame Street. The OP’s depiction of himself is thus weighted by infantile and adolescent signifiers, as he claims to be trapped in a “teenage mindset” for his entire existence. By positioning himself as irredeemably juvenile, the OP distances manhood as an unintelligible reality to those constrained by their incel status.

Commenters agree that inceldom halts advancement through life beyond teen years. Nearly 27 percent of respondents directly address the OP’s claim that “people like us cannot grow up,” and all affirm this interpretation of inceldom. Comments of this type tend to qualify the OP’s claim by expanding on the original analysis:

- B. Can’t grow up without teen experiences with foids.¹²*
- C. “Grow up” essentially means get married and have kids. Which means be good looking or at least average looking. So when people criticise men who won’t “grow up”, it’s just another form of incel shaming.*
- D. Society expects so much from everyone but for people that look like us there is really no driving force since we knew that it was over from the start. Countless rejections, so what are people like us really working for? Just stuck in an endless loop with no way out.*

Commenters universally describe inceldom as a negation of agentive “progress.” Two incels.co users explicitly attribute this feature of inceldom to a lack of heterosexual encounters with women. One affirms “growing up” requires boys to engage in “teen experiences,” presumably heterosexual sex, with “foids.” Another respondent links “growing up” with securing marriage,

¹² “Foids” or “Femoids” are incel terms for women and girls.

which itself requires a level of desirability unobtainable to incels. Here, manhood is categorized as a status achieved through sexual and romantic behaviors, but one that requires essential biological features to precipitate. With the knowledge that these manifestations of “progress” fall beyond their reach, incels are left with the fragments of an unworthy, aimless existence. One respondent describes this recognition with blunt conviction: “there is really no driving force since we knew that it was over from the start.”

Incels.co framings of masculinity connect with broader discourses on heteronormativity. As a theoretical framework, heteronormativity refers to the alignment of sex, gender identity, and sexuality so that each category dissolves into one another. Heteronormativity draws a single equivalency between individual biology, gender presentation, and sexual preference, and in doing so it categorizes heterosexual and cisgender bodies as “normal” alignments (Gamson and Warner 1994). These categories of identity—sex, gender, sexuality—do not represent equal pillars in constructions of the self. Instead, heteronormative discourse tends to privilege biological sex as an *a priori* variable that comes to constrain gender presentation and sexual preference. Gender identity and sexual orientation, then, emerge as “downstream” manifestations of sex, rather than individual constructions that come to define one’s body. Incel discussions of manhood are not unrecognizable from these broader heteronormative discourses. For incels.co users, “growing up” to achieve manhood requires a sexual prowess which is predetermined by immutable genetic factors. The result is that “advancing in life” is only afforded to those whose bodies mark them sufficiently desirable, which then enables certain boys to “progress” by engaging in heterosexual sex. Commenters thus cast inceldom as a disorder that subverts normal developmental processes, rendering incels perpetually detached from achieving the typical

outcomes of adulthood. These positive identity practices depict incels as locked in a “endless loop” or a “teenage mindset,” presenting their condition as infantile, powerless, and meek.

What emerges from these comments is the distress that broadly characterizes the incel register. Incels.co users express a deep psychic anguish at the immobility of their lives. They perceive themselves as severed from agency, as incapable of attaining relationships, jobs, praise, and respect. They categorize this failure to “grow up” as the ultimate manifestation of the incel status, as the culminating interpretation for a life defined by humiliation and defeat. This grieving does more than (just) discursively distance incels from power: it emerges as a compelling recognition of inceldom’s finality. Incels become scorned men doomed to a type of masculine purgatory, bound to a juvenile state of existence by virtue of their nonsexuality. This pain of expectation is best exemplified in one incels.co user’s response:

E. i sort of grew up in the era of "games are for losers/little kids" so I had always had this notion that once I 'grew up' and became an adult I would just stop playing games. it was the natural progression. i'd move onto other more sophisticated things like going to museums, enjoying long hikes, fucking my girlfriend. then you become even more of an adult and then you got kids and that takes all day to raise them properly so for the next 20 years it is all about them. you'd have no time for yourself. at least that's how i saw my future going back when i was a teen. then i hit 20 and everything sucked. i definitely didn't feel like an adult. nobody wanted me. nobody talked to me. so i just kept playing video games thinking one day i guess all my shit will come together. and i'll finally be an adult. then i hit 30 and everything still sucked. still no friends. still never been on a date. no love interests. i'm so ugly and fat people look at me with disdain

when i go out in public so now i just stay in my dark room and never want to go out. the only thing to do is play video games to pass the time. that or binge Netflix/YouTube but either way this isn't a life worth living and i don't expect like i will ever fully feel like i am an adult. i don't ever truly feel like i will feel as i have accomplished something in this world or become successful. and i will never feel like i have made my parents proud. because i am too old now and the only thing left to do now is work until i stop and die. no happiness. no friends. no love. just work, misery and death.

Here, this commenter describes an ongoing crisis of expectation that characterizes his experiences across multiple decades. He recounts his life through his twenties and thirties as a type of waiting game; that is, he expected adulthood to suddenly snap into place and finally begin his “natural progression.” When this event never happens, he realizes that he will never “fully feel like an adult,” which he attributes to being ugly and overweight. What is left with the remains of his life is a brutal, joyless routine: “no happiness. no friends. no love. just work, misery and death.” Although strikingly morbid, this interpretation perhaps offers a better alternative to indulging any hope that life could be different. There appears to be some comfort in accepting the finality of the incel condition. By abandoning any fruitless expectation of progress, this commenter can accept the monotonous rhythm of his remaining years without false hope. These positive identity practices of incels.co users thus resolve the psychic madness of expectation. Once the incel title is accepted and attributed to immutable features beyond control, all individuals are left with is deciding which constellation of copes will preserve them until “it’s over.”

Chad Always Wins

At its outset, the blackpill requires its adherents to put aside any hope that their present circumstances could improve. Positive identity framings of incel-dom are thus self-annihilating: accepting the incel status requires an acknowledgement that suffering will inevitably persist. How do incels.co users respond to this defeating realization? One reaction is death fantasies. Although infrequent, some commenters respond to evidence of incel-dom's inevitability with suicidal ideation. Short confirmations of such sentiments like "it's over" or "ropemaxx"—an allusion to hanging oneself—appear occasionally throughout this incels.co post (three percent). Such ideations tend to receive little uptake in the thread, as no commenters engage with responses of the sort. More broadly, positive identity practices cannot sustain any sense of self-worth, as they inevitably push toward fatalism.

Another response is to discredit women's evaluation of men that marks incels unworthy. Scholars have previously written on the gendered "gaze" problem for emergent masculinities (Coupland 2007 and Cheong and Kaur 2015). Much of this work has focused on heterosexual men increasingly turning toward bodily self-presentation and grooming. By heightening attention to image and vanity, traditional notions of masculinity become unsettled. Men risk losing a sense of "manliness" if they appear narcissistic or bodily absorbed in order to attract female attention (Coupland 2007). The vulnerability associated with submitting to women's appraisal thus presents a significant challenge to preserving masculinity. For corporations advertising male-grooming products, the threat of female gaze is challenged by a series of mitigating discourses: that is, advertising techniques that maintain a sense of "manliness" in the face of women's evaluation and increasing male-vanity (Coupland 2007). For incels, the vulnerability associated with the female gaze is folded inevitably into their social identity. All forms of masculinity—

Chads, betas, incels—represent ontologies of existence that depend upon women’s determination of individual desirability. Incels are the casualties of this scrutiny, found unworthy in the eyes of the female panopticon.

Because positive framings of incelism tend to nullify self-worth, incels.co users rely on negative identity practices that simultaneously distance them from Chads and discredit women’s evaluation of desirability. By drawing a tight concordance between masculine identity and psychological state, Chad becomes susceptible to critique. Chad is generally depicted as an arrogant, self-admiring man with animated, perhaps even feminine, colorful clothing. The original 2016 meme that produced his aesthetic (Figure 2) showcases his vanity by highlighting his extreme self-absorption. He pays \$3000 for designer clothing, perfectly coifs his hair, and elects visually bright neon attire. He “does not register the emotions or feelings of other at all” because he is entranced with preserving his self-image. Chad’s defects thus refract the problems of the female gaze. Although incessantly adored by women, Chad comes with his own suite of pathetic traits. He is a self-obsessed narcissist who is himself undeserving of the praise he receives from women. Invoking Chad can alleviate vulnerabilities associated with the gaze, because he embodies the fallacy of women’s appraisal as a measure of individual worth.

THE CHAD STRIDE



Figure 2. *The Virgin Walk and the Chad Stride*. Incels Inside. Retrieved April 2020.

Invocations of Chad appear frequently in incels.co threads and generally catalyze the dejection taking hold in the comments into collective outrage. Around 11 percent of responses in the thread “I always want to stop playing video games and ‘grow up,’ but people like us cannot grow up,” use Chad as a foil for interpreting incel’s harsh rejection from society. Comments of this type emerge abruptly in the flow of conversation, marking a dramatic shift from self-reflection toward hostility. These users argue Chads receive less scrutiny when engaging in the same activities incels use to cope, like playing video games:

- F. *Chad plays videogames and his gf make him sandwiches and fuck him after*
- G. *[Responding to comment E] or she'll give him a BJ ([oral sex]) during. Chad always wins*
- H. *... my cousin in law is a chad playing video games and no one cares.*

The comparisons drawn here highlight the privileges associated with being a Chad and the societal disdain for incels. While Chads receive no criticism for playing videogames, the same act is leveraged as evidence of incels' immaturity. Women are entranced by Chad's good looks and fail to consider him capable of embarrassment or wrongdoing. They will happily indulge his gaming tendencies if they find themselves lucky enough to be his anointed possession. Such comments, then, frame women as fundamentally shallow creatures who are exclusively driven their attraction to "high status" men. One commenter confirms these views by offering a specific example of a purported Chad receiving praise for playing videogames from the popular press. He describes the public approval for the actor Henry Cavill, best known for playing Superman in DC universe films, when he revealed he is an avid gamer:

- I. *Henry Cavill admitted multiple times that he's a PC gamer. Normies and the press (journalists) all reacted "whoa, so cool" On top of that, people often claim that PC gamers that play strategy games (that Cavill plays) are ugly fat neckbeard losers. He got a free pass on that because he a famous CHAD. We need to stop bothering what those people say.*

This commenter is likely referencing a series of articles that covered Cavill's gaming tendencies, such as Vanity Fair's "Henry Cavill Was Fat as a Child, Plays World of Warcraft, and Other Surprisingly Humanizing Details About Our Generation's Superman" (Miller 2013). Although this comparison highlights the differences between Chads and incels in public reception, it also

reveals their closeness by common action. That is, both play videogames but receive starkly different appraisals for their behavior. The implication holds that incels have done nothing to warrant their societal neglect, and they can attribute the positive treatment of Chads to more global forces such as evolution and hypergamy. Incels are thus vindicated by Chad's very existence. Invocations of Chad challenge the authority of the female surveillance in that women emerge as unreliable judges of masculine worth. The result is that female scrutiny is partially rejected—not so much that the illusion of incelhood is dismantled—but enough so that individual aimlessness can find new meaning in a sense of injustice.

Allusions to Chad appear frequently in other incels.co threads. In “It is impossible to get ripped unless you have Godly genetics or use massive roids (which will make you bald),” Chad juxtaposes incels' inability to gain muscle mass.¹³ One commenter writes:

J. I lifted for years and received almost nothing in terms of strength gains.

Meanwhile Chad thunderarms benches my max for warmups on his first day.

Here too, Chad is conjured to expose the defeating reality of incel life. Although this comment does not address female appraisal, it similarly deploys Chad to frame incel grievances as unfair. Chad emerges as the phantasm onto which incels project their frustrations, suffering, and indignation. He gives a name to the faceless enemy of genetic tyranny, to the injustice of life's genetic lottery, and to society's cruel neglect of incels. By negatively distancing themselves from Chad and his public adoration, incels catalyze their dejection to a sense of outrage at the unfairness of their circumstances. What materializes from these comments, then, is a dialectic of masculinities that embeds in incels.co users' experience of the masculine self. Chads and incels emerge as more than just different isoforms of manhood, but as entirely distinct species that

¹³ This comment thread was previously described in Chapter II in greater detail. For clarification, return to “Invocations of the Blackpill” in Chapter II.

move from life in diametrically opposed ways. Scholars might theorize this symbolic distance as an example of hybridity, but such framings miss the affective salience of Chad's existence. The Chad-incel distancing mutates incels' humiliation into fury. By absolving incels of any responsibility for their actions, Chad legitimates a perception of the masculine self that centers in aimlessness and defeat. Without Chad to refract their mistreatment, incels' posturing as casualties of feminism and genetic determinism falls apart.

Conclusion

Exploring articulations of experience on incels.co reveals the cursory nature of globalizing analyses. Incels are not distancing themselves from hegemonic masculinity to conceal their power. Rather, their acts of boundary making emerge as desperate attempts to make sense of their suffering, and to remove responsibility for the anguish they have felt up to the point of embracing incelhood. Incels.co users' identity practices attempt to resolve the psychic pain that everything they have done in life is wrong, that the unworthiness they see in themselves is no fault of their own. The symbolic distance accomplished by their self-victimization is undeniable, and the material violence that is sanctioned by such victimization remains potent, but focusing exclusively on symbolic distance misses the affective salience of blackpill masculinity. Why young men are attracted to incelhood as a discursive position of masculinity must be answered through the particular. Only in assessing the specific articulations of individual experience can scholars make headway into the incel phenomenon.

Chapter IV: Racial Intersections

Abstract

Inceldom tends to be represented in popular and scholarly writing as a white nationalist movement, but these depictions fail to capture the diversity of racial narratives circulating on incels.co. In this chapter, I discuss two incels.co posts that assess how race embeds in the incel mythology of attractiveness and suffering. Rather than uphold white supremacy, incels.co users generally treat whiteness as tentatively incompatible with the incel condition given its wide societal appeal. This framing of white desirability coalesces into the philosophy of “just be white” (JBW), which casts white men as the normative standard of sexual conduct, and non-white incels as more justified in their claiming of incurable undesirability. JBW is not universally accepted among incels.co users, as some frame inceldom as an ontological category that defies racial categorization. For these users, desirability is a more salient identifier of masculine identity than race, which upholds inceldom as a racially inclusive taxonomy.

