

RACIALIZATION ON INCELS.IS:
RACIAL STATUS AND STATUS THREAT

by

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Abstract

This project examined the historic-racial schema articulated by involuntarily celibate male members of the online forum incels.is. Based in a content analysis of images and comments from incels.is, it drew on a broad framework informed by double-consciousness, historic-racial and corporeal schemas, hegemonic and hybrid masculinities, and realistic and symbolic threat. This research documented what assumptions shape said schemas, how incels operationalized racial status and status threat, and how racialized and non-racialized incels incorporated those ideas into their corporeal schemas. It found that processes of racialization on the forum were articulated in a manner consistent with the warped ‘handing back’ of racialized identities described by Fanon and Du Bois. Racialization was akin to a process of objectification and racialized incels interpellated limiting core self-evaluations, while non-racialized incels drew on hybridized masculinities to distance themselves from privilege yet sought to entrench it.

Keywords: *Involuntary celibacy; incel; masculinities; racialization; blackpill; realistic threat; historic-racial schema; double-consciousness*

Author’s Note: *Content warning for discussions of sexual assault and violence against women, dehumanizing language directed against racialized minorities.*

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Dedication

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List of Acronyms

- 1) Ascend – to have (unpaid) sex and thus stop being an incel.
- 2) -cel – A suffix which when added to a noun or verb denotes the reason for incelibacy.
- 3) Curry(cel) – Indian Incel.
- 4) Emotes – An image like a smiley face that is used to express emotion online.
- 5) Foid/Foids – Female Humanoid(s).
- 6) Incel – Involuntarily Celibate.
- 7) Incelibacy/Inceldom – The state of being involuntarily celibate.
- 8) -maxx – A suffix which when added to a noun or verb denotes a way to improve an incels situation, potentially with the goal of ascending.
- 9) Mog/mogger – To be better looking than someone else.
- 10) NEET – Not in Education, Employment, or Training.
- 11) Noodle(whore) – An Asian person. With suffix, an Asian woman.
- 12) NT – Neurotypical.
- 13) OP – Original Poster. An internet term for the person who begins a thread.
- 14) Rice(cel) – Asian Incel.
- 15) RVF – Roosh V Forum. Roosh V was extremely influential in the PUA/manosphere space, and the forum used to be a place for posting PUA Game results. He has since rebranded the forum to be a Christian space.
- 16) SFcel/WNcel – Stormfrontcel or White Nationalistcel. Incels who identify as members of Stormfront or as White Nationalists.
- 17) Shit-test – A Pick Up Artist term for female resistance to PUA Game.
- 18) Shit posting – An internet term for posting funny, ironic, or non-serious content.
- 19) SMV – Sexual Marketplace Value. PUA terminology for ranking people's attractiveness.
- 20) Trucel – True Incel.
- 21) Volcel – Voluntary Incel. An insult which implies the target is willfully responsible for their incelibacy and could ascend if they wanted.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Incels (a portmanteau for involuntarily celibate¹) are a male supremacist group whose adherents have been responsible for multiple terrorist attacks in Canada and the United States (BBC, 2018; Brockbank, 2019; CBC, 2019; Ankel, 2020; BBC, 2020). They are an online-only group composed of mostly young, avowedly cis-gendered, and performatively straight men experiencing difficulties achieving romantic and sexual relationships, often to the point of a total lack of all such experiences. They have a sense of aggrieved entitlement, arising from the sense that they are being unfairly denied sexual and romantic connections.

Incels believe that their situation is caused by the feminist sexual liberation of women beginning in the 1960s, which they claim allows women to choose their own sexual partners without shame (Kimmel, 2013). Women are constructed simultaneously as a resource to be competed for and as a villainous Other, who cruelly and purposefully oppress incels by withholding sex. Incels also experience intense self-revulsion (Witt, 2020) and instrumentalize claims of masculine suffering to naturalize masculine dominance (Ging, 2019).

Research suggests that the incel worldview overlaps with white supremacist ideologies (Hoffman, Ware, & Shapiro, 2020) and the group is a fertile recruiting ground for alt-right white supremacist movements (Mamié et al., 2021). Given this, it may be shocking to learn that despite the common media framing of the group as “disaffected, young white males” (Talbot, 2018) or “a toxic manifestation of White Man Blues” (Rouner, 2018) - the group is almost half composed of racialized men. Informal surveys performed by the community itself suggest that this community was, in 2019, at least 55% White and 45% composed of men identifying as Black,

¹ ‘Incel’ is both the word the community uses to refer to itself and the word used in scholarship and reporting to refer to this group. This paper will likewise use the word incel(s), as well as incelibacy and inceldom.

Latino, Asian, Indian, Middle Eastern, or Other (Demographics of Inceldom). Although this poll is by no means scientific, neither is it likely to be purposively faked.

Table 1: Racial Demographics of Reddit-at-large vs. Incel Forums, %

Race	Reddit, U.S., Pew Research 2019	Reddit, U.S., /r/Braincels 2019	incels.co, 2019
White	73.4%	52.4%	56.1%
Black	3.4%	7.0%	8.2%
Hispanic	18.0%	7.0% (Latino)	8.4%
East Asian	5.1%	33.8%	27.3%
South Asian/Indian			
Middle Eastern			
White-Asian			
White-Black			
Other			

Figure 1: Screenshot from the Incel Wiki “Demographics of Inceldom”

Academic research on incels is still a nascent field, though fast growing. Scholars began to examine the group around 2018, four years after what is now viewed as the first incel attack occurred in Isla Vista, 2014. In May of that year, 22-year-old Eliot Rodger began a deadly killing spree, starting with the slaughter of his roommates, morphing into the pursuit of blonde sorority members and their partners, and ending with suicide before he could be arrested. Early research either does not have access to demographic data (Ging, 2019, Shaw, 2018; Van Valkenburgh, 2018), does not examine it, or frames the group as majority white (Rouner, 2018; Talbot, 2018; ADL, 2020; Farrell et al, 2019; Hunté, 2019).

This project aims to extend scholarly understanding of the group by exploring how white and non-white members of the group construct and interpret their racialized identities within the bounds of the group ideology, which has been described by scholars as both racist and

performatively anti-racist (Ging, 2019; Chang, 2020). It challenges the popular construction of this group as an all-white, white supremacist group, drawing attention to the internalized racism and self-hatred expressed by racialized members of the community. Who, in fact, is saying what about race in this community? Drawing on a framework informed by Fanon and Du Bois, this essay asks: how are members constructing and ‘handing back’ racial identities within the edicts of the incel ideology? This research also considers the place of the incel ideology within broader historical trends of political violence and discusses potentialities for de-radicalization. To explore these dynamics, the following research questions were examined:

- 1) How do incels construct and interpret racialized identities?
 - a. What language do incels use to reference race?
 - b. How do incels engage with users they know the racial identities of?
 - c. What kinds of outcomes does the incel worldview predict for different racial identities?
- 2) How do incels articulate, refute, and embrace racial status and threat?

The Rise of the Involuntarily Celibate

On May 23, 2014, 22-year-old Elliot Rodger killed six and injured fourteen, using a knife, a gun, and a car. His killing spree began with a failed attempt to enter the Alpha Phi sorority house at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and ended with a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head (Dorell & Welch, 2014). In between killing three in his dorm room and driving to the sorority, Rodger posted a video on YouTube entitled “Elliot Rodger’s Retribution.” He spoke about his frustrations with women, his virginity, his loneliness, and his rage: “I do not know why you girls aren’t attracted to me, but I will punish you all for it.” (Lovett & Nagourney, 2014). He also emailed a 137-page manifesto to two dozen family, friends, and his therapist, entitled “My Twisted World: The Story of Elliot Rodger” (Feldman, 2014).

About a month before the shooting, Rodger's mother became concerned by some of his online activities and called the police to request a wellness check. Deputies did not view the concerning videos, did not search Rodger's home, and did not find reason to instate an involuntary hold (CNN Wire, 2014). Rodger's weapons were purchased legally. About the incident, Rodger wrote:

"I had the striking and devastating fear that someone had somehow discovered what I was planning to do, and reported me for it. If that was the case, the police would have searched my room, found all of my guns and weapons, along with my writings about what I plan to do with them. I would have been thrown in jail, denied of the chance to exact revenge on my enemies. I can't imagine a hell darker than that." (CNN Wire, 2014).

The case received international attention as the media picked over details in Rodger's lengthy manifesto and YouTube videos where he explicitly described his desire to commit the attack for which he is now known. Rodger was the son of British filmmaker, Peter Rodger, and a Malaysian Chinese film company research assistant, Li Chin. In his manifesto, he expressed feeling different from a young age because of his mixed-race ancestry, as well as his anger upon seeing white women with non-white men:

"I am half White, half Asian, and this made me different from the normal fully-white kids." (Rodger, 2014, p.17)

"How could an inferior, ugly black boy be able to get a white girl and not me? I am beautiful, and I am half white myself. I am descended from British aristocracy. He is descended from slaves. I deserve it more." (Rodger, 2014, p.84)

"How could an ugly Asian attract the attention of a white girl, while a beautiful Eurasian like myself never had any attention from them? I thought with rage." (Rodger, 2014, p.121)

Rodger was neither the first nor the last killer to use spectacularized mass violence to punish others, particularly women, for his inadequacies. However, his attack may be understood as a turning point in violence associated with incel and incel-adjacent ideologies. Rodger is cited as a source of inspiration by subsequent incel attackers (Minassian, Beierle, and Carini all name-

checked Rodger) and attacks associated with the community have been steadily increasing since 2014. The community regards him as a saint (Witt, 2020), and use his initials to encourage each other to commit acts of spectacularized violence (e.g. ‘go ER’, ‘be a hERo’).

Origins and Predecessors

The phrase incel, short for ‘involuntarily celibate’, was first coined by a Canadian Carleton University undergraduate student named Alana. She started an online support group in 1993 for men and women who were inexperienced in love and dating. It was called ‘Alana’s Involuntary Celibacy Project’ (Anti-Defamation League, 2020). Alana herself was struggling with her sexuality and wanted a space where she and others could go for advice about social skills and how to start dating (Hoffman, Ware, & Shapiro, 2020). With time, Alana moved on from the project, and without moderators the site began to founder.

Other spaces on the internet were created where the still nascent community could gather. Particularly, two websites cropped up: IncelSupport and LoveShy. The community on IncelSupport was mixed gender with stricter moderators, while LoveShy trended overwhelmingly male (Kelly, 2020). LoveShy, founded in 2003, was home to the more militant and vitriolic half of the community; biologically deterministic memes and praise for violence were common (Hoffman, Ware, & Shapiro, 2020). Posts evidencing incel influence could also be found in 4chans /b board, or on Reddit, most prominently on subreddits like the eponymous r/Incels, r/Truecels, and r/ForeverAlone. Due to the addition of a new, stricter moderator at LoveShy, the more militant part of the community began to scatter. Many moved to Reddit. A harsher edge began to emerge in the community, and the idea began to spread that embracing the

label ‘incel’ entailed acting to “take control of their lives and exact revenge for the dismissive and derogatory way they were treated” (Shapiro, Ware, Hoffman, 2020, p.4).

At its peak in 2016, the subreddit r/Incels had 40, 000 active users. In 2017, Reddit banned the community for repeated violations of the website’s prohibition on incitements to violence (Shapiro, Ware, Hoffman, 2020, p.4). r/Truecels was banned shortly beforehand. Of that subreddit, it is interesting to note that an incels.is wiki page maintained by a ‘community historian’ has the following to say:

“In short, [SJWs](#) were mad that r/Truecels, an extremely small forum, allowed calls for the legalization of [rape](#) (even though trying to incite illegal rape was banned). So they got it quarantined. r/incels then ramped up in response, and then that was banned and [incels.co](#) was created, which now has magnitudes more members than r/Truecels ever had.” (Incels.wiki).

A more heavily moderated successor called r/braincels was also banned in September 2019, for bullying and harassment. Today, small communities of incels exist in chat rooms on Discord (such as ‘al-Manowar’, ‘Darkest Abode’, ‘decline’, and ‘Haven for Hopeless Incels/Femcels’), and the website incels.is (formerly incels.co & incels.net). This last appears to be the largest, English-speaking, dedicated community for incels that remains, potentially due to being hosted privately. The website doesn’t identify the individual(s) who run(s) it, but a contact email (infinitecel@protonmail.com) is provided under a FAQ list (Rules and FAQ). Infinity is the handle of one of the administrators of the site. The front page of the website boasts the following statistics:

“Threads: 328,221
Posts: 7,428,141
Members: 15,429 (emphasis mine)
New Lost Soul: georgeFugen

Time online: 67248d 4h 3m”
(collected Feb 12, 2022, 10:18pm).

It is possible that Reddit’s crackdown on the community resulted in a decrease in the number of individuals who spend their time online interacting with incel content. At the very least, it reduced the risk that users could be steered towards such content algorithmically. The addition of an additional layer of insulation between teenagers vulnerable to extremism can only be a good thing. However, it is impossible to say how many emigrants from Reddit actively identify as incels, to say nothing of people who express ideas and sentiments originating or linked with the incel community but who are not actively engaged in one of the remaining communities. Therefore, it is difficult to pin down an exact estimate of total membership.

Self-categorization with the group is an important factor in group identification theory (Riek et al., 2006). However, this distinction may not be as relevant here as the endorsement of views linked with inceldom. Although a self-labelled incel might be expected to be exposed to a broader or more extreme version of the ideology, the core ideas and sentiments are what have been tied to incidents of real violence (Scaptura & Boyle, 2020). The incel worldview is defined by a few core ideas. Primarily, it revolves around the idea that society is fundamentally hierarchically organized along impassable and genetically determined categories of physical attractiveness, and that women are the primary agents of sexual selection with the power to withhold or grant sex and intimacy. Women supposedly favour ‘Chad’, who is the idealized figure of an attractive man, muscular, confident and axe jawed. Pick-up artist (PUA) teachings, which influence incels, hold that 20% of men sleep with 80% of women, leaving the remaining 20% of women for the leftover 80% of men.

Incels place themselves at the bottom of the social hierarchy, enacting a hybrid masculinity that allows them to distance themselves from hegemonic masculinity (embodied in

the ‘Chad’ archetype) while reinstating the value of their (self-identified, sigma²) masculinity and the natural order of masculine dominance. They simultaneously contend that their practice of masculinity is, or should be, more socially valuable than ‘Chad’ masculinity, while arguing that women are exclusively attracted to hegemonic masculinity (e.g. wealth, dominance, status). This contention is used to argue for a return to pre-1960s sexual values, to once again further restrict women’s sexual agency. Incels see themselves as an in-group defined by their lack of access to sex and construct the rest of society as an out-group defined by their access to the same. Due to the power women supposedly hold as sexual resources, incels also argue that society is biased to benefit women and that feminist movements are not only unnecessary but destructive of desirable social mores and norms.

Incel Violence

It would be important for legislators to note that there is a subset of the community that is not violent. Identifying as an incel does not necessarily include an endorsement of the terrorism motivated by the group, a distinction the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) made when they classified the group as a terror organization in 2020 under the name misogynist incel.

In a 2020 paper, Hoffman, Ware, and Shapiro identified four categories of incel violence: incel-motivated terror attacks, attacks with mixed motives but evidence of incel influences, acts

² ‘Sigma’ is a way of describing masculinity in manosphere groups that is drawn from debunked research on wolf hierarchies. Other masculinities used in this way include alpha, beta, and omega. While an ‘alpha’ male is approximate to a ‘Chad’ (the type of masculinity associated with hegemonic maleness), a ‘beta’ is a follower, an ‘omega’ is at the bottom of the pack and often bullied, and a ‘sigma’ is a lone wolf. For an overview of how the scientific understanding of wolf hierarchies has changed, see Kjørstad, 2021. The changing science has not stopped manosphere groups like incels from using this terminology as a mode of self-validation, and the terms have even made their way into popular culture largely divorced from their origin in manosphere spaces.

of targeted violence perpetrated by self-professed incels, and ex post-facto incelism (p.8). The first refers to “acts of political violence with explicit political and ideological aims committed by males claiming to be part of the incel community via its online presence”, where the primary drive for committing the crime was incelism. Hoffman, Ware, and Shapiro classify Elliot Rodger (2014), Alex Minassian (2018), and Scott Beierle (2018) as such. This category is partially distinguished by the targeting of ideologically symbolic locales for attack, such as a sorority house and a hot yoga studio (2020, p.10).

It should be noted that Minassian’s incel status is subject to some contestation.

Immediately preceding his attack, he posted the following message on Facebook:

"Private (Recruit) Minassian Infantry 00010, wishing to speak to Sgt 4chan please. C23249161. The Incel Rebellion has already begun! We will overthrow all the Chads and Stacys. All hail the Supreme Gentleman Elliot Rodger!" (CBC/Radio Canada, 2018).

The veracity of the post was initially questioned by journalists but was later confirmed by Facebook to have been authentically posted by an account linked to Minassian himself (Swain, 2018). In his initial interactions with the police, Minassian stated that “he killed as part of an incel rebellion and that his interest in incels was sparked by rejection from women at a Halloween party in 2013. Minassian told police he was inspired by a manifesto by Elliott Rodger.” (Humphreys, 2020). Yet only four months after this interview with detectives, Minassian told a psychiatrist he had lied to police. In this subsequent interview he claimed that he was ‘obsessed’ with incel forums and websites but that he never posted there or communicated with Elliot Rodger as he had maintained. He claimed instead that he was motivated by extreme anxiety over failure at a job he was due to start. The psychologist who interviewed Minassian and testified in court stated that he found this new defense difficult to believe, due to the detail and complexity of what Minassian initially told police (Humphreys,

2020). It was, however, confirmed that Minassian never had contact with Rodger. Minassian told the psychologist, Bradford, that “It would be energizing that the media would be identifying me as such... It does not bother me to be on the list (of incel killers).” (Humphreys, 2020).

The second category consists of attacks that do not arise from an express embrace of the incel political project but are nevertheless committed by those who espouse or identify with the ideology (Hoffman, Ware, & Shapiro, 2020, p.11). This includes Christopher Harper-Mercer (2015), William Atchison (2017), and Nikolas Cruz (2018) (ibid., p.11). Each of these attackers had previously mentioned inceldom in an online or offline capacity prior to the incident. These attacks targeted schools, rather than places symbolically associated with women, and fit a profile of violence motivated by ‘aggrieved entitlement’, through which lens a school shooting may be seen as an instrumental way for adolescent boys to enhance their masculinity (ibid., p.12).

The third category includes acts of targeted violence against individuals, perpetrated by men who either identify as incels or are familiar with the movement. They highlight Sheldon Bentley (2016), Emmanuel Aranda (2019), and Alex Stavropoulos (2020). These attacks are not clearly meant to advance a political ideology, evidence potentially random targets, and are perhaps the most significant proof of the role that misogyny and sexual frustration alone can play in sparking violence (ibid., p.14).

The fourth and final category includes incidents where the incel community retroactively inducts past attackers into a catalogue of incel ‘saints.’ These attacks predate the advent of modern online incel communities, but their violence nonetheless evidences the pattern of “social isolation generally, and rejection by women specifically” that animates contemporary incel violence (Hoffman, Ware, & Shapiro, 2020, p.14). This category includes Marc Lépine (1989),

George Sodini (2009), Eric Harris & Dylan Klebold (1999), Seung-Hui Cho (2007), and Adam Lanza (2012). (ibid., p.14).

Years before Rodger's attack, in 2009, George Sodini opened fire on a fitness class in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He killed three women, injured nine others, and then shot himself. He left behind notes citing his lack of sexual and romantic relationships as the reason for his attack (DiBranco, 2020). Sodini's weapons were also legally acquired. Although Sodini was not active in any incel communities, his crimes are often placed in continuums of incel-related violence due to the similarity in motive. To 'go Sodini' was a common phrase on popular incel forum that users would say to others to encourage them to take violent, spectacular revenge for their incelbacy; the slogan has since changed to reflect new instances of violence. As previously mentioned, one new code takes the form of 'Going ER' or being a 'hERo', a reference to Eliot Rodger's initials. This was the most common code encountered through this project, though the namechecking and lionizing of subsequent killers is also present on the forums.

Sodini and Eliot Rodger were both involved in the PUA communities, groups founded around the treatment of women as sexual objects made accessible to men through mental manipulation (DiBranco, 2020). Sodini attended conferences designed to teach 'game', while Rodger was active on the websites PUAHate.com and loveshy.com (Woolf, 2014). In his manifesto, Rodger noted that he found his way to PUAHate.com after being disillusioned with PUA techniques, and that he found in that community "a forum full of men who are starved of sex, just like me", which "confirmed many of the theories I had about how wicked and degenerate women really are" (Woolf, 2014). PUAHate.com was a site for men who had tried pick-up artist techniques and found them lacking; loveshy.com was one of two predecessor

websites to the subreddit community r/incels. Eliot Rodger also used the label ‘Forever Alone’, which is a reference to r/ForeverAlone, a noted subreddit for incels (Woolf, 2014).

(Scientific) Black Pill

Key to the incel ideology is the “Black Pill”. The Black Pill is a metaphor which emerges from a web of popular culture and internet history. In the movie *The Matrix* (1999), the protagonist Neo is offered a choice between a red pill and a blue pill. The blue pill will let him return to his simulated, contented life, while the red pill will wake him up to the horrors of his real condition. The red pill was adopted as a metaphor by major male supremacist movements constituting what scholars call the ‘manosphere’ - Pick Up Artists (PUA), Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW), and r/TheRedPill, and incels (Kelly, 2020, p.18). For groups like this, ‘taking the Red Pill’ describes ‘awakening’ to the ‘truth’ that men do not have systemic power or privilege, and in fact are the victims of discrimination by women and feminists, who hold systemic, political, and cultural power over them (Kelly, 2020, p.18).

The Black Pill is a more extreme version of the Red Pill. ‘Black Pillers’ accept the precepts of the Red Pill, and argue that in addition, looks are genetically determined and women choose partners based solely on physical features, so inceldom is genetically pre-determined and unchangeable (Gallagher, 2020). In a thesis presented to Ryerson University, Anthony Burton provides a comprehensive overview of the Black Pill, not previously articulated in the literature, and usefully distinguishes between the Red Pill and the Black Pill:

“The key distinction between “looks theory’s” red pill and the black pill is that the former believes that the situation of oppression that it articulates can be overcome: while lookism claims that the improvement of physical appearance can lead to social wealth, the black pill believes that women select men with the best genes, and these genes express themselves in ways that cannot be avoided. The black pill believes that

“genetically inferior” men cannot achieve romantic or sexual intimacy with women as presented: biological essentialism is the axiom from which male oppression emerges. General claims about women’s choosiness, preferences about physical appearance, and preference for traditional masculinity carry over from predecessor movements. Yet the black pill’s view of oppression is not only grounded in the idle preferences of outside actors. Supposedly-immutable biological traits like neurotypicality, race, wealth, penis size, virility, voice pitch—bodily traits that cannot be improved by lookism’s prescriptions alone—are part and parcel of the black pill’s oppression framework. And since these traits are outside the typical realms of self-improvement, the structure of male oppression exists on the much deeper level of genetic makeup (Burton, 2020, p.37).

As Burton’s analysis makes clear, the Black Pill situates the incel’s perceived oppression below the cultural level, ingrained in the expression of genetic makeup. Therefore, there are only two real options left once someone has accepted the Black Pill: accept their fate or try to change it. Or, as incels present it, to Lay Down and Rot (LDAR) or go Elliot Rodger (ER). Suicide is often presented as an inevitability, and users often push one another towards it as a solution. It is common to see users asking each other why they have not done it already or telling each other that it is the only escape (Kelly, 2020, p.18).

Incels.is maintains a wiki for incel terminology, including a page describing the Black Pill. It is largely composed of academic papers and other studies which have been interpreted as supporting incel claims about women, attractiveness, and race. A subset of the Black Pill is called the Scientific Black Pill, which argues that an immutable hierarchy of genetic racial attractiveness exists, with whiteness being the most desirable set of features (Jaki et al., 2019). It therefore consists of the general tenets of scientific racism, rebranded to fit with incel jargon. This page is emblematic of a broader trend within incel spaces, which I believe merits addressing. It is the tendency for incels to use scholarly papers to justify their worldview. Research to do with racial dynamics in dating is crucial for understanding the full impact of a white supremacist culture, but it is vulnerable to abuse by groups determined to misinterpret and

oversimplify the results. Scholars publishing in areas relevant to the incel worldview should be very careful in how they approach and present their research.

A Note on Positionality

This project has endeavored to remain on the side of empathy without crossing into the territory of sympathy. The researcher's interest in this subject comes from a complex position as a survivor of gender-based sexual violence, and as someone with a family member who may rightly be called an incel (though not likely a misogynist). The following sections reflect an attempt to understand, but not excuse, the rising trend of social alienation and sexual frustration among young men that defines the incel movement.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

A Note on Edginess Online

A defensive strategy often leveled by the online far right is to respond to backlash by asserting that critics are wrongfully assigning malicious and serious intent to something that was intended as edgy irreverence or humour. Trolling is a well-documented practice online (for a fuller examination see Angela Nagle, *Kill all Normies*, 2017). Groups like incels have been known to purposefully post content they hope will offend (such as content that calls for violence or degrades a protected identity) with the goal of getting ‘normies’ to take the bait and get upset, so that they can make fun of the baited person (Lankshear & Knobel, 2019, p.52).

How, then, do we examine a group known for shielding itself with irony and humour? Should we assume that everything that they say is a lie, or instead take everything at face value? The answer is not exactly in the middle. Witt argues, “(because) it is impossible to know what is in earnest and what is not; we cannot differentiate it and we should not.” Whether or not the discourse is ironic, its impact is the same, since “some faction of the community is reading this content as serious and acting upon it” (Witt, 2020, p.677). Regardless of if the content posted to incel forums is intended as trolling by the posters, some men within the group are deadly serious. The discourse on these forums, while shrouded in edgy humour and dramatics, is at least being read by a subset of the community as revelatory of some deeper truth. This should be enough to force us to take seriously the threat of incel violence, however masked in irony.

(Internalized) Racism, (Status) Threat

Social Identification

To speak about incels as a group, it is important to first define how individuals come to identify themselves as members of social categories. There are two major origins to scholarly work about identity: social identity theory (Hoggs and Abrams, 1988) and identity theory (McCall and Simmons, 1978).

In social identity theory, the term social identity refers to a person's knowledge that they belong to a social category or group; a social group being a set of individuals who share social characteristics and recognize themselves and others as part of that group (Stets & Burke, 2000). This group forming process takes place through what Hogg and Abrams called social comparison, where people like the self are classified with the self and labelled the in-group, and people different from the self are labelled the out-group (Stets & Burke, 2000). In identity theory, self-categorization is dependent on a named and classified world. This classification depends on symbols that designate social roles, and on people recognizing themselves and others as occupants of those roles, which come with behavioural expectations (Stets & Burke, 2000).

While these theories differ slightly with regards to the process, both rely on a fundamental assumption: that the self can name and recognize itself as a member of a category or group. The regard of others is equally as important; without the group's recognition of a person as part of that group, that person cannot be considered a member of that social category. With this context, we must take seriously the incel claim that women and non-straight men cannot be involuntarily celibate. Although this premise, of course, is nonsensical; there are many people of many types of bodies and sexualities who might experience what is nominally involuntary celibacy, this claim makes sense when we consider that the Institute for Research on Male

Supremacism recommends using the term misogynist incel, to distinguish the male supremacist movement from personal identification with the phrase. Misogynist incels are a part of a movement based around entitlement to sex and dehumanization of women. Kelly et al. write:

“A failure to distinguish people who identify as incels or “involuntarily celibate” (including women) from *misogynist* incels leads to flawed recommendations and significant misunderstandings of the nature of this community, the prevalence of misogyny in our societies, and violence against women.” (Kelly et al., 2021)

Using the term misogynist incel allows us to be more specific in our research and recommendations. Similarly, this research project hopes to shed light on the demographics and dynamics of misogynist incels, countering the prevailing public opinion of this group as a majority-white, white supremacist movement. The presence within a racist group of racialized individuals points to a more complicated problem, one which runs the risk of being misaddressed without a course correction. The purpose of this problematization is not to express sympathy for incels, but rather to complicate the easy moralizing which is present in academic and media discourse on the group.

Threat Theories

In addition to group identity, the concept of threat is fundamental to this research. Realistic group conflict theory (RGCT) is the earliest iteration of an academic theory of threat. It arose from an experiment conducted by Sherif et al. (1961) called the Robber’s Cave experiment, which took place at a boys’ summer camp and was tested during a game where the boys were split into two groups competing for the same goal. The success of one group directly impacted the success of the other. The theory proposed that when two groups were in competition for scarce resources, the potential success of one group threatens the well-being of the other,

resulting in each group respectively taking up negative attitudes towards the outgroup (Sherif & Sherif, 1969).

Threat theory moved away from the focus on material competing interests with the work of Bobo (1983). Bobo's theory of symbolic racism (SR) focused specifically on intergroup bias between blacks and whites. He posited that negative outgroup attitudes, specifically racism, were not the result of actual or perceived competition but of conflicting values and beliefs; particularly the belief that blacks violate and threaten values important to whites (Bobo, 1983; Kinder & Sears, 1981). Bobo distinguished between realistic threat (an actual, material threat to the self) and symbolic threat (the perception of value violations). He argued that individuals may still perceive threats to their in-group even when their material self-interest is not impacted – thus, a white male may perceive affirmative action as a threat to his group even when he himself is not affected (Bobo, 1983).

The literature at the time treated RGCT and SR as though the two theories were in direct conflict (Bobo, 1983; Kinder & Sears, 1981). More recently, scholars have begun to treat the two conceptualizations of threat as complementary, rather than mutually exclusive (Riek et al., 2006). Studies measuring both realistic and symbolic threat have found that both types of threat can account for unique variance in outgroup attitudes (McLaren, 2003; Wilson, 2001).

In a paper published in 2000, W.G. Stephan and C.W. Stephan proposed *Integrated Threat Theory* (IdTT). They introduced a fourfold classification system of threat: symbolic threat, realistic threat, negative stereotypes, and intergroup anxiety. IdTT proposed that outgroup attitudes can be simultaneously or independently influenced by all four types of threat, emphasizing that threats or value conflicts need not be real to influence attitudes. It also

broadened the scope of SR theory from relations between blacks and whites to examine how both majority and minority group members can perceive threat (Stephan & Stephan, 2000).

In 2015, Stephan, Ybarra, & Rios followed up the publication with a revised version of the theory. Renamed to *Intergroup Threat Theory* (IpTT), the fourfold structure was reduced to twofold, retaining just symbolic and realistic threat. Intergroup anxiety and negative stereotypes were no longer considered forms of threat but were reduced to potential antecedents of symbolic and realistic threat (Stephen et. al, 2015). The theory also separated threats into group and individual levels. The operationalization of the terms realistic and symbolic threat still referred to material interest threat and perceived value threat. They note that perceptions of realistic and symbolic threat tend to be highly correlated (Stephan et al., 2009; Stephen et al., 2015).

Scholars have further broken down the conceptualization of threat into status and acceptance threat. Status threat is the sense that an in-group's value is undermined by outside forces, such as the sense that men as a group are threatened by a reduction in the status of masculinity. This can lead to attempts to preserve the position of the dominant group, and members who feel their group is threatened may respond by re-affirming their membership (Scaptura & Boyle, 2020, p.4). According to testing of their masculine overcompensation thesis men who strongly agreed that "recent changes in our society often disadvantage men" were more likely to endorse war, homophobia, and misogyny (Willer et al., 2013, p.1000). Acceptance threat is a sense of rejection and derogation arising from the feeling of not truly belonging to the group, such as when a man's gender identity is threatened. Experiencing acceptance threat can lead to "displays of toughness, aggression, lack of empathy, devaluation of women, need for respect, competitiveness, and homophobia" (Scaptura & Boyle, 2020; Dahl et al., 2015; Harris, 2010; Bird, 1996).

Misogynist incels appear to evidence both status threat and acceptance threat.

Foundational ideas in the Black Pill ideology suggest that the status of men as a group is threatened by feminism and the advancement of women's civil liberties. The group points to women's rising participation in the workforce, declining rates of marriage and rising rates of divorce, and the supposed privileging of women in North American court systems regarding alimony and child custody as evidence. Incels also aggressively examine the ways in which they do not meet standards of masculinity, which they describe as encompassing factors like height, musculature, dominance, aggressiveness, money, facial symmetry and 'strong' bone structures, large genitalia, deep voices, confidence, narcissism, manipulativeness, and psychopathy (Scientific Blackpill). Incels tend to describe themselves in terms of which of these characteristics they lack, how this impacts their ability to attract women, and how this makes them feel inhuman, depressive, and angry (Ging, 2020). This project attends to the descriptions of incels to determine if and how incels integrate status and acceptance threat into their constructions of racialized identities, and if and how incels deployed concepts of realistic and symbolic threat in the context of racialization.

Racialization

This paper takes the perspective that race arises not as a 'fact' of skin colour but from a process of racialization, which Sara Ahmed describes as:

“... A process that takes place in time and space: 'race' is an effect of this process, rather than its origin or cause. So, in the case of skin colour, racialization involves a process of investing skin colour with meaning, such that 'black' and 'white' come to function, not as descriptions of skin colour, but as racial identities” (2002, p.46).

Ahmed further argues “that race, which is ordinarily assumed to be the intrinsic property of bodies does not come before ethnicity, which is ordinarily assumed to be the cultural inscription of group identity. Race as bodily difference is a consequence rather than the origin of ethnicity” (2002, p.46). The researcher notes that although ‘racialization’ is a process which occurs regardless of skin colour (Ahmed, 2002), ‘racialized’ and ‘non-racialized’ are also commonly used in the humanities to mean ‘marked’ and ‘unmarked’, or ‘non-white’ and ‘white’. Similarly, this research will use ‘racialized’ as short-hand for ‘non-white’ and ‘non-racialized’ as short-hand for ‘white’. Early examinations of the community resulted in the conclusion that when users identified their racial/ethnic identity, it was most often done through a statement akin to “I am ‘ethnic’” (to mean non-white) without further specification; the lack of widespread granular detail available is why this research generally restricted itself to the broad categories of ‘racialized’ and ‘non-racialized’.

The ascription of identity to epidermal markers that creates the concept of race is notably described as a process which takes place in the face to face (Fanon, 1952/2008; Ahmed, 2002). However, incels are a group which congregates exclusively online (Ging, 2019). This does not mean that incel forums are a race-less space; to the contrary, race as an identity marker features heavily in incel discourse. Whereas constructions of race off-line are anchored in the skin, “without physical cues, racial identification is anchored to the perspectives on racial issues offered in authors’ messages” (Burkhalter, 1999), meaning that racialization occurs through the reading of explicit and implicit cues expressed in posts and profiles. The ability of users to control these signs means that it is important to examine when and how users present themselves in these spaces as racialized.

Internalized Racism

In 1903, W.E.B. Du Bois published *The Souls of Black Folks*, where he argued that Black Americans experience double consciousness. Having both identity orientations (Black and American), is psychologically damaging because anti-Blackness is a fundamental part of the American identity. This leads Black Americans to internalize negative beliefs about themselves and their group, resulting in poor core self-evaluations: “evaluation[s] of one’s worthiness, effectiveness, and capability as a person” (James, 2020). Du Bois’ most influential articulation of double consciousness reads as follows:

“After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, —a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, -an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.” (Du Bois, 1903/2003, p.63).

The double-consciousness described by Du Bois is a sensation sunk into the context of the period in which he was writing, making it thus a socio-cultural effect rather than a biological given (Pittman, 2016); it is a product of coming-of-age as a racialized person in a racist society. It is the warring sense of two irreconcilable identities: of the racialized self as it is known only to itself; and the self as it is handed back through the warped lens of the other: damaged and distorted by the prejudices held by those (white) bodies reflecting it. While the term double-consciousness was never written by Du Bois again (in his later works, he focused more on the phenomenon of the ‘veil’, associated with the ‘colour line’ dividing Reconstruction America), scholars have nevertheless taken up the term, both for its utility and in critique (Pittman, 2016).

The term as operationalized by Du Bois is undeniably masculine; it refers to ‘*his* twoness’; thus, Darlene Clark Hine writes:

“had Du Bois specifically included the experiences and lives of black women in his lament, ... instead of writing, “One ever feels his twoness”, he would have mused about how one ever feels her “fiveness”: Negro, American, woman, poor, black woman. (Hines, 199, p.338)

This critique is of a line with others; it points to a certain restrictedness in Du Bois’ original conceptualization, which as noted was based in understanding black identity-building in a certain period. Of course, societies change and the way that they hand back identities to individuals also changes. Thus, Du Bois’s double-consciousness could be tripled, quadrupled, fragmented even further when expanded to consider the identities of black women, or even racialized men more generally. Additionally, as Pittman writes, this would not be contradictory but in fact “wholly consistent with the point of his conception if, added to the doubling of consciousness consequent upon racially oppressive social conditions, other forms of psychic doubling or fragmentation, responses to other forms of inequality, might arise” (2016, p.14).

Du Bois far predates the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw, the scholar who gave us the term ‘intersectionality’ to examine how multiple, overlaid and intersecting oppressed identities (in its original form, referring specially to Black women’s identities) can be at work simultaneously in identity-construction, resulting in an experience that is fundamentally different for its doubling (or tripling, etc) than if one possessed only one or the other identity markers. Crenshaw’s expansion of the concept is useful in that it draws attention to the specific experience of Black women; however, Du Bois’ concept in its original masculinist operationalization remains relevant here due to the overwhelming masculinity of incels as a group and incel violence specifically. It is in a manner thus coloured by intersectionality, yet true to the original

conceptualization, that this paper endeavors to apply the concept of double-consciousness to incels: as a way of understanding how racialized men immersed in the incel ideology construct understandings of themselves, how these dynamics function to shape their core self-evaluations, and what evidence of this can be traced in their online articulations of racialization.

Building from Du Bois, Frantz Fanon wrote that all colonized subjects experience internalized racism (IR). In articulating his conceptualization of the experience of the colonized subject, Fanon suggests the existence of a ‘corporeal schema’ and a ‘historic-racial schema’. ‘Corporeal schema’ refers to an awareness of the body as ‘ready for action’ in the phenomenological sense, an awareness arising from a specific point of origin of capacities for doing things (Fanon, 1952/2008). Beneath and all around the corporeal schema lies the historic-racial schema, created by “the Other, the white man, who had woven me out of a thousand details, anecdotes, and stories.” (Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, p.185). Thus, the corporeal or body schema may be understood as the ‘first’ consciousness’, while the historic-racial schema forms the basis for the ‘doubled’ consciousness, the sense of self provided by “looking at oneself through the eyes of others” (Du Bois, 1903/2003, p.63).

The historic-racial schema has the effect of ‘crumbling’ the corporeal schema. Colonialism is one of the major structures shaping the historic-racial schema, leading to what Fanon describes as the colonial mentality. Colonial systems enforce the inferiority of the colonized to the colonizers through institutions and systems that benefit the colonizer economically, politically, and socially in a recursive, cumulative process, leading the colonized subject to feel inferior, experience self-doubt, and construct their self-concept through the perspective of the colonizer (Fanon, 1952/2008, p.111). Black bodies are seen and ‘fixed’ as Other through the white gaze, marked by their difference from the neutral white body (Fanon,

1952/2008), and pre-existing cultural ideas about ethnicities shape the ways in which the white gaze hands the racialized body back to itself. Fanon described this as a process of racial objectification, through which people are turned into things, identified only by their skin colour, racial or ethnic features, or their culture. He writes, “My body was returned to me spread-eagled, disjointed, redone, draped in mourning on this white winter’s day. The Negro is an animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is wicked, the Negro is ugly” (1952/2008, p.189). He sees himself through the eyes of others, his consciousness doubled and alienated, and the self that is returned to him is unrecognizably damaged. The corporeal schema, the phenomenological awareness of one’s own potentiality, may be understood as roughly equivalent with the modern psychological concept of the core self-evaluation, an assessment of one’s worthiness, effectiveness, and capability as a person (James, 2020). The historic-racial schema or the doubled gaze, once internalized as racism, thus has the effect of limiting the body’s awareness of its own potentiality or ability to accomplish things.

In 1971, an influential report by William E. Cross Jr. placed internalized racism (IR) as the first step in his ‘nigrescence model’, a five-stage identity model for ‘becoming Black in America’, building from Fanon and Du Bois. Since Cross, IR has mostly been conceptualized as “the internalization, among racial/ethnic minorities, of negative views about their racial/ethnic group, including themselves as racial/ethnic group members”, although recent scholarship has noted that IR can include the internalization of positive stereotypes in addition to negative ones (James, 2020, p.2). Research on internalized racism and white status threat suggest that incels may understand their situation very differently depending on their racialization. It is known that internalized racism has deleterious effects on mental health, with the potential to increase symptoms of depression and anxiety (Williams & Williams-Morris, 2000; Molina & James,

2016). IR has also been shown to generally decrease core self-evaluations, exacerbating both negative physical and mental health outcomes (James, 2020). Yet in some cases, IR has been demonstrated to protect against negative health outcomes. For example, Burkley and Blanton demonstrated that minorities sometimes ‘functionally internalize’ racism as a “short-term, situational endorsement that occurs as a function of the individual’s needs in a particular situation... (and is) likely to result in positive consequences for the individual”, such as to protect oneself from the psychological consequences of failure (2008, p.39). It is the contention of this paper that racialized incels experience a great deal of internalized racism, up to and beyond the short-term functional endorsement described by Burkley and Blanton. While further research would be required to make an authoritative statement on this potential phenomenon, data collected for this project tentatively supports this statement and at the least, points to a need for further examination of this dynamic.

Incels and Race

Critical feminist scholars like Ging (2019) and Scaptura and Boyle (2019) were among the first to study incels as violence attributed to the community increased, presenting detailed analyses showing how the community operationalized concepts of masculinity, femininity, threat, and social structure, though without mentioning how the community approached race or racism. Jaki et al. (2019) and Chang (2020) have explored how the in-group language of the community constructs a worldview that positions incels as powerless victims of women while inciting violence against women. Jaki et al. found that terms denoting race and ethnicity (such as currycel and ricecel) were prominent in group discussion, indicating that these factors are important to the group worldview (2019). Chang found that the group sometimes deployed anti-

racist rhetoric when discussing their difficulties finding partners but ultimately critiqued this use as designed to demonize women rather than to call for structural change (2020).

The typical image of incels is of a community composed primarily of young white men, perhaps driven by media coverage of the group describing them as “white, heterosexual men” (CBC News, 2019), “primarily heterosexual white men...mostly white, young men” (Ohlheiser, 2021), “groups of disaffected, young white males” (Talbot, 2018), or “a toxic manifestation of White Man Blues” (Rouner, 2018). Indeed, many scholars have fallen into this trap as well. “The vast majority are young middle-class white males” (Cottee, 2020, p.95); “[a product of] the erosion of white male privilege... young, sexually disenfranchised white males” (Ging, 2019, p.3); “a white militant extension of compulsory sexuality” (Kelly & Aunspach, 2020, p.3). In an influential interview, Heidi Beirich of the Southern Poverty Law Center called them “young, frustrated white males” (Kelly & Aunspach, 2020). Some, writing more generally about the manosphere like Hunté (2019) and Shaw (2018), implicitly rather than explicitly frame the group as white, perhaps unintentionally. Hunté writes: “Many of the communities of the manosphere are inhabited by individuals who have a privileged background. For instance, users of the TRP [r/TheRedPill] community... are overwhelmingly white and male” (2019). Shaw describes the manosphere (including incels) as the result of “cultural and economic changes which challenge the primacy of the white male worker in the West” (2018).

In fairness, this is not true of all authors. Notably, Chang acknowledges the presence of non-white incels on /r/Braincels. She writes:

The view that incels are all white men shadows the presence of non-white incels on the forum and overlooks the horizontal bonds formed between these men. Investigating the participation of non-white men on /r/Braincels raises interesting questions about how misappropriated antiracist rhetoric can in fact be mobilised to uphold a white male supremacist order. This is not to disregard the vicious racism within the community—or

the synergistic qualities of white and male supremacy—but to investigate how “progressive” language can be taken out of context to justify bigotry. (2020, p.14)

Chang’s claim here is about the trend in incel spaces of blaming racist *individual women*, rather than a *racist system*, for the difficulties apparently experienced by racialized incels. It appears that the only time when incels acknowledge racism as a force in society is when they can use it to attack and dehumanize women. It also works to establish an in-group bond, positioning incels against the world. Misogyny is here instrumentalized as a uniting force.

Jaki et al. acknowledge both how incels feel misrepresented by media that frames them as white conservatives, and that this framing is indeed untrue:

“Wikipedia states that incels are mostly heterosexual and white. The former is true for the users of the Incels.me forum (the latter is not)... However, race is an extensively treated topic in the forum, but primarily in relation to which race has more incels and which race has more (dis)loyal women. There is a general consent that unattractive non-white men have a harder time than unattractive white men (“Ethnic subhumans like me [...] are either instantly rejected or friendzoned”), which is referred to as the “just be white theory”. There is also consent that “[r]ace is a big part of looks” and that Indian incels (currycels) are most badly off. Other ethnic groups mentioned in this context are Asians, and less often African Americans and Arabs. This may reflect, to some extent, the ethnic variety of the forum. One user believes that only half of the people on Incels.me are white. Other users claim that most incels are not white, and one user substantiates this by referring to a poll in the forum.” (2019, p.12-13).

Such attention to the internal dynamics of how incels perceive their situation is disappointingly rare in scholarship on the subject. While it is reasonable to resist adopting the incel framing of their problem, it seems important that many incels claim to be socially denigrated for their ethnic or racial identity. Most commenters documented in this project railed against perceptions of the group as all-white: “The majority of incels ARE ETHNIC”; “Incels are the most diverse people, we're just race realists”; “Incels are mostly non-white”; and “Even as supposed evil terrorist killer nazis, we ethnics are still invisible.”

In a qualitative thematic analysis, Nate Gallagher argued that “incels.co articulations of (lived) experience challenge... claims of white centrality. Far from upholding white superiority, incels.co users generally see whiteness as tentatively incompatible with inceldom.” Such reasoning is largely supported by conclusions from the Black Pill, which “ranks whiteness as an indisputable indicator of attractiveness in multiethnic, Western societies” (Gallagher, 2020). On the face of it, the claim that whiteness is integral to perceived attraction in Western societies is one that is not controversial to academics. It is broadly accepted that white features are the normative beauty standard (Deliovsky, 2008); and studies on dating apps have found that racialized men tend to receive less matches, although the factors are not so straightforward as most incels posit (Yancey, 2009).

It is this dynamic which raises what this researcher considers to be the most troublesome aspect of this situation. On the face of it, incels who protest the racist beauty standards of society *are not wrong*. Much has been written about how normative beauty standards centralize white features, and the negative impacts these standards can have on the mental health and wellbeing of those who do not fit these standards. It is even normatively acceptable for people who do not fit these beauty standards to be angry about the harm they cause. It is hard to escape the conclusion that on some level, *some incel anger is justifiable*. However, for as many incels who are violent because of their anger, there are millions more people who experience the same situation and do not react with the same vitriol, blame, or violence. The problem lies not with anger at racist beauty standards. Rather, it lies with the way that some misogynist incels use that anger as an excuse to hate women and to justify violence they may already want to commit, all under the lens of various alt-right groups seeking to organize.

At the risk of overstating the point, the thrust of this essay is not to defend white men by arguing that violence is committed by non-white men as well. It is to call attention to an unexamined way that toxic masculinity creates the potential for violence in internally diverse communities which are nevertheless vulnerable to radicalization by white supremacist groups. Incel spaces are viewed as recruiting grounds by such groups (Mamié et al., 2020). In the offline world, many of these men may have never been exposed to such views. However, online, messages like the following can be read by incels of all races:

“FUCKING LOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOL. Yeah bro, those 70 IQ Blacks living in mud huts popping out 5-6 kids they can't even feed are really (OBJECTIVELY) superior to taller, 100+ IQ, more attractive Europeans who are responsible for the vast majority of humanity's technological, scientific, and cultural advancement.

Kill yourself you brainlet”³

Of course, simply interpreting a message does not mean that the receiver automatically adopts this position; however, it is the contention of this essay that incels of all races may be vulnerable to messages like this, for different reasons. For example, white incels may be instrumentalizing a claim to white superiority to make up for a realization that they lack other means of accessing social, economic, or cultural power. In contrast, racialized incels who have built a corporeal schema under the effects of a systemically racist historic-racial schema seem likely to be vulnerable to a discourse that pretends to be revealing a harsh truth: *they were right about you*. In addition to the crumbling body schema that racialized men are already dealing with, the incel ideology appears to function as a crucible, distilling and concentrating the worst parts of the social assumptions about racialized groups, thus saturating these already vulnerable men with rhetoric that reinforces their worst fears about themselves. It may be freeing for a

³ The text “Kill yourself you brainlet” appeared in this comment marked by a ‘spoiler’ tag. This is an affordance of the forum which allows users to make part of a comment invisible. On clicking the spoiler tag, the text is revealed.

person who has been met with repeated rejection to accept the notion that they never had a shot to begin with – that their flaws are inherent and thereby *not their fault*. There is a certain relief in giving up. This dichotomy does not reflect all misogynist incels – there are far more dynamics at play in the claiming of group membership – but it complicates the rhetorically simple, morally easy condemnation of the incel.

Whiteness and Masculinities

In 1987, Connell proposed a theoretical model of masculinities dubbed Hegemonic Masculinity. This described a social and cultural hierarchical system where men are separated and organized into competing tiers based on how closely they adhere to the hegemonic masculine subject (Connell, 1987). This subject is a model of an ideal man, “whose identity and social location are composed of all of the attributes that accrue privilege”; i.e., white, upper-class, able-bodied, heterosexual, cis-gendered, etc. (Witt, 2020, p.677). Beneath this are found groups of “increasingly compromised body-subjects”, exhibiting such ‘debilitating’ traits as racialization, disability, homosexuality, etc. (Witt, 2020, p.677).

Hegemonic masculinity is enacted through a “pattern of practice” that has two forms: one, the domination of women by men, and two: the domination of subordinated masculinities by the hegemonic subjects, or intermale dominance (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p.832). Hegemonic masculinity also results in the commodification of women’s bodies in a way that “builds social and cultural capital” for men (Scaptura & Boyle, 2020). The ideal hegemonic male embodies sexual prowess and holds the potential to enact violence on other bodies (Witt, 2020).

Hegemonic masculinity is an ideal standard of masculinity defined by a specific setting and time. It consists of a set of accepted beliefs, behaviours, and performances associated with

masculinity which encourage the dissemination and reproduction of patriarchy (Connell, 1987; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). It relies upon a hierarchical structure of heterosexuality, working to establish the power of men over women and power differentials in intra-male relationships (Segalewicz, 2020). These power differentials are defined by the degree to which they conform with or differ from hegemonic masculinity. Other forms of masculinity include hybrid masculinities and inclusive masculinities.

The concept of hybrid masculinities serves to extend and deepen considerations of maleness. It refers to the instrumental adoption of behaviours historically coded as marginalized (e.g., black, gay, or feminine) into contemporary masculine gender performances (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014, p.246). This serves at least three main purposes. