Subcultural Hierarchy and Policing amongst Incels in Online Forums

Christian A. I. Schlaerth iD
Waldorf University, USA

Aaron Puhrmann iD
Grand View University, USA

Elaine Bossard iD
Waldorf University, USA

Rachel Setting iD
University of Iowa Hospitals & Clinics, USA

Abstract: While investigations into incels online have increased, most have focused on their potential for violence, their misogyny, extremist ideologies, and their mental health. Very little has been devoted to examining the nuances of that subcultural group. The research in this paper examines the hierarchy that has been established within the incel subculture, online, and how that hierarchy is policed using various mechanisms such as reporting "fake-cels" to the moderators to have them banned and insults. Findings show that there are clear hierarchical delineations of incels in general, with "blackpill" incels being the most extreme in their worldview and their use of science (albeit cherry-picked) to justify the incel ideology. The researchers also found that there is a hierarchy specific to the online forum from which data were gathered. The paper concludes that understanding incel subculture is salient in addressing the potential threats of violence and treating those individuals who no longer want to identify as incels. Future directions of research would be to examine why boys and men identify as incels.

Dr. Christian A. I. Schlaerth is an Assistant Professor of Criminal Justice and Sociology at Waldorf University, where he currently serves as the Chair of the Criminal Justice Department. His work has been published in several national and international journals, and he has several book chapters that span the areas of education, labor, politics, and inequality, amongst others.

email address: chrisitan.schlaerth@waldorf.edu

Dr. Aaron Puhrmann is an Assistant Professor of Sociology and Criminal Justice and chair of the Department of Sociology at Grand View University. His research interests lie in the relationships between gender and crime, but he maintains broad interests in disparities and inequalities in the criminal justice system, especially regarding both racial profiling and migration. He has written on subjects pertaining to drug courts, robbery, and immigration.

email address: apuhrmann@grandview.edu

Dr. Elaine Bossard is an Associate Professor of Psychology at Waldorf University, where she currently serves as the Chair of the Psychology Department.

email address: elaine.bossard@waldorf.edu

Ms. Rachel Setting earned her bachelor's degree in psychology from Waldorf University in 2021. She currently works as a Research Assistant at the University of Iowa Hospitals & Clinics.

email address: rachel.setting@outlook.com

Involuntary celibates, more commonly known as incels, are an online community of people, almost exclusively male, who identify as a new type of sexuality. They would describe themselves as not being able to form, against their will, intimate relationships with women. Blame for such failings is placed on many different causes, including women being too picky, competition from "Chads,"[1] their personal failings, macroeconomic factors, changes in culture, et cetera. This paper seeks to examine the online subculture that they have formed, the hierarchy that becomes established within this group, how they police the boundaries of the group in total, and the hierarchy within the subcultural group of incels. Overall, it has been shown that inceldom can lead to extremism in other areas of social life and even violence in the real world (West 2023). While some therapists are attempting to create treatment or de-programming programs for reformed incels, as Van Brunt and Taylor (2020) outline, it becomes increasingly important to recognize the diversity of beliefs and the hierarchy that exists within this subcultural group.

The term incel was originally coined by a Canadian woman only known as "Alana," who started a website titled "Alana's Involuntary Celibacy Project" in the 1990s. Her website was meant for her and others like her to explore the struggles of forming loving relationships (Taylor 2018). Since then, however, the term and motivations have morphed into a movement and online community of misogyny, self-loathing, and advocacy for violence against others—often women. An incel is a boy or man who wants to have a sexual and emotional relationship but finds that he cannot form one due to conditions that are outside of his control. They are celibate for reasons that are outside of their control—hence, the involuntary celibate, or incel, moniker.

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[1] Incel term for a physically attractive male.

Overall, not a lot has been written on the topic of incels from a sociological perspective (Hoffman, Ware, and Shapiro 2020), though more academic studies are being produced. What has been written mostly focuses on the misogyny behind the movement and its relationship to right-wing extremism, violence—specifically mass shootings—and the potential for violence, of which there are undeniable links (Baele, Brace, and Ging 2023). Others have written about incels and mental health, believing that there is a psychological element, namely, depression, that leads to incel self-labeling (Costello et al. 2022; Sparks, Zindenberg, and Olver 2023). One can surmise, though, that there are social forces and pressures that push such individuals to accept their position in society as an incel and bring them to accept a distorted worldview, a process known as "taking the red pill." A worldview where women become objects of conquest and where failure to obtain those objects is an indication of being a failed male member of society (Brooks, Russo-Batterham, and Blake 2022). Any rebuffed advances are blamed on the objects of their affection—women—or on their male competitors whom women deem to be worthier of their sexual attention. In the incel worldview, their failings are externalized to others and blamed on societal shifts that have made incels less desirable in terms of being an intimate partner to the opposite sex. In short, incels feel oppressed by society in general, by women, conventionally attractive men, and, at times, the wealthy (the idea being that money can buy sexual access—not in terms of sex work, though), who are all distorting the sexual marketplace.

This paper seeks to indicate and examine the previously unremarked hierarchy within the incel movement. While many view the movement as monolithic, there are a variety of subsets of incels that vary in their level of acceptance of their position, much

like any other subculture. Similarly, incels vary in their beliefs as to why they are unable to achieve their conquests or, as we shall see later, "ascend" in the incel vernacular. Likewise, there is an unofficial ranking amongst incels that can be defined through the individual's devotion to the incel identity, as well as other characteristics. Finally, this research explores how incels police themselves, defend their cultural boundaries, and mark people as either in or out.

Subculture and Hierarchy

Subcultures are groups of people who participate in mainstream culture yet also have their internal norms, mores, beliefs, and values. In the book *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance* (1997), Howard Becker explores the phenomenon of subcultures as it relates to deviance using participant observation research. During his observations, Becker finds that deviant subgroups tend to develop practices and rituals that serve to keep individuals within the group bonded. It is such practices and customs that distinguish the subculture from the rest of society. They help to identify those who are "in the know," to borrow from Erving Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical analysis, and those who are not—those who are part of the group and those who are outsiders.

An important question for this research is whether incels or inceldom are considered a subcultural group, community, ideology, or movement. According to the Incels Wiki, a site that is maintained by self-described incels, on their Frequently Asked Questions page, they simply say "no" with the following explanation:

"Incel," isn't a single community any more than, for example, trans people are a single community. As far

as self-identified incels or incel forums, these communities are fractured and generally do not advocate radical beliefs unless you want to call determinism and in some cases misogyny radical ideologies. Individual philosophies like the original blackpill definition or subcultures like 4chan culture emerge on some, but not all, forums dedicated to involuntary celibates and go in and out of fashion, and there is broad disagreement on the causes and consequences in these communities. Calling involuntary celibates a movement is like calling poor people a movement or ideology. To elaborate, 'pauperdom' is the state of being poor. This term is to poor people, what inceldom is to incels. Both are life situations, the terms 'incel' and 'pauper' denote a person affected by these things. Most people would widely agree that poor people aren't a movement, nor is there a specific ideology that which they adhere. Likewise, incels and inceldom are the same in that respect. [Incels Wiki 2022]

While the authors of the Incel Wiki make some interesting comparisons, they show a lack of understanding of some of the other groups to which they compare themselves. For instance, there is a trans community, or at least some people would define themselves as such (Lev 2007; Boylan 2014). The LGBTQIA+ community describes itself as a community and movement, as well, and does not identify as being a homogenous group. The moderators of the Incel Wiki page are making either false equivalencies, such as pauperdom, or are outright misinterpreting other historically oppressed subcultural groups and communities.

As the Incel Wiki FAQ page states, they do not believe themselves to be a subculture or their forums to be communities. When one compares the characteristics of subcultural groups and communities (whether terrestrial or virtual), it becomes evident

that despite their protestation, their perception does not match the sociological reality. Incels are indeed a subculture. Ross Haenfler (2003) describes and analyzes cultures, especially when discussing past cultural theorists, and finds incels as being a subcultural group. Dick Hebdige's (2002) concept of "bricolage," the combining and remaking of cultural objects, also fits the idea that incels are a subculture, which is done by incels with non-material cultural artifacts, like ideas, values, beliefs, and, as will be discussed later, scientific findings. Incels have an ideology that binds them, define people as either in or out, police the boundaries of their group (as will be discussed in the findings), develop their lingo (use of specific terms and phrases), and have virtual meeting spaces. In short, incels are a subcultural group or community (when on one of their online forums).[2]

Just as society is stratified, subcultures also have a level of stratification. The hierarchies within subcultural groups may or may not be formal—such as in the case of leadership. In cases of leadership within a group, the determination of who leads and who follows, along with the various subordinate levels, can be the outcome of democratic decisions amongst group leaders (i.e., voting) or through some other mechanism like charisma (Weber 2004). Where stratification is more informal, such as with no clear leader, the determination may be about who is more into or serious about the group compared to those members who are seen as posers with only a superficial relationship to the subculture. Such types of divisions have been seen before, for instance, in the realm of cyber piracy (Yar and Steinmetz 2019). In

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[2] The Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) page of their Wiki page (https://incels.wiki/w/Inceldom_FAQ), which is written and maintained by those who run the incels.is website, clearly states that they do not believe themselves to be a subcultural group. The evidence indicates otherwise.

the case of cyber piracy, one's position within the hierarchy of pirates is based on levels of contributions to the community, motivations, and results. Commitment to the subcultural group, however it may be defined, is a salient factor in determining a group hierarchy. That is true of incels as well, where individuals' status within inceldom is weighted based on their commitment to the subculture.

Other studies have labeled or treated incels as a subcultural group. For instance, Stephane Baele, Lewys Brace, and Debbie Ging (2023) examine incel communications online, across platforms, and how they come to share and identify with their often extremist ideology. Their study largely focuses on the language that is used by incels in those various online platforms. Two other studies, by Brenna Helm and colleagues (2022) and Roberta O'Malley, Karen Holt, and Thomas Holt (2020), look at incels as a subculture more broadly but, again, focus on their language as a binding factor, their views toward women, how men are oppressed (a central tenet of inceldom), and sex. Where this study diverges from previous research is through the presentation of a subcultural hierarchy within inceldom and demonstrating how the boundaries and membership of inceldom are policed.

Self-esteem and social competition are necessary for understanding how the boundaries and the hierarchy of inceldom are created and maintained. The necessity of self-esteem in social groups is thought to motivate group members to adopt various behaviors and attitudes to attain status in their respective groups (Rubin and Hewstone 2004). Social competition in groups can be used to change one's position in the group hierarchy to protect the status of the group. Self-esteem amongst incels might seem to be a contradiction at first, as lack of self-esteem

is often used as an explanation for why people become incels (Sparks, Zindenberg, and Olver 2023). Yet, incels seem to have an abundance of self-esteem online, with the problem being that no one understands them. Therefore, self-esteem, especially as it relates to incel hierarchies, must be understood in the proper context.

Applying theories regarding subcultural groups and hierarchical ordering has not been done when analyzing incels and their internal workings. The research presented here takes those previous concepts and applies them to this online group. While incels have been viewed as a single cohesive group in previous literature, that is not necessarily the case. There are gradations within the incel community based on their commitment to the incel identity, motivations, understanding of the social position, and, ultimately, acceptance of the identity. Understanding the hierarchy within the incel subculture can help future researchers, therapists, and law enforcement professionals in comprehending and dealing with incels, as well as other extremist groups.

Methods

The internet has become a resource that is rife with data for research in the social sciences. It has provided new subjects and topics for research, as well as allowing people to cross paths and connect who otherwise never would have in the physical world (Mann and Stewart 2000). Social media, in various forms, have served as an excellent source to connect. They have allowed people to find others to share in similar experiences and led to people expressing their "true selves," some of which may not be socially acceptable expressions in the "real world" (Bargh, McKenna, and Fitzsimmons 2002). However, on the

internet, such behaviors and ideas have audiences who will echo back like-minded sentiments.

The World Wide Web has also allowed for the development of new research strategies, especially for groups that exist solely online, living virtual lives and managing an online impression (Chester and Bretherton 2007). As the internet at times encourages anonymity, virtual participant observation has become an in-vogue method for gathering data from online sources and social forums. The COVID-19 pandemic, likewise, has further pushed social science research into virtual realms, either out of necessity or as a measure of safety or comfort when interacting with strangers. Coincidentally, the COVID-19 pandemic has also made online interactions, both dating and otherwise, more pertinent as they were the main source of outside human contact.

Originally, the researchers wanted to investigate social media postings in dedicated incel groups, such as those found on Reddit, Twitter, Facebook, and Discord. However, it proved difficult because of issues of access. For instance, Reddit has quarantined sub-Reddits devoted to incel culture. In other social media platforms, groups for incels were set to private and would have required the research team to enter the groups to gather data, potentially exposing team members to harassment or other negative effects while also not guaranteeing access to those private, online groups.[3] Rather, the researchers discovered a website, incels.is, which served as a fountain of data for this study. The website appeared after social media outlets began to restrict incels online and became the *de facto* online community for incels, not

bound by any of the user agreements attached to virtual forums like Facebook and Reddit. In short, that has become the *de facto* online gathering space for incels across the world. The researchers did not reach out or elicit responses from self-identified incels. Rather, an analysis was done on the content of their posts in the publicly accessible online forum.

The research conducted for this study was approved by the universities' institutional review boards, yet questions about the ethics of conducting online research remain. The website from which the data were gathered is a public forum, accessible to anyone with an internet connection. Therefore, there is no presumption of privacy regarding the data gathered. While incels who read this paper may identify their words, it is unlikely that they would be able to identify any of the other individuals reported here, aside from their usernames. No personally identifying information was collected during the research. As with any qualitative research, the participants, should they read the published work, may be able to identify their words. What is important is that others cannot identify the individual. That is maintained in this research.

To collect the data for analysis, the researchers began by recording posts in the forums related to feelings of isolation or being alone, which was the original subject of the research. The collection was initially done by copying and pasting entire threads, which included the original posts along with all the responses, into Microsoft Word documents. That process proved to be inefficient as there are over one million individual posts on the website in nearly 500,000 threads, with over 20,000 members.[4] To

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[3] It is unknown whether the data would have been different if the researchers had accessed the private online groups on various other social media platforms. The users on incels.is seem to be very open in discussing aspects of their lives as incels, which is central to such type of research.

[4] There is a subset of around 200 threads that are labeled as "Must-Read Content," which serves as an orientation for incels that are new to the website. Such threads were included in

aid in the data collection process, the researchers employed a "web scraping" program called Octoparse, which is capable of recording all forums, posts, and responses, thus providing the researchers with a wealth of recorded data from which to conduct analyses. The researchers chose to "scrape" the 500 most recent forums, as going further would have resulted in a data set that was unmanageable.[5] Results from Octoparse were saved in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, which was then transcribed into Word documents and uploaded to the selected qualitative analysis program, Taguette. Taguette is an online, open-sourced, qualitative research program that allows the researchers to collaborate and "tag" posts in real time, allowing them to code and check each other's work.[6]

Once the posts were collected, they were analyzed for commonalities in search of themes that appeared across the individual experiences. Such methods are consistent with those espoused by qualitative researchers Glaser and Straus (2008) and Charmaz (2010). The researchers cross-coded each other's work to ensure inter-coder reliability, showing that the researchers were interpreting the findings in the same, or at least similar, manner (McAlister et al. 2017). The cross-coding ensures reliability and validity in the research findings (Franklin, Cody, and Ballan 2001). Sampling and coding were done

until the researchers reached theoretical saturation, where no new themes or codes were arising out of the data (Charmaz 2008; Thomson 2010; Aldiabat and Le Navenec 2018; Saunders et al. 2018).

While the initial thrust was to examine why incels come to identify as such, it was not the focus here. Preliminary findings were presented at the Midwestern Sociological Society's annual meeting in March of 2023. Audience members expressed interest in the area mentioned earlier—the hierarchy of incels which many expressed not knowing about. Most knew about "taking the red pill," but they were unaware that there are different levels of being an incel, with the culmination being "black-pilled." They were also surprised to learn the use of cherry-picked scientific findings to justify the ideology of incels—something that is prominently displayed by those who claim to have "taken the black pill." Such interactions at the conference indicated a void in the literature that this study seeks to fill.

Findings[7]

The findings from this study are consistent with previous subcultural studies. When studying any group that is in some way separate from mainstream society, subgroupings and hierarchies are likely to form (Realo, Allik, and Vadi 1997). For instance, they happen in offices (Hofstede 1998), Greek life on college campuses (Reis and Trockel 2006; Butter 2017), sports teams (Halevy et al. 2012; Wagstaff, Martin, and Thelwell 2017), their fans (Tsiotsou 2013; Esmonde, Cooky, and Andrews 2015), and others. Here, the research examines the divisions within the online incel subculture, which have not been

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the data collection process as they are seen as essential, by the admission of site administrators, to understanding inceldom.

[5] While 500 posts were analyzed, one will find some names repeated several times in the analysis. Such individuals are some of the most active in the incels.is website. The more they post, the more likely they are to be included in the analysis.

[6] Taguette can be found at https://www.taguette.org. It is a free, open-sourced, qualitative data management program that allows researchers to collaborate. A program (or application) can be downloaded to a device where the analysis can occur, or Taguette's servers can be used to complete the analysis. The researchers decided to use the servers, for ease of collaboration and concerns regarding security on personal computers.

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[7] All texts from the discussion threads and responses are reported in their original format, unless otherwise indicated.

explored in-depth within the literature, and how incels come to define themselves within the bounds of different divisions. For instance, within the incel subculture, there is a hierarchy in which there is infighting amongst the incels over ideologies and possibilities. That phenomenon has largely been ignored in the literature and is a salient aspect to understanding incels. Also, themes regarding the use of legitimate scientific findings, albeit cherry-picked results, were explored in the analysis of the data.

Informal Hierarchy: Different Pills/Cels as a Typology

What has become evident throughout the data collection and analysis process is that there are different levels of hierarchy within the incel subculture. The basic subdivision of incels comes from the identification of different "pills," the main ones being "redpill" and "blackpill" incels, and the distinction from non-incels—"bluepills."[8] The concept of the pill originates from the scene in *The Matrix* (a movie released in 1999) where Morpheus offers the hero of the film, Neo, the choice between two different colored pills—red and blue. During the scene, Morpheus explains:

> This is your last chance. After this, there is no turning back. You take the blue pill—the story ends, you wake up in your bed and believe whatever you want to believe. You take the red pill—you stay in Wonderland,

and I show you how deep the rabbit hole goes. [*The Matrix* 1999]

The scene packs a lot of symbolism, but one thing is clear—the blue pill represents "being asleep" while the red pill represents "awakening" or "demystification" (Schlaerth and Puhrmann 2023). The first step for incels, then, like Neo in *The Matrix*, is to take the red pill, which is a symbolic phrase that indicates they have achieved an awakened state—a truer form of wisdom that is lacking in "normies." Normies, or non-incels, are known as "blue-pillers" or people who are still asleep. For instance, *Lonely-ATM* wrote in a thread that he started titled: "Getting blackpilled for the first time":

> my family and friends only gave me bluepill advice that always made things worse, it was a miracle to find blackpill, it showed me in minutes what dozens of people couldn't do in years. but now i know. It's a biological factor, her brain is sending her warning signals to stay away from me, my genes are garbage and she feels disgusted just imagining the two of us together. but if you were a chad and did the exact same things she would get into a relationship with you. sub 5 life is hell, you're forced to sit and watch while chads steal all your dreams from you, even though he's putting less than half the effort you put in.