Inceldom as a White Nationalist Movement

Popular media frames incel ideology as a sort of “gateway” for men descending into neo-Nazism (Taub 2018). The logic follows that online misogyny catalyzes men’s sexual aggrievement into a politics of racial dominion, supplanting sexual victimhood with a more pernicious form of racist extremism. Journalists highlight what these factions hold in common: an aggrieved sense of entitlement that one’s birthright—whether sex or political power—has been denied by feminism or demographic replacement. Scholars are beginning to uphold these depictions of inceldom, as a brief from the Georgetown Institute of Women, Peace, and Security (Zimmerman et al 2018) describes the blackpill as a “political ideology based on a new wave of

misogyny and white supremacy.” While acknowledging that “not all incels are white supremacists or terrorists,” the authors conclude a toxic view of gender relations provides a “linking thread” between the blackpill and more racially motivated ideologies (Zimmerman et al 2018). Inceldom, as it is popularly represented, becomes a sort of intermediate in white men’s radicalization into racial terrorism.

While journalists have been quick to reduce inceldom to a white nationalist movement, evidence supporting this framing remains elusive. The question becomes: do media portrayals of inceldom align with the discussions and identities circulating on incels.co? Demographic data from the site indicate that they might not. The most recent internal poll from October of 2019 (“Survey Results”) found roughly 53 percent of respondents (n = 546) self-reported as white. The remaining minority reported Asian heritage (either East or South Asian) in the greatest proportion at roughly 17 percent, with Black, Hispanic, and Middle Eastern profiles accounting for the remainder with near 10 percent each. In terms of geography, a strong majority reported living in Europe or the North American, collectively totaling 85 percent of survey respondents. These data alone do not constitute sufficient evidence to theorize inceldom’s relationship with racial ideologies, but the ethnic variety of site users should unsettle the framing of blackpill ideology as a predominantly white endeavor.

Given that demographic data challenge assumptions on the racial makeup of inceldom, why does it retain the imprint of white supremacy? Part of the answer stems from the fact that inceldom—as an ideology and a collection of virtual communities—lacks critical theorizing within the dimension of race. Most scholars (Ging 2016 and Hoiland 2016) who have engaged with incel forums tend to avoid incorporating race in their analyses. Jaki et al (2019) give tangential consideration to racist language in their study of incels.co language (then incels.me).

In their dataset of 3,500 threads, they found racial slurs were sporadic, but race was frequently discussed in relation to which ethnicities were believed to boast more incels (Jaki 2019). The result is that racial discussions on incel forums escape critical scrutiny. Within this dearth of theorizing, whatever conclusions drawn about the Manosphere in terms of race get projected onto incel communities. Scholars have previously described the Manosphere as exclusive to white men. Coston and Kimmel outline it as “a loose but loud collection of Internet blog sites, policy-oriented organizations, and a legion of middle-class white men who feel badly done by individual women or by policies they believe have cheated them” (2013, 375). As a single point within this network of virtual communities, incelism becomes subsumed under the Manosphere and assumes all of its discursive baggage. White centrality, then, becomes transplanted into incelism as its organizing political ethos.

In the broadest sense, this chapter addresses the racial narratives that embed in the incels.co users’ experiences of the self. I understand race as a socially conditioned ideology of human difference with no comprehensible biological origin. The American Anthropological Association’s statement on race (1998) outlines this framework:

With the vast expansion of scientific knowledge in this century, it has become clear that human populations are not unambiguous, clearly demarcated, biologically distinct groups.... ‘Race’ evolved as a worldview, a body of prejudgments that distorts our ideas about human differences and group behavior. Racial beliefs constitute myths about the diversity in the human species and about the abilities and behavior of people homogenized into "racial" categories.

Race, in contrast to popular belief, does not represent a sound model for interpreting human variation. That is, there are no boundaries along the range of human diversity from which racial categories can be convincingly argued. Such conclusions should not minimize the role that race plays as an ideology; although race does not originate from as meaningful biological basis, it takes on a significant consequence in shaping how individuals move through the world.

Collectively, these outlines provide a clear, organizing framework for discussing incel racial narratives.

Race and Sexuality

As with all traits within the incel canon, the blackpill codes racial boundaries through a grammar of sexual appeal. Such race-sexuality discourses do not deviate from mainstream or historical constructions of race, given that sexuality is often deployed to structure logics of racial difference. Angela Willey (2014, 27) grounds the interplay between race and sexuality in *Undoing Monogamy*, noting that “sexology must be understood as part of the colonial project and its experts’ fantasies about geographically distanced Others as constitutive of its knowledges.” How race and sexuality become bound in historical processes of “othering” anchors the ways in which incels.co users understand racial difference.

Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1979) provides an entry point into the coproduction of racialized and sexualized hierarchies. Said (2-3) defines “Orientalism” as the general acceptance in Europe of a “basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, ‘mind,’ destiny and so on.” For Said, difference between The Orient and the Occident is exaggerated by the West’s projection of femininity onto the East. By reducing the Orient to a feminine, traditional, the West affirms its own modernity and masculinity:

Orientalism itself, furthermore, was an exclusively male province. Like so many guilds during the modern period, it viewed itself and its subject matter with sexist blinders. This is especially evident in the writings of travelers and novelists: women are usually the creatures of male power-fantasy. They expressed unlimited sensuality, they are more or less stupid, and above all they are willing (207).

The Orient as an emblem of femininity does more than discursively uplift the West as a masculine ideal, but it justifies extractive enterprises into the East. By presenting the Orient as submissive, historical, and penetrable, Oriental dualisms legitimate Western intervention into the East as a type of benevolent conquest. What emerges from Said is that demarcating “othered” geographies often calls upon a language of sexual difference. In the initial moments of global confrontation, sex and gender were coopted to distinguish peoples and cultures in a manner that would eventually solidify as a racial science.

Said speaks broadly about race-gender discourses in Western imagination. Ann Stoler discusses the more precise mechanisms by which sexuality, gender, and race become coterminous in *Race and the Education of Desire* (2012). Here, Stoler reconfigures Foucault’s theoretical assessments from *The History of Sexuality* in an imperial field, affirming his notion that sexual science serves as a tool that comes to control populations. For both Stoler and Foucault, 18th Century European governments became increasingly invested in managing people at the level of the state population, and not merely as individuals. To do so, states regulated issues such as birth, death, marriage, and contraception as a means of managing life more systematically. Sexuality, due to its procreative potential, could serve as an interface between the individual and the population, and it garnered close surveillance from the State’s supporting regime of scientists (Foucault 147). Much of this scrutiny centered on perverse expressions of sexuality—childhood masturbation, homosexual intercourse, and women’s “hysteria”—that became essentialized as fixed markers of identity. The state could then deploy these sexual subjectivities for the purposes of social control, threatening to discipline those who did not conform to respectable, state-sanctioned unions. Stoler extends these findings beyond Europe by implicating sexual science in the management of colonial life. For Stoler (2012, 15), colonial

sites were the “laboratories of modernity” from which these sexual subjectivities were first produced. Racial boundaries were drawn from any perceived sexual abnormalities of colonized subjects—homosexual practices, promiscuity, nakedness—that marked difference from the respectability of monogamous, heterosexual Europe. Stoler concludes that European sexual subjectivities—the “hysterical woman” or the perverse adult—could not exist without the racially erotic counterpoint of the libidinal, colonized subject. Although the precise logics of racialization differ across colonial regimes and colonized geographies, sexuality remains a pernicious force underwriting racial difference.

In order for the sexual discourses emerging in the colonies to become instruments of governmentality in Europe, they required a body of scholars to transcribe them into the Metropole. Into this field stepped the developing institution of anthropology, which emerged as the curator of imperial hierarchies born out of the successive waves of European colonization. Michel-Rolph Trouillot (2003) provides a compelling genealogy of anthropology’s racial motivations in “Anthropology and the Savage Slot: The Politics and Poetics of Otherness.” Here, Trouillot contends anthropology inherited a historical field of “othering” as it crystallized as a discipline. Travelers’ logs, missionary accounts, and natural history found a home in emerging anthropological institutions, which took up the task of delivering the spectacle of the “other” to Western audiences. Much of this work relied on racial taxonomies first outlined during the Enlightenment period by scholars like Carl Linnaeus and Friedrachs Johann Blumenbach. In *System of Nature* (1758), Linnaeus argued the varieties of humankind could be slotted into categories below the species level. Although not an anthropologist himself, Linnaeus’s four human taxonomies—Americus, Europaeus, Asiaticus, and Afer—introduced the idea of human populations could be essentialized and discretely bounded. Johann Friedrich Blumenbach

inherited this model of human taxonomy, using anatomical features to discretely classify human variation along these discrete geographical identities. Such work constitutes the foundation of physical anthropology, as categories of physically measurable human diversity that became legible through a taxonomic system of division. Early anthropology is thus pervaded by attempts to link race, behavior, and culture in tight alignment. Certainly, xenophobic traditions preceded anthropology's formulation as a field, but these trends did not discursively solidify as a racial and sexual science until the tools of binominal nomenclature and social evolution were made available. Put simply, the "savage slot" became anthropology's reason for existence.

More recently, anthropologists have challenged these colonial imprints on the field. In 1951, Sherry Washburn called for a "new physical anthropology," one that would move away from discrete classification and toward clinal models to explain human variation. This paradigm shift does not mean that race as a discourse of difference has lost purchase. Despite the academic disavowal of the biological classification of race, racial subjectivities remain potently reproduced, embedding in global discourses and individual subjective experience. To account for race as a subject position, an expanding body of scholarship theorizes race as a culturally specific, social experience. Smedley and Smedley (2012, 18) frame race as a "worldview," conditioned as a "... systematic way of looking at, perceiving, and interpreting reality." Of course, defining race as a "social construct" tends to say very little about the mechanisms that build racial boundaries. Patrick Wolfe remedies this problem by describing races as "traces of colonial history" that continually recuperate colonial inequalities (2006). For Wolfe, these racial logics extend beyond their initial formulation, becoming ongoing discourses of difference that opportunistically mutate to align with colonizer's interest.

Tracing the historical treatment of race provides a necessary backdrop for interpreting the racial narratives of incels.co. Revealing how sexuality and gender operate as instruments of racialization tethers incels.co conceptions of race in a longer colonial logic that manifests in novel ways. Many of these narratives gain authority from a body of scholarship that does not interrogate the colonial logics of race manifesting in its findings.

The Blackpill on Race

Race figures as an essential category of identity and desirability on the Scientific Blackpill page, and the research cited here is primarily concerned with women's evaluation of male attractiveness along racial lines. Analysis from the blackpill page tends to draw upon four racial categories—white, black, Hispanic (or Latino), and Asian—that together constitute a racial hierarchy of desirability. Here, white men are granted preeminent status as the ideal of beauty, with black and Hispanic men occupying the middle of the hierarchy, and Asian men falling to the bottom. Occasionally, Asian identity is deconstructed into East and South geographies to recursively distinguish Indian men as the most desexualized ethnic group.

Like all bodily features within the blackpill, racial orders of beauty are attributed to women's subconscious appraisal of masculine desirability. One cited study (Lin and Lundquist 2013) concludes women enforce stricter racial requirements in dating than men, with women of all races tending to privilege white men as the most suitable partners. Support for these conclusions comes from online dating datasets, which find that an overwhelmingly majority of women express a racial preference in their virtual dating behavior (Lin and Lundquist 2013). Incels.co users leverage these findings as evidence that women of all ethnicities are “sexually racist;” that is, the wholesale dismissal of men on the basis of race exposes women's collective

prejudice, and women emerge as shallow creatures who lust exclusively after “high-status” mates (who are overwhelmingly white). Upon cursory glance, these incel conceptions of race seem to align tentatively with feminist critiques of racialized beauty standards. A large body of feminist scholarship considers contemporary racial standards of beauty as an outgrowth of colonial race-gender discourses. Asian men are desexualized, for example, by Orientalist ideologies and practices that reduce the East to an exotically feminine geography (Fung 1991). The blackpill unsurprisingly rejects these social constructionist views of beauty, and instead reduces racial hierarchies of attractiveness to biologically hardwired impulses. Neglect of Asian men is attributed to facial “neoteny,” which describes an adult’s degree of resemblance to an infant. Cited publications (Vashi 2016) hold that Asian facial structure is characterized by a rounder face, higher eyebrows, lower nasal bridges, and more receded chins, which collectively create an infantile impression. Women’s purported disregard for Asian men is attributed to these “babylike” features, which are simultaneously leveraged to interpret the high sex appeal of Asian women and rebuke “Western beauty ideals.” Such reasoning is supported by a large body of evolutionary psychology research, which purports that “neotenous” features are more attractive in women because they suggest fertility (Jones 1995). Like neglect for Asian men, whiteness is similarly diagnosed as an evolutionary cue of attractiveness. The blackpill concludes “global preferences for whiter skin and the ‘white standard’ of beauty by which all races are judged is likely biological” (BlackpillScience, 2020). Rosy, golden skin is taken as an objective indicator of health, which is interpreted as an ingrained evolutionary desire for virile and healthy mates.

Racial hierarchies of beauty embed in the language incels.co users to characterize their experiences of incelhood. Like any other feature outlined in the blackpill, racial identities are affixed to the “cel” morpheme to attribute undesirability to a specified trait. Not all races are

treated the same in these naming conventions. Asian identities tend to be reduced to stereotypes of their respective regions: “Ricecels” defines east Asian incels, “Currycels” are those with heritage from the Indian subcontinent, and “sandcels” are individuals whose backgrounds are in the Middle-East and North Africa. These geographies represent racial groups to which inceldom can be attributed, given the general rejection of Asian men by women. “Whitecels” and blackcels” do not receive similar stereotyped titles, and these names hardly manifest in incels.co comments except when commenters need to clarify their ethnicity. These naming conventions thus cast whiteness—and blackness to a lesser degree—as normative templates of sexual conduct. A similar recursive grading of racial attractiveness describes the various isoforms of Chad, who is himself Caucasian. Non-white versions of Chad exist but appear less frequently in incels.co writings: Tyrone (black Chad), Chang (East Asian Chad), Chadpreet (South Asian Chad), and Chadriguez/Rico/Carlos (Hispanic Chad). Unspecific allusions to a “high-status” man in incels.co comment threads almost exclusively use “Chad” to convey this imagined persona. Non-white versions only appear when race becomes a salient factor of a dominant man’s identity. White desirability, then, is inscribed in Chad’s deployment as the pinnacle of male attractiveness.

Incels.co Comment Threads on Race

Race is treated as an extensive topic of discussion on incels.co forums. Generally, these conversations center on how race intersects with sex appeal or how racial unity should be treated within the incel canon. In this section, I detail two incels.co posts that consider race in relation to the incel experience. The first post tracks disagreement over “just be white” theory (JBW), which holds whitecels exist in closer proximity to ascension by virtue of their appealing ethnicity. The

second post assesses the notion of “racial allegiance” among incels.co members, or the idea women must reproduce within their respective race.

JBW Theory

The blackpill is cautious in its analysis of racial preference to avoid condemning white incels. Strong preference for whiteness does not presuppose that all whitecels are voluntarily celibate. Instead, race is fixed as another point in the constellation of features used by women to enforce sexual exclusion. Despite this caution, some incels.co users have come to regard whiteness as incompatible with incels’ irredeemable repugnance. These sentiments on white desirability—which are supported by the blackpill—coalesce into the incel philosophy of JBW. Although contested among incels.co users, JBW theory highlights whiteness as the foremost indicator of attractiveness in multiethnic, Western societies. Discussions of JBW center exclusively on white and Asian men, as two ends on a spectrum of racialized masculine appeal. This philosophy designates the white body as the standard of normative attractiveness, while simultaneously emasculating Asian men as desexualized. JBW is often accompanied by the companion theory SEAmassing (South East Asia maxxing), which purports that white Westerners can improve their dating chances by transplanting to South East Asia. The theory follows that white incels can freely obtain sex with women in any South Asian geography, given the relative novelty of their ethnicity and its universal appeal. SEAmassing was inspired by one incels.co user’s anecdotal sexual conquests in Thailand, which he chronicled on the forums in 2017. Here, ItsOver (username) details his struggles in finding sexual partners in Great Britain, and his ultimate success with Thai women once he traveled overseas (“SEAmassing” 2020).

One incels.co post shares purported evidence for JBW theory. In a post titled “SCIENTIFIC PROOF that the order of importance is: Race > Height > Face > Money,” the original poster (OP) presents conclusions from a 2006 publication on partner preference and race (Hitsch 2006). The cited study (Hitsch 2006), a joint publication from the University Chicago school of Business, the University of Chicago Department of Economics, and the MIT School of Management, analyzed a dating service dataset which tracked the activities of 22,000 online site users from two American cities. To approximate the monetary value of a man's race, height, and facial attractiveness to women, the authors analyzed user attributes and their partner searches. All traits were then calculated in terms of the additional income needed by “low-tier” men—those with small stature or bottom 10 percent facial attractiveness, for example—to earn the same attention from women as the average man. From this analysis, the OP extracts several findings relevant to incels’ interest in race, height, facial attractiveness, and financial status. He writes:

A. Race > Height > Face > Money

Highlights:

- *Being Asian costs you \$247,000 extra per year compared to a white guy.*
- *Being 5'7" costs you \$150,000 extra compared to a 5'11" guy, or \$180,000 compared to a 6'2" guy.*
- *Being bottom 10% facially costs you \$40,000 extra compared to an average guy or \$186,000 compared to a top 10% guy.*

As noted, it costs an extra \$247,000 for an Asian man to date a white girl. It costs an extra \$154,000 for a black man to date a white girl. On the other hand, white men can make up to \$24,000 less to be considered equally attractive to Asian

women. ie. Asian women will accept poor white men over average income Asians. If we tally up the cost, then we find being an ugly 5'7" Asian will then cost you an extra \$437,000 income per year. ie. You need to make \$499,500 annual income to match the attractiveness of an average white guy. In America, this income represents the top 0.5%. So the only way money can compensate for being physically unattractive is if you are in the top 0.5%, and this is just enough to bring you back to equal to an average white guy. It still isn't enough to make you actually attractive, and you need to find a way to make sure girls know about the money for it to even matter in the first place.

For Equal Success With:	Additional Income Needed by White Men (\$1,000)	Additional Income Needed by Black Men (\$1,000)	Additional Income Needed by Hispanic Men (\$1,000)	Additional Income Needed by Asian Men (\$1,000)
White Women	0	154	77	247
Black Women	220	0	184	-
Hispanic Women	59	30	0	-
Asian Women	-24	0	28	0
	Additional Income Needed by White Women (\$1,000)	Additional Income Needed by Black Women (\$1,000)	Additional Income Needed by Hispanic Women (\$1,000)	Additional Income Needed by Asian Women (\$1,000)
White Men	0	Not Feasible	Not Feasible	Not Feasible
Black Men	Not Feasible	0	Not Feasible	Not Feasible
Hispanic Men	Not Feasible	Not Feasible	0	Not Feasible
Asian Men	Not Feasible	-	-43	0

Note: The table shows the additional annual income that a man or woman needs to compensate for his own ethnicity if he wants to date a partner who is a member of a different ethnic group. The baseline incomes are \$62,500 for men and \$42,500 for women. For example, consider an Asian man who would like to date a White woman. In order to be as desirable to her as a White man who earns \$62,500 per year, he needs to have an additional income of \$247,000 (i.e., he needs to make \$309,500 per year).

Figure 1. Ethnicity/Income Trade-Offs in Study of Online Dating Preferences (Hitsch 2006), as Cited on Incels.co Forum Post.

Here, the OP offers little additional analysis beyond what is directly lifted from the cited publication. Using data on the calculated monetary value of particular traits, the OP establishes a hierarchy of features used by women in their evaluation of partner desirability: “Race > Height > Face > Money.” Race, in this formulation, is granted primary status as the foremost measure of individual attractiveness. Evidence for this conclusion comes from the finding that Asian men require the maximum reported additional income (\$247,000) to be seen as favorably as a white man to a white woman. Similar calculations are reported for height and facial attractiveness relative to their respective median, but no additional income score surpasses that reported for Asian men (Hitsch 2006). Discussions on race-attractiveness hierarchies thus center on the extreme difference in appeal between Asian and white men. Asian identity becomes the ultimate marker of immutable undesirability, a near insurmountable obstacle in the endeavor toward ascension.

Respondents in the thread tend to view the OP’s presented evidence as a vindication of JBW theory. Nearly 63 percent of commenters agree that incelism results from the dismissal of ethnic men by women of all races; that is, that incelism is problem of racialized beauty standards.

- B. Inceldom is an ethnic problem, always has been.*
- C. Will this finally shut up the JBW deniers?*
- D. Every white is a Chad in the eyes of ethnic foids.*
- E. Race > everything. Can’t believe there are so many copers here who deny that.*

Commenters here advance the notion that whiteness is incompatible with incel status. Whiteness garners so much appeal—itsself measurable in monetary terms—that it prohibits white men from reaching the undesirability necessary to claim inceldom. Within this calculus, race becomes more than just fragmentary trait used to assess attractiveness, but the primary characteristic of incels. Commenters write, “Inceldom is an ethnic problem” and “race > everything” as evidence of race’s preeminent importance in women’s calculation of attractiveness. Asian men fare the worst in this context, experiencing the greatest degree of neglect by women of all races. White men, in contrast, are conceptualized as benefiting from these racial standards, and one user goes so far as to consider whitecels as Chads to non-white women (“every white is a Chad in the eyes of ethnic foids). Support for this notion comes from the paper finding that white men can earn \$24,000 less income and still and maintain equal success with Asian women (Figure 1). Racial standards of attractiveness thus grant non-white incels legitimacy in the perception of their own doom. Outrage is then directed at to anyone who denies these “truths” of racial desire. These “deniers” are labelled copers, indicating that their disbelief does not align with tenets of the blackpill.

Some commenters partially contest the conclusions advanced by the OP, noting the study deals primarily with long-term relationships and not sex appeal. These respondents argue whiteness garners the cultural capital necessary for stable unions but does not incite lust in the way that blackness does:

F. So true women prefer whites when it comes to settling down and finding a nice beta bux to fund them. But for sexual attraction women prefer black guys. Women can only truly love black guys and they love them for how they look women only care about white guys money.

G. you can give your hard-earned riches to some white whore, and she's still going to fuck Chad/Tyrone behind your back as much as she can get away with it.

Comments of this type endow blackness with a threatening hypersexuality. Generally, the blackpill concerns itself with the purported “primal instincts” that drive women to covet high-status men. Given that the cited publication deals with long-term relationships and not sexual conduct or sexual desire, the article itself becomes open to critique. Here, blackness becomes inscribed with an intense eroticism that draws women into its seductive orbit, but on its own is insufficient in maintaining long-term relationships. Black men’s hypersexuality is not directed at all women but targets white women more precisely. That is, most of the hypothetical, interracial unions discussed by incels.co users play out between white women and black men.

Not all commenters agree with the pervading interpretation of JBW theory. A minority of posters rebuke the moderators for allowing the “condemning [of] white incels,” which they argue goes against community guidelines. Other critics of JBW theory cite data from the publication demonstrating white men do not enjoy the same advantages with non-white and non-Asian women (Figure 1). One commenter reports the finding that white men require \$220,000 and \$59,000 additional income to receive the same attention from black and Hispanic women as their respective male counterparts. Such evidence is leveraged to critique the notion that all white men are “Chads in the eyes of ethnic foids.” Other comments attack JBW theory more explicitly, arguing “racepilling” distracts from the common experiences of rejection that unite all incels:

Ethnics do not have a monopoly on true incel-dom. Plenty of Whites here get just as much female attention as any Ethnic here (i.e. none). If you want your issues understood, stop trying to pin them on other incels who have nothing to do with them. Incel-dom is only going to spread as a ‘big tent’ idea, not a racially exclusive wound-digging club.

For this commenter, race becomes just another incidental feature that might contribute to one's collective undesirability. The presence of white incels on the forum is sufficient evidence to rebuke JBW: men would not be here unless they had to be. Ultimately, this commenter alludes to more global aspirations, noting inceldom must orient itself as a racially inclusive movement if it hopes to gain traction as a political group.

There is no single, coherent logic of race that unites incels.co as a community of practice. Instead, theories on race are opportunistically deployed to legitimate identities within the incel worldview. For JBW proponents, evidence of white desirability establishes a recursive grading that distinguishes whitecels from their non-white counterparts. Whiteness grants a tenuous proximity to ascension by virtue of its wide societal appeal, which leaves non-white incels further marginalized in the hierarchy of sexual desire. JBW adherents thus grant their own psychic pain a preeminent status within the incel community, using Asian neglect as leverage in the constant jockeying to determine which experience of nonsexuality is most earned. JBW critics respond to these challenges by defending their legitimacy in claiming inceldom. These defenses take on a diverse range of positions, with no consistent logic that justifies white inclusion within inceldom. Some JBW deniers attack the assumption that race alone determines desirability, highlighting their own experiences of rejection which they attribute to height, frame, and facial attractiveness. Others advocate that inceldom should represent a racially inclusive taxonomy, with the ultimate aim of expanding the blackpill to men of all races as a political therapeutic for feminist hegemony. According to this logic, racial pandering—or racebaiting—distracts from the issues that unite incels as casualties of feminism.

Racial Allegiance

A second incels.co post from early 2019 deals with the question of “racial allegiance” within the incels.co community. A core belief of ethnic nationalist strains, racial allegiance describes the belief that men of each race “own” their respective women (Kimmel 2013). Such reasoning tends to originate from anxiety over miscegenation that troubles purported ethnic purity. In a post entitled “racial allegiance is an extremely bluepilled cope,” the original poster (OP) describes racial preservation as an absurd belief with no logical home in inceldom.¹⁴ Here, the OP addresses the post to any white nationalists on incels.co (stormfronters), whose belief in maintaining racial purity defies the blackpill’s assumption that incels will never reproduce:

A. This is really for white nationalist copers, because the white race is the only race I see so obsessed with race like this, to the point where they try to co-opt other "movements" into their race obsession, and the most laughable example of this, is trying to co-opt the "incel movement".

They don't seem to get the irony of these things: 1. Recruiting men who cannot get sex, into a movement revolving around men preserving and continuing their race, WHICH MEANS REPRODUCTION, AS IN HAVING SEX. 2. The majority of incels ARE ETHNIC, its like trying to recruit blacks into the KKK and wondering why you don't have "any takers." [...] The white race has it the easiest when it comes to getting laid as their typical looks are considered the universal standards of attractiveness. Not only that, having a white partner is a symbol of social status, especially for ethnic women, because the white race is seen as the worlds "conquerer race", that's never going to change, its an established historical fact.

¹⁴ In contrast to the blackpill and the redpill, the bluepill describes a set of deluded beliefs centered in feminist critiques of patriarchy. Describing a belief as “bluepilled” means it does not align with the blackpill’s understanding of society.

[...] No incel is actually "a part of" their race, we are genetic defects of our own race, and therefore just as easily excluded as members of other races because they are also considered genetically defective and not "superior". That's the irony of white incels claiming allegiance to their race, they don't seem to get that they have no race, their race doesn't consider them a part of that race, they'll gladly use you and take advantage of you and your patronage to establish that white nationalist state, and when its all said and done white women will resume their chad fuck fest and you'll still be left an incel, its all just a giant cope.

Here, the OP dismisses white nationalism as fundamentally antithetical to incelism's core principle of nonsexuality. He describes attempts to align the blackpill with white superiority as ludicrous, given that incels.co boasts an apparent non-white majority and that white men experience the fewest obstacles in securing sexual partners. The notion that most incels.co users are non-white, however, is not supported by internal polling ("Survey" 2019). A 2019 October poll found a slight white majority at 53 percent, but the response rate was only 546 of the over 10,000 active users. Regardless, the OP reduces white nationalism to a "giant cope" in that its supporters are only granting their existence some preserve of respectability against the blackpill's painful fatalism. That is, white nationalism offers no material benefit to incels, because incels are constructed as somehow existing outside of their own races, as "genetic defects" with no racial allegiance. Despite the fact that race figures as a measure of individual desirability, incel status emerges as a more salient ontology of existence than race itself.

A majority (61 percent) of commenters agree with the OP's interpretation that racial allegiance as a cope. Most of these respondents offer short confirmations of the OP's premise,

stating “High IQ post” or “OP, your analytical mind is a blessing to this community.” Others provide more elaborated responses that define racial unity as incompatible with inceldom:

B. If aliens came down to Earth and were given the job of categorising the various types of humans they beheld, I’m pretty sure that Chad and Tyrone would be placed in the same category and likely the incels would be paired together as well, irrespective of their race. This should prove that racism is just a cope for subhumans to cling onto a tenuous feeling of superiority in a world which can’t help but keep reminding them how inferior they are.

C. racism as a whole [is] simply a mix of tribalism and coping hard

Here, commenters reify incels as somehow existing outside of racial categorization. Under this logic, Chads and Tyrones exist in tighter proximity than they do to incels of their own respective races. Such comments, then, carve desirability as the preeminent feature of identity within the incel worldview. Racial “copers” are those who refuse to accept this ranking of ontological categories, and they hold onto racial allegiance in a desperate bid to elevate their own lives with some semblance of superiority.

A small percentage (11 percent) of respondents reject the OP’s characterization of racial allegiance, but these comments fail to generate a consistent defense. Although infrequent (two percent), some of these individuals invoke anti-black or anti-Semitic rhetoric to dismiss the OP. None appear to explicitly embrace white nationalist movements by name, but some express fears over demographic replacement or the importance of racial purity. Others hold JBW is no less of a cope than racial allegiance. The logic follows that incels are not rejected exclusively because of their race, but because they are deemed undesirable for a host of other features. Under this

framing, JBW proponents are made to appear guilty of what they accuse racial purists of doing: coping.

D. You'll claim that Whites are obsessed by irrational racial loyalties when you and everyone like you bands together to whine and rhapsodize about the unique struggles of "ethnics". This is exactly the kind of tribalist agitation that you decry when it sounds from the mouths of Whites, who are oddly the only people here who actually keep quiet about it until provoked.

*E. I don't care about your mental gymnastics I just don't want to live around n*****.*

F. White incels out there, don't let these anti-white non-whites convince you that the genocide and replacement of your race is a good thing. They are simply tribalists who want the white race destroyed, due to jealousy.

G. JBW is not a better cope

Emanating from these comments is the diversity of means by which racial narratives embed in incels.co users' negotiation of suffering. Inceldom starts with the realization that life is inherently meaningless, which initiates attempts to imbue oneself with any sense of significance. Within this struggle, race offers the possibility of recursively distinguishing oneself from other incels. For JBW proponents, white desirability grants their own suffering a more legitimate stance within the incel ranking of undesirability. Some of these individuals view racial allegiance as a baffling cope, given its illogical alignment with a movement predicated on terminal nonsexuality. For critics, JBW theory is itself a cope that allows non-white incels to channel their furor at whitecels, which is undeserved. Some of these JBW deniers undoubtedly support rhetoric that is reminiscent of white nationalism (comment 3), but profiles of this type appear to be anomalous (two percent of commenters in the thread). The presence of small minority of

those who espouse white superiority is undeniable, but these comments tend to receive little uptake or sharp disavowals from other incels.

Conclusion

Returning to the popular representation of incelism as white nationalist movement, incels.co articulations of experience challenge these claims of white centrality. Far from upholding white superiority, incels.co users generally see whiteness as tentatively incompatible with incelism. Such reasoning is largely supported by conclusions from the blackpill, which ranks whiteness as an indisputable indicator of attractiveness in multiethnic, Western societies. More broadly, race embeds in the various ways by which incels contend with their own psychic suffering. JBW proponents, for example, uplift their own incurable suffering as the most distinguished, given the widespread appeal of white skin. Critics of JBW respond to these challenges by emphasizing incels' collective suffering as a more salient identifier that transcends racial categorization.

Chapter V: Discussion

The Suffering Apparatus

Stepping back, what emanates from incels.co is a pernicious mood of anguish that pervades the community of practice. Engagement on incels.co represents what I call a “suffering apparatus,” which I define as the discursive machinery that permits, evaluates, and valorizes expressions of suffering among blackpill adherents. Each investigative category of my project—scientific literature, masculinity, and race—entangles with this amplification of psychic misery.

The scientific blackpill, as a condensed body of scholarly literature, offers a diagnosis for one’s social and sexual isolation. It roots undesirability as a terminal constraint common for all incels, and it understands this suffering through a grammar of biological determinism. By attributing the incel condition to genetic tyranny and societal misandry, the blackpill reduces incel suffering to an inevitable fact of life. Scientific discourse thus outlines the conditions of possibility for incels, marking ascension and happiness as impossible realities for those doomed by their purported poor genetic quality. Incels.co users invoke these principles in their writings to provide evidence of the unfair and incurable nature of their undesirability. Scientific literature, as it filters from cited publications into individual utterances, grants authority to these framings of pain.

Suffering is also folded into inceldom’s construction as a masculine category. Masculine ontologies of existence—Chads, normies, and incels—diverge along lines of desirability, and more perniciously orient the possibilities of life for each identity. Inceldom is largely understood as a negation of progress, as a masculine purgatory that traps neglected men in an inescapable juvenile state. Chad legitimates this depiction, as he collapses all forces keeping incels down –

female hypergamy, genetic orderings of attractiveness, societal misandry—into one imagined figure. Chad always wins, and by extension, incels always lose.

Racial worldviews variously intersect with these masculine categories of existence, but there is no consistent logic pervading across the forum. Those who believe whiteness cannot align with the incel identity grant their own suffering preeminent status, as the most deserved form of incelhood. Proponents of JBW thus recursively distinguish themselves from their white counterparts by categorizing their own pain as the most “earned.” Those who reject JBW tend to describe incelhood as a racially inclusive taxonomy, as a more salient ontology than race itself. For these individuals, incels’ collective suffering upends racial categorization, placing all incels in closer proximity to each other than to Chads of their respective races.

My goal in outlining the suffering apparatus is not to reduce my account to one broad interpretation. While suffering might represent a general mood, it does not capture the diversity of ways that people grapple with the blackpill’s prescribed fatalism. Emphasizing the discursive engine of suffering, however, has utility: it orders a structural explanation as to why individuals gravitate to these forums and embrace incelhood’s tenets. For the lonely, friendless, those that perceive themselves unworthy or unlovable, the blackpill might offer a sense of closure in understanding one’s own pain. It removes responsibility for suffering, by locating the source of such misery to factors beyond individual control. Though it confirms the worst suspicions about its adherents, the blackpill appears to provide some comfort with the finality that “it’s over,” and that there is nothing its members did wrong to warrant such suffering.

This study does not come without its limitations. That I did not speak with individuals on incels.co unsettles many of the conclusions I draw, marking them limited. Speaking with the individuals who engage on incels.co would make the analysis richer, messier, and more honest.

Such testimony could more precisely identify the salient motivations of incel-dom, and how individuals see themselves as people and as members of the community. Engaging with incels.co users would further open lines of inquiry into how engagement on incels.co informs offline experience, and vice versa. Future studies of incels.co or other incel forums could also develop more layers of analysis, such as studying incels.co rhetoric over time (since the site's founding in 2017), or paying closer attention to the types of usernames, profile pictures, and other non-verbal cues that circulate on incel forums.

Refraction

Studying incel rhetoric is a process of refraction, of viewing how broader discourses on race, evolution, masculinity, and attraction filter in and out of incel-dom. In this sense, Incels.co forums serve as an articulation of dominant discourses that pervade throughout the West. The regional variety of forum users prevents anchoring race-gender-sexuality discourses in any one particular geography, but the logics remain perniciously diffuse across the globe (Fung 1991).

Science

Far from an absurd pseudoscience, the blackpill is animated by contemporary scholarship in areas relevant to the incel imaginary. Research on partner preference, mating strategies, and genetic correlates of bodily traits inadvertently grant legitimacy to the incel worldview by upholding an evolutionary paradigm wielded to naturalize difference. Most literature in forum postings or on the scientific blackpill page is reputable among academic circles, rather than

widely discredited as “pseudoscience.” All this is to say that the blackpill quotes Richard Wrangham, not Richard Herrnstein.¹⁵

Broadly, scholarship that views gendered differences through a rigid evolutionary lens is problematic. Evolutionary forces have undoubtedly shaped sexual difference, and evolutionary theory is a useful tool in assessing human variation and adaptation to different environments. But all too often, evolution provides an uninterrogated explanatory model that naturalizes and exaggerates sexual difference, which could be interpreted more convincingly with attention to cultural models of gender. To remedy these shortcomings, I join the voices calling for a more interdisciplinary approach in the study of biology and gender, one that melds science, culture, history, and subjective experience into a more collaborative approach to biocultural phenomena. Angela Willey (2016, 1) frames this type of research orientation as “biopossibility, which describes “the complexly mediated capacity to embody certain socially salient traits and ‘differences.’” Such a methodological ethos decenters assumptions about sexuality and human behavior that shape current biological paradigms, and further encourages collaboration across discipline. By bridging the epistemological boundaries carved between fields, research on biocultural realities can start from a place of curiosity, rather than a static set of known “truths.”

Masculinity and Race

At times, incel language can be extreme in its racism, but the underlying discourses that structure incel conceptions of race do not appear “fringe” in any meaningful sense. Racial

¹⁵ Richard Wrangham is the Ruth B. Moore Professor of Biological Anthropology at Harvard’s Department of Human Evolutionary Biology. His research in *Demonic Males* assesses the purported evolutionary factors that lead to human male violence. Incels.co users quote many of his findings in their writings and on the Scientific Blackpill, such as his assessment that male sociopathy appeals to women (Scientific Blackpill, 2020). Richard Herrnstein co-authored *The Bell Curve* (1994), a widely discredited book that purport human intelligence is largely influenced by inherited factors, like race.

narratives on incels.co settle into three broad conclusions: that white men are the normative template of sexual conduct, that Asian men are emasculated and undesired in light of this white ideal, and that black men are threateningly hypersexual.

The image of Asian men as desexualized is one that has been sinisterly reproduced over centuries of Orientalist discourse. Broadly, feminization of a collective “East” tends to amplify Asian women’s sexuality, but it dampens the libidinal energy of Asian men in the Orientalist imagination. While common on incels.co, these narratives of Asian emasculation circulate more broadly in popular media. Richard Fung (1991) writes that Western representations of Asian men—which typically use East Asian men as synecdoche for a collective “Asia”—rely on two tropes: the wimp/egghead or the Kungfu master/samurai/ninja. These characters vary widely in personality traits but become united by a desexualized “zen ascetism,” which is defined by a striking absence of sexuality. These modern presentations link with a multitude of initial colonial logics of racialization deployed across the globe. In the United States, for example, Asian men were demasculinized by a variety of legal and social mechanisms. During the first waves of Chinese immigration to the US in the 1840s, a combination of migrant restrictions on Asian women (under the guise of prostitution laws) and anti-miscegenation laws prevented Asian men from accessing the patriarchal systems of power that white men enjoyed (Fung 1991). Feminization of Asian men thus emerged as an effort to mark them “safe,” as units of capital that did not threaten the white, heterosexual, patriarchal family as a locus of power.

Similarly, the imagining of black men as hypersexual is not restricted to incels.co, but one that is both mainstream and colonial in nature. Across multiple colonized geographies, European regimes projected onto the black African subject a libidinal energy of sexual perversity (Stoler 2012). These imprints of hypersexuality extend beyond the initial colonial encounters, as

black men continue to be imagined with threatening sexual fervor in popular representation (Fung 1991). Frantz Fanon (1967) offers an explanation for these race-sexuality discourses in *Black Skin, White Masks*, where he concludes that perceptions of black promiscuity are rooted in white fears of educated black people. To prevent black men from attaining intellectual advancement, blackness is reduced to a body severed from intellect: “The negro is eclipsed. He is turned into a penis. He is the penis” (Fanon 1967, 207). Reducing black men to their genitals reaffirms their subhuman status and justifies white oppressor’s fears of racial miscegenation. Sexual difference, as seen on incels.co and elsewhere, unwrites these understandings of racial difference that make colonial inequalities ongoing.

In highlighting these brief historical anecdotes, I hope to braid incel and popular representations of race together in the thread of colonial history. What these links reveal is how race, gender, and sexuality collapse on another to exaggerate difference in the service of power. Such understanding has undeniable utility. Historically, most antiracist movements have concentrated on combating discrimination that centers on intellectually-based behavior (Fung 1991). As such, antiracist movements that do not deconstruct race-gender discourses can fail to address the logics that continually recreate racial difference. Incels.co refracts how these discourses reproduce racialized asymmetries: they represent more raw versions of popular race-gender representations that become sanitized in the mainstream majority. All of these considerations are lost when inceldom is relegated to an “extremist” margin. I do not want to minimize the material violence precipitated from forums like incels.co, but I assert that defining incels as “fringe” obfuscates how incel discourses manifest in more normalized circles to reproduce colonial logics of power.

Conclusion: Reentry into Discourse

To close, Truillot's prescriptions from his essay "Anthropology and the Savage Slot" (2003) provides a summary of my motivations in studying incelism, and what I believe can be accomplished by this type of work. For Truillot, anthropology's future depends on its ability to contest the "savage slot" and the knowledge-systems that construct otherness. To do this, he argues anthropologists must "attack" the discourses, epistemologies, and processes through which otherness takes shape. Greater reflexivity on the part of the ethnographer cannot accomplish this feat alone. Instead, this work requires what Truillot refers to as "strategic points of reentry into the discourse on otherness" (9). His prescription holds that anthropology must contend with the historical significance of the field and develop creative means of dismantling otherness.

What I hope I have demonstrated in this project is that the "incel problem," as it is often represented, is no less than a societal problem of patriarchy and white supremacy. As a potential "strategic" entry into discourse on otherness, studying the articulations of incels.co users refracts broader discourses of power that become mystified under mainstream respectabilities: how science can distort and exaggerate sexual difference in ways that compound gendered power dynamics, and how race-gender discourses perniciously reproduce racial asymmetries and power inequalities. It is through this close engagement with the complexities of life—especially in a group like incels.co that so uniquely attends to sexual, gendered, and racial difference—that we understand how these ideologies produce violence and suffering more broadly. This type of engagement drags these discourses to the surface where they become legible, where they become tools in understanding the possibilities of better futures.

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