LonelyATM expresses his frustration with his friends and family giving him advice to help him get a romantic partner, advice that he finds demeaning. To him, those people, who are "normal" in that they subscribe to the traditional and socially acceptable values of mainstream society, do not understand the personal and social issues that he must confront daily. They are unable to view reality, or his reality, much like anyone in *The Matrix* who presumably chooses to take the blue pill. In general, blue-pillers

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[8] For a more comprehensive list of terms and listing of "pills" or "cels," consult the Incel Wiki website (https://incels.wiki/w/main_page) that operates like any other subject-specific online, open-sourced, encyclopedia, but can only be edited by incels registered to incels.is. Another source could be the book published by incel sympathizer Richard Wallace, *The Black Pill* (2020). The introduction to Wallace's book provides readers with the history and philosophy behind the red pill/blue pill dichotomy.

are largely looked down upon by incels. They are seen as naive, even dangerous. In a thread that was devoted to an incel who committed suicide, called "RIP to our friend schery6/2028chan," user *The Enforcer* wrote:

> I never want young people to waste their potential. It was a really nice talk tbh and enjoyed hearing his thoughts on things. I thought I'd gotten through to him because he seemed to take it onboard fairly well. I wanted him to succeed in life and not feel as isolated and down as he did. We should always strive to guide the younger people who find themselves here, not do what bluepillers do and lead them to a path of failure. I'm at least glad that he felt safe in these spaces and found community/support while he was still here though.

Generally speaking, blue-pillers are not incels, yet they are an important facet of understanding incel culture. Labeling people as having taken the blue pill helps to define the boundaries of the incel subcultural. There are in-group members, in the form of red- and blackpills, and everyone else—those outside of the group.

The second group of pills is also the most well-known in the literature concerning incels—redpills. They represent a diverse group of individuals within the incel subculture that includes men's rights advocates (MRAs), Pick-Up-Artists (PUAs), the Man-o-Sphere, and those who think that looks, money, and status (LMSs) are essential to forming relationships with attractive members of the opposite sex.[9] Redpill groups believe that they are enlightened to

the idea that there is a trend in society that is leaving them out of the chance of having sexual relationships. *Bruvdon*, at the beginning of a thread he called "Ramblings of a normie," writes:

> Hey everyone. I don't know what I would call myself, but I think most people here would define me as a 'normie'. In high school, I never really thought much about looks - I had a few crushes which is typical, but I was very sterotypically redpilled as far as dating went.

What sets redpill incels apart from other groups is that they at least still have hope to ascend or become "normal" by having sex, relationships, et cetera. Again, like Neo and the red pill in *The Matrix*, taking the red pill is symbolic of waking up and gaining a sacred type of knowledge creating hope. Indeed, red-pilled individuals still engage with the opposite sex despite repeated failures. User *Adson* started a thread called "I don't know what happened," in which he describes an interaction he had at an office party. During that interaction, he used a common PUA technique:

> All the time i accidentally looks at her she look at me. For the most part of the Event she was the only one i never interacted. **I tried my best to avoid her (i wanna stay mysterious)** being a sadistic and negativist i thought she was disgusted by my presence… **I am 100% sure she find something mysterious about me…** [emphasis added to highlight the technique]

Adson goes on to explain that he is not necessarily undesirable and describes what most would consider to be awkward behaviors during this interaction,

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[9] Within redpills, other subgroups include gymcels—those who go to the gym to better fit into the expected norms of society. Another group is seamaxxers, who seek out partners in Southeast Asian countries because they believe they would be more desirable there due to their physical characteristics,

while being average in the US, would be viewed as superior in a country such as Thailand.

yet he still has doubts as to the true intentions of the women he interacts with at the office. *Adson's* musings express that he still has hope with women but is in doubt of their motivations by expressing underlying sexism and misogyny.

Overall, *Adson* and *Bruvdon* represent typical beliefs of redpill incels. There might be something wrong in society or with themselves, but there is still hope of ascension. There is debate as to whether redpills are incels because they still try and can appear "normal." The incel subculture has come up with a term to describe those who think there is hope or who have had, or currently have, girlfriends—fakecels, a term used to denote position in the informal hierarchy.

While many incels aspire to ascend, that is, obtain sexual conquest or a meaningful intimate relationship, that achievement itself represents a contradiction within the incel subculture. Those who ascend are no longer viewed as incels because they are no longer involuntarily celibate. Failure to ascend is seen within inceldom as a success, or, to borrow from online forums, "failing so hard it is a success." Indeed, the aspiration to ascend is seen as a weakness amongst incels, a delusion. In other words, those who seek to ascend are fooling themselves and have not truly become black-pilled and are, therefore, not being true to their community. The lack of a commitment to inceldom places them lower within the hierarchy, as has been previously observed in other social groupings (Chase 1980). Hence, there is another contradiction within the incel culture—ascension is desirable, yet the desire to ascend is seen as a weakness.

The final major category of incels to discuss is blackpill incels. Black-pillers consider themselves to be the only ones who are truly understanding what it means to be an incel and fully buy into the ideology. Two very distinct characteristics set black-pillers apart from red-pillers. The first distinctive characteristic is that they have given up any hope of obtaining a relationship with a woman, as they believe that hope is a delusion. The title of a thread started by user *Spongebozz* sums up this mentality:

> Incel trait: you keep looking
> Blackpill incel trait: you keep looking for new posts on this forum

Spongebozz is suggesting that blackpill incels have withdrawn from mainstream society and have begun to seek other incels on the website. Other users responded that they were going to keep refreshing his thread when they were bored because what he wrote reflected many of their mentalities. That sentiment of solace and hopelessness is echoed by user *Knight of Cymry* in a thread he started called "How I ended up here," where he wrote:

> When I was growing up, I never would have thought that I would end up in my mid-twenties miserable, depressed, and alone, on a forum for other male sexless outcasts of society like myself. It's not the future that I envisioned, but the one that ultimately became my unfortunate reality.

He explains that in his failings at relating to women, he has found himself in an online forum amongst others like himself and, in doing so, has given up any hope of changing his situation. He goes on to explain that he discovered that about himself in high school after repeatedly being rejected by schoolmates—girls for relationships and boys for friendships. Another thread, titled "It's so sad that we replace socialization with this forum," sums up the blackpill incels mentality of hopelessness.

The second characteristic that distinguishes black-pillers from other incel types is their use of scientific findings to support their belief system (Burton 2022). However, it must be noted that black-pillers either selectively pick findings from legitimate physical and social scientific publications or take those out of context. They also use pseudoscience and debunked scientific research to lend credibility to their ideology and to justify their failings in the social world as well as their behaviors as incels. A clear example of such practice, although not explicitly part of the data collection for this paper, can be found in Martin Goldberg's self-published book, *Understanding and Overcoming the Blackpill* (2021), where he selectively uses studies from biology, evolutionary psychology, and various other social sciences to explain why many men are identifying as incels.[10] If one did not know better, he makes a convincing case through his organization of the research and the sheer volume of references and citations. However, Goldberg's work is just a better-organized version of what blackpill incels engage in.

Some blackpill incels use social science jargon to create theories of society that justify their ideology, explain their position in the social hierarchy, and serve to rally other incels around a cause. For instance, user *subhuman* started a thread called "Inceldom is the result of societal configurations, and they would still bring you suffering even if you 'ascend,'" where he outlines a theory as to why, even if incels ascend, they would remain societal rejects. He writes:

This is a diseased world, and inceldom isn't the main problem but rather a symptom of the disease. Think about it like this. As an incel you are literally defining yourself based on women. It's not an individual phenomon with linear causality but more of a web of relationships to all the different whores and chads in the sexual market. Even if you somehow manage to ascend with a drunk girl or betabux some used up whore, the hostile sexual climate that made you an incel is still going to exist, mostly unchanged since you are just one small person out of billions and thus exert an insignificant amount of influence over the system. You will still suffer from it's effects, except you aren't able to control these: Devaluation of virginity and chastity…Abolition of gender roles…Individualism… Age of consent…Agepill…

The user *subhuman* puts together what appears to be a coherent theory as to why boys and men identify as incels. The entire post exemplifies the two characteristics of blackpill incels—the use of science (here, social scientific theories) and the feeling of hopelessness. Here, *subhuman* claims that even if one were to ascend, he would still be unable to shed the label of incel because of the various facets and macro-social trends in an evolving society. His threads and posts were very well received, earning him the title of "High IQ Post." Another user, *LifeMaxxer*, responded with the following missive:

Inceldom is a natural phenomenon that occurs in the animal kingdom with any sexual species that competes for mates. In any game there will always be winners and losers. The mating game is no different. It's a sad fact of reality that some competitors in the game are quite literally born to lose, while others are made to lose through forces outside of nature (this is emergent and secondary). For this reason, inceldom cannot be defined in any other way, except through nature…

[10] Martin Goldberg fashions himself as a social scientist. However, the researchers were unable to find any background concerning his education or credentials. It should also be noted that Goldberg self-publishes many of his books, a sign that his research is not seen to be legitimate by the social science community, and his claims should be taken with the proverbial "grain of salt."

Amongst humans there exists a distribution of sexual access and availability that is based on the sexual value of each individual human in each sex (so two distributions). This value is based on genetics first and foremost, but is also based on other markers of success and failure, depending on each sex. For men, the non-genetic success markers are status in the male hierarchy and access to resources - the former implying the latter (plus dominance), but the latter not necessarily being contingent on the former. For women, these non-genetic markers are chastity, age and submissiveness, with chastity being the winner by a very wide margin, followed by age in close second.

LifeMaxxer relies on evolutionary psychology to explain and justify the perceived societal slights that he and his fellow incels face. The use of that field is noteworthy because it makes the social hierarchy and its inequities appear as though they are natural and ultimately inescapable.

The explanations used by blackpill incels like *LifeMaxxer* and *subhuman* serve multiple purposes within inceldom. Much like disproven biological theories of crime that are taught in criminology courses, such explanations absolve incels of any responsibility for their failings and their behaviors. In other words, their inability to ascend is not their fault but rather a product of nature and their genetics. Also, as one cannot combat natural selection or genetics, explanations such as those give incels a reason to stop trying, to give up. It is absolution for no longer wanting to compete with "Chads" for "Stacys" and "foids" (female humanoids).

From the data, one can see the clear distinctions between the different pill takers within inceldom. Figure 1 provides a typology of the pills based on the data that have been collected.

Figure 1. Typology of Incels: Pill Colors

Type of Incel (Pill Color)	Description	Sub-Types (if applicable)
Bluepills	• Non-Incels • Often try to give self-described incels advice • Sometimes referred to as normies, which means "normal" people	• Fakecels • Women • LGBTQIA+ • Chads • Stacys • Foids
Redpills	• Still have hope to ascend • Attempt to use tricks to get the girl, display frustration when they fail • Place heavy emphasis on LMS • Generally part of the Man-o-Sphere	• PUA's • MRAs • Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW)
Blackpills	• Have given up on ascension • Most active in incel online forum • May use science to justify or support their ideology and position as incels	• No apparent variations

Source: Self-elaboration.

Not all incels are the same. In short, there are striations within the subculture of inceldom. For instance, bluepills, as stated earlier, are not incels but rather "normal" people whom incels either want to emulate or despise and blame for their involuntary celibacy. They are used by incels as a foil to explain their condition. Redpill incels are those who sub-

scribe to the incel ideology but maintain hope that they can escape. In their worldview, dating and sex are games to be played, with tricks and skills employed to ascend. Failure to ascend is then blamed on other people or on changes in society that have made them undesirable. In short, their failures are not their fault but everyone and everything else's fault. The key here, however, is that redpill incels maintain they have hope, and they need to change some aspect of themselves, such as "maxxing" out (looksmaxxing or gymmaxxing), to make them appear more desirable and fit into the rest of society. The final type of incel is the blackpill incels who, to put it bluntly, do not maintain any sense of hope in their ability to ascend. That group of incels is the hardcore believers in the incel ideology and will often use scientific findings to back up the ideology. They are also the most active members of the online community from which the data were drawn.

There are two reasons why having a typology that explains the subdivisions within inceldom is important. The first deals with the threats they may pose to others in the form of violence and mass shootings, as well as a general relationship to right-wing extremism (Townsend 2022). The second reason deals with deprogramming incels, that is, to treat those who want to exit inceldom and become "reformed." That is an area that needs further examination.

Informal Hierarchy: Interactions in the Online Forum

Until now, mostly the macro-structural hierarchy amongst incels has been examined, with little attention having been paid to the internal workings of incels online (see: Andersen 2023). The findings have explored the major differences in pills as they have been played out in the analysis. However, it is also important to note that those online forums have become virtual meeting spaces for incels to interact with one another, commiserate, share stories, pontificate, and find solace that they are not alone in the world. Those interactions online are seen as contributing to greater inceldom. Posting in the incel forums becomes a quantifiable measure of one's commitment to the identity of being an incel. Other organizations, formal and informal, have similar measures with varying rewards. For instance, in many jobs, such as in the legal profession, a person (ideally) receives greater rewards, usually pay, in return for the hours they put in; the people with the most billable hours receive the highest bonuses and then will be invited to participate in more prestigious cases (Abel 1989; Lazega 2001; Jiang et al. 2009). A similar pattern is seen in volunteer and social organizations—those who devote more time to the cause may end up in leadership positions, officially or unofficially (Okun 1993; Catano, Pond, and Kelloway 2001; Hustinx et al. 2022; Meyer and Rameder 2022). The incel subculture is no different—the more a person posts, the more prestige they will have amongst their incel brethren.

In formal and informal organizations, there are individuals who do not contribute a lot of time or effort, and they are often looked down upon or have their motives and devotion to the causes called into question (Willer 2009; Mallum 2017). A similar phenomenon can be seen within the incel subculture as well. Those who do not contribute often or a lot, or at all, are viewed with disdain within the incel subculture. For instance, a common term in internet forums that is used derisively for those who never contribute to online forums is the lurker. Lurkers are low on the informal hierarchy for a few reasons. First, because they do not contribute to the community, they are seen as merely taking some-

thing from those who share. Second, there is a perceived perversion to the lurkers: what is their true motivation? Are they merely voyeurs, getting pleasure from passively observing those brave enough to bear their pain on the internet? It is possible that they are too afraid to share, fear of being mocked (which happens within the incel subculture, but the nature of the ribbing can be up for debate)? The conclusion is their motivations do not matter, as they are unknown, and it is assumed that they are merely selfish yet are still viewed as part of the community (Sun, Rau, and Ma 2014). Lurkers, though, are still accepted, especially when they finally post. In the thread "I have no idea what my svm is. Serious I have no idea what my svm [sic][11] [sexual market value] is," started by a user known as *Anthrax*, user *PresidentCel* said:

> I just lurk and lurk. I lurked for like two years before joining in 2020. I'm the same way in real life. I don't say much…How was this forum back in your lurking days?

PresidentCel is telling his fellow incels in the thread that he was a longtime lurker but has now become an active user. He also recognizes that the forum has changed over time, has changed locations, et cetera.

Another important piece of the informal hierarchy is based on the number of postings an individual makes. Like lurkers, those who do not post often enough are viewed with derision. For instance, greycels are, to put it one way, novice incels. They are individuals who have made less than 500 individual posts on the website.[12] Sometimes they are referred

to as new recruits to inceldom. For instance, in the post from *PresidentCel*, he is engaging in an interaction with another user regarding their status based on their number of posts who states:

> Based take btw:feelsYall: Not to be rude, but how could you have joined in early 2020 yet only have just over 500 posts? You're basically an honorary greycel.

So *PresidentCel* is called out for not having enough posts, but, conversely, because of his length of membership in the community, he is not a greycel either. In reading the entire thread, those posts did not seem to be a conflict between the two users but rather an observation with a response.

The number of posts a user makes, though, points to one of the contradictions in the incel subculture. Users are expected to participate, but if they participate too much, they are ridiculed. For instance, in the thread titled "Foid tried to cancel me on social media," started by the user *Vomitcel*, during a dispute in the thread, another user, *Khanivore*, wrote:

> Nah, you must know that majority of local angry birds are kids, and it shows you have 12,414 posts and wasted 82 days of your life on a board for losers. Aren't you a little ashamed of yourself?

That insult was directed at the original poster, *Vomitcel*, and meant to shame him for wasting so much time on the forum. Quantity of posts, then, serves as a double-edged sword—too few posts and you are viewed as a novice, too many posts and you are accused of wasting your time.

There are individual incels who post often, and/or post meaningful musings, who are admired by their fellow members. For instance, user *THE TRUE*

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[11] Sexual Market Value (SVM) draws from Bourdieu's concepts of fields and capital, as explained by Martin and George (2006).

[12] Users who have less than 500 posts on the incels.is forum receive the label of greycel in their profiles and with all their posts.

CHIMPLER, in *Anthrax's* thread, "I have no idea what my svm is. Serious, I have no idea what my svm is," expresses that he misses some users who have seemingly gone silent. He writes:

> I fee like a lot of the content was better. I miss some of the old posters who are gone.

Those users whom administrators see as model contributors, especially when they post something poignant and meaningful, may have their threads added to the "Must-Read Content" or have their threads pinned. Such a move can serve as a badge of honor on any social media platform. In a thread titled "It's so sad that we replace socialization with this," started by *Deleted member 7448*,[13] *Deleted member 27249* states while quoting another comment (original user's comment is in added quotation marks):

> your personality said: "Damn this thread really got pinned by the mods :lul: You'd think they wouldn't promote a thread that is talking about how we'd rather be socializing IRL instead of this forum." @ anon1822 s posts are deserve to be pinned.

Anon1822 is the original poster (*Deleted member 7448*), whose post was not only pinned but also considered to be a "High IQ Post" thread by other users. Several members agreed with *Deleted member 27249's* observation. For instance, *Deleted member 27204* wrote: "Another high IQ post from you brother," while *Hate_My_Life* responded with "Top tier relatable content always," indicating that *Anon1822's* posts are often high quality. Several other responses echoed that compliment regarding *Anon1822*, which demonstrates that he has earned respect from his fellow incels due not only to the number of his posts but also the quality of the posts.

Incel subculture, beliefs, and behaviors are presented, often to the extreme, in their posts. They present themselves as attaining incel behaviors, hating on women, "ethnics," and those who are lower in the incel social structure. Such presentation is often to protect their status as an incel overall as well as to display their commitment to being an incel, which ties to how they are seen within the incel community, much as what happens within sports teams (Shang and Chih-Ming Ku 2018) and other organizations, like work (DiPalma 2004). It will be demonstrated later from their posts that while many of those individuals might present with low self-esteem, they are going to seek acceptance and self-esteem from the incel community. They participate in social competition behaviors to advance their status within the incel group. The level of commitment to incel behaviors and acceptance of the red pill or black pill ideologies increases the likelihood of an improvement of one's position as incel. Within the forum, such behaviors will appear as the positive activity.[14]

Policing and Conflicts Online

Incels are no different from other subcultural and informal associations. They share various norms and mores while also subscribing to a particular set

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[13] Deleted member followed by a number is not necessarily a username. Deleted member labels take the place of usernames when a member has been banned by moderators or has, on their volition, deleted their account from the incels. is forum with the label replacing the original usernames.

[14] From the incels.is webpage's FAQ and Rules section regarding "How do ranks and stars work?": "You earn one star per 100 posts, up to 5 stars. Once you get 500 posts, your rank and color change, and you reset to one star again. Notice that for each rank, you need to have been registered for one extra week on the site, this is so spamming to skip ranks isn't possible. You can see all ranks in the Members section's sidebar. If you have the post count + registered time, simply be patient; the 'upgrade' process runs every hour."

of beliefs and values that help establish and maintain their identity as group members. Those cultural delineations set the subcultural group apart from the rest of the mainstream cultural members (Yinger 1960). As such, anyone who violates those norms or turns away from those beliefs is often informally punished for their indiscretions, while conflicts arising from those violations must be mediated through that informal enforcement (Williams and Copes 2005; Bryant 2014; Stamkou et al. 2019).

Some groups and individuals are not allowed the status of incels. Women, according to their ideology, cannot be incels, whether or not they face many of the same issues that incels do. User *WØLF* explains:

> Lesbian pill is brutal, it saves foid from being alone after whoring with chad, I see tons of single mothers going the lesbian route because they can't find good looking men to be married to…normies and chadlites will soon be replaced with other foids. foids will only pair with giga chads and giga pretty boys in the future and if she can't secure one she will take another foid because it is more valuable than any normie or chadlite.

WØLF is suggesting that while women may face some difficulties, they can always find a man to be with them, and if that does not work, they can fall back and be with their fellow women. It is implied that lesbianism is always an option for women, a choice if they are unable to find a desirable partner, something that is not an option for incels. However, following such logic, it is unclear why homosexuality would not be an option for those men. According to the incels.is forum rules, the following groups are explicitly banned from the forum:

> Women and LGBT Individuals: Banned on sight, no exceptions. This is a heterosexual male-only forum.

> Non-incel: Even if interested in blackpill philosophy, the community has voted not to allow non-incels.

> Under 18's: Forum accepts only those who are 18+, no exceptions aside from those grandfathered.

In terms of LGBTQ issues, all content related to that group is banned, unless it is to criticize the LGBTQ community. Strangely enough, "furries" and "bronies" were also included as banned for being part of the LGBTQ community and given their own name ("furfags").

Incels are protective, ironically, of their identity, especially regarding who is and who is not an incel. Certain groups are not allowed to be incels. Those who ascend, the term used by incels for having sex or getting an intimate partner, are, by definition, no longer incels. One of the other groups that is also banned is Chads, who are non-incels. Chads, whom incels believe are genetically blessed with the good looks that women desire, and are looked down on as being shallow, are not allowed to be incels. User *Fat Link* expressed disdain that more of those Chads were beginning to identify as incels in a thread he started called "More Chads are becoming…Serious More and more Chads are becoming incels strangely enough…" that sparked a deeper discussion within the forum about who is and who is not an incel. User *Burnscarcel* states the following during the debate while quoting another user, *WØLF*:

> WØLF said: tfw the head janny doesn't even know what a chad is Sheeit nigger the vast majority of JBW [Just Be White] theorists are all nodding their heads in agreement with me about him now as I type.

FFS you don't get much more Chadly than having his traits which are:

White
Probably tall enough
Blue Eyes
Square Jaw
Asesthetic symmetrical face
Looks financially successful…

Who is and who is not a Chad is up for debate in inceldom. The *Fat Link* post fomented a debate about Chads where they ended up discussing and debating whether or not certain individuals, who claimed to be incels, were, in fact, Chads. It is assumed, within inceldom, that true incels, the blackpills, have a certain base level of knowledge and should know how to define Chads. User *SlayerSlayer* sums that point up:

> The majority of you niggas have no idea how to rate looks objectively at all. I shouldn't have to post a pic of what a chad looks like because such fundamental blackpill knowledge should realdy be self evident if you're posting on these forums.

SlayerSlayer demonstrates two phenomena that have been discussed in this paper. First, he is highlighting the existence of a hierarchy, namely, that blackpills are the only true incels. Second, he is saying that anyone unable to identify a Chad is not a true incel and, therefore, should not be posting in the forums. *Slayerslayer's* post demonstrates both policing the boundaries of inceldom and the enforcement of incel hierarchy.

Further policing of inceldom and the incel hierarchy is evident during a dispute in the thread titled "Foid tried to cancel me on social media." The original poster (OP) was called out for his actions in real life, which entailed bullying someone with Down Syndrome with the hope of impressing a girl at his school. During that conflict, user *ElTruecel* accused *Vomitcel* (OP) of being a fakecel, while another user, *TheProphetMuscle*, in support of that accusation, chimed in with, "indeed OP will have an ascension post soon enough." The activities of *Vomitcel*, which he, himself, reported, were not deemed to be in line with inceldom. Immediately, *Vomitcel* was castigated for making fun of someone who could very well be accepted into the incel subculture. Indeed, other users began to point out other famous people with disabilities whom they were posthumously claiming would have been one of their own. User *Indari* identified the following historical figures as being incels:

> These men are the truest of incels; if you think your dating life is hard, theirs is infinitely harder.
> Beethoven went deaf; he was an incel
> Heaviside was hearing impaired; he was an incel
> Joseph Merrick was so severely deformed he was called "the elephant man"; he was an incel.
> That, my friend, is why I don't find it funny that you bullied a child with down syndrome.

Also, *Vomitcel's* motivations for attacking the classmate were not in line with inceldom—he was trying to do it to impress a girl. Ultimately, *Vomitcel* was reported to the website moderators and called a fakecel—serving not only as an insult but a technique used to police their boundaries. By reporting *Vomitcel* to the moderators, the hope is that he will be banned from the online social forum, which is the definitive way to police boundaries and punish those who violate the incel norms. Not only are you not able to participate in mainstream society, but now you cannot be part of the incel community.

Insults within inceldom serve two purposes and must be understood within the proper cultural con-

text (Mateo and Yus 2013). First, they are often used to bond with members of the group or to foment group solidarity (Dynel 2008). The insults may serve as a bonding mechanism, like "locker room talk" within sports teams (Curry 1991; Pennington 2016). The insults help other incels to feel as though they are part of the group when they use them against individuals who violate incel norms or characteristics, thereby reinforcing the "ins" and the "others." Second, they can also help a member feel as though they are part of the group if they receive a good-natured insult, thereby becoming a compliment. In the "Getting blackpilled for the first time" thread, two users hurled insults at the OP. *Michael15651* wrote:

> Yup. Stick to women in your own league, you subhuman POS.

Calling the OP, *LonelyATM*, subhuman is meant to reaffirm his position in society as an incel and reinforce that, by being subhuman, he is unlikely to ever ascend. However, *Michael15651* was called out by another user, *ElephantMan*, for being a greycel, which, as mentioned earlier, is lower in the incel hierarchy. Essentially, *ElephantMan* is telling the user, by reminding him of his position, that he is a novice and should be careful about insulting others, especially when someone starts a thread. Another user, *AsgardTheFatecel*, uses a similar insult at *LonelyATM*:

> At the end of the day you can put a cockroach in a suit but it's still a cockroach.

AsgardTheFatecel's slight serves the same purpose as *Michael15651's*, despite being harsher in tone, but it is not coming from a novice incel. In certain ways, it lets *LonelyATM* know that he has made it into the group. That he is one of them (the incels) now, especially since that at the start of his post, he admits

to taking the black pill. Other insults used in the forum include homophobic and racist language and general "shitposting" that has been widely reported in other studies, a practice that further enforces the "us vs. them" mentality that is widespread in inceldom (Baron and Dunham 2015).

Conclusion

Attempting to study incels as a subcultural group in an impartial manner is difficult. It calls into memory the experiences, for example, of Bronisław Malinowski and his feelings toward the Trobriander Islanders off the coast of Australia, where he was less than thrilled about being interned there during World War I and viewed his subjects as backwards, unintelligent, vulgar, and unattractive (Baker 1987). Malinowski's ethnographic observations are an important lesson to researchers to remember our relationship with those being researched as well as attempting to view the world through their eyes. The same can be written regarding involuntary celibates, which is what this paper attempted to do—get into the world view of incels.

At the beginning of this paper, it was mentioned that incels do not view themselves as a subcultural group and compare themselves to either LGBTQIA+ members or to homeless people—that neither of those would be viewed by mainstream society as a subcultural group. Despite their claims, taken directly from their own FAQ page, the data indicate otherwise. As the findings show, incels set boundaries to determine who are and are not incels, they have their language and code words that serve as a shared dialect within the group, they have a common bonding area (online forums, especially incels. is, from which the data were taken), there is a shared belief system, and they interact with one another.

According to Gary Alan Fine and Sherryl Kleinman's (1979) conceptualization of subcultures, incels share many of the characteristics that they outline, such as having structural roles that help to spread information, media diffusion, membership, and weak ties (incels, seemingly, rarely meet outside of their online forum, but that is a matter for future research). However, the case could easily be made that incels are not a subculture, as they have withdrawn from mainstream society in certain ways, but rather a contraculture, where their norms and beliefs are contrary to mainstream society (Yinger 1960). Ultimately, though, Dick Hebdige's formulation seems most appropriate when discussing incels.

One question that should be asked at the end of all research, regardless of methods, is, "So what?" Why is the research on incels important, and ultimately, what is the point? The media has begun to report more on incels, especially in conjunction with a rise in mass shootings. When a mass shooting occurs, there is becoming a greater chance that the perpetrator may be an incel or have some connections to inceldom, as well as other extremist online influences. One thread started on February 14, 2023 by *YuiStillMyCope*, who has previously posted on the topic, is titled "The FBI defeated us in a very insidious way." Here, he theorizes that the FBI was beginning to infiltrate their community and expressed anger and frustration that incels were being labeled and treated as a terrorist threat. He blamed the FBI for, among many things, incels being censored (or quarantined) in social media:

> Undermine public opinion: One of the primary ways the FBI targeted organizations was by challenging their reputations in the community and denying them a platform to gain legitimacy. Hoover specifically designed programs to block leaders from

"spreading their philosophy publicly or through the communications media". Furthermore, the organization created and controlled negative media meant to undermine black power organizations. For instance, they oversaw the creation of "documentaries" skillfully edited to paint the Black Panther Party as aggressive, and false newspapers that spread misinformation about party members. The ability of the FBI to create distrust within and between revolutionary organizations tainted their public image and weakened chances at unity and public support.

Whether or not *YuiStillMyCope's* claims are founded, government and non-government agencies have begun to take notice of their online presence. The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) has begun to pay more attention to the online activities of incels, recognizing that their ideology, when taken to its extremes, can lead to violence. The ADL has an entire page devoted to the subject that includes a glossary of terms for the uninitiated. For those reasons, gaining a deeper understanding of the incel subculture is vitally important, especially if it is to be viewed as a social problem.

If society is going to treat inceldom as a social problem, then, logically, a solution must be sought. On Reddit, there are incel recovery groups, therapists have begun to treat self-proclaimed incels for various ailments, and even rehabilitation facilities have started programs to "cure" incels. If such interventions are to be successful, then knowing about incel subdivisions becomes essential. A treatment plan for a redpill incel, such as PUAs or LMSs, would be quite a bit different than how one would treat a blackpill incel who has lost all hope and sees no way out, even justifying their position through science.

Previous studies, as well as the ADL, have treated incels as a homogenous group. They are viewed as

largely heterosexual, cis, white males who blame women and society for their inability to "get laid," find a girlfriend, form a meaningful relationship with a member of the opposite sex, or other manifestations of their failing. Where this research diverges is by finding the nuances within inceldom in identifying the existence of a hierarchy of incels and delving further into how they define and police themselves.

Finally, this research is part of a broader project devoted to studying incels, but more importantly, to gain insight into their lifeworld, or *Lebenswelt*, with the potential for *verstehen*, which should be the goal of the social scientist according to Weber (1946). It is limited in the data collection methods, as it merely examines online postings, which comes with its own shortcomings (Karpf 2012; Latkovikj and Popovska 2019). However, the amount of data collected is vast and worthy of further investigation. For instance, future directions of research could include aspects of popular culture that are consumed by incels (music, art, print, television, etc.), which might give a greater insight into how such artifacts shape the incel worldview and ideology. Another area, as suggested by others, would deal with incel attitudes toward sex workers. Yet another area of importance would come from incels who may have reformed—what led to the reformation, what are their relationships like, and have those relationships significantly altered their ideology? Some of these issues would require interviews. However, while interviews may be beneficial to such type of research, one would be limited by sample size and would not be able to reach the level of theoretical saturation that collecting online postings has been able to achieve.

If society truly wants to understand incels, then we must begin to examine the root causes as to what drives those men to identify as involuntarily celibate, give up, withdraw from society, and find comfort and solidarity online with other like-minded individuals. There are social conditions that are driving them away, conditions that incels are not entirely clear about. Only through a deeper investigation into the data will the incel phenomenon be truly understood.

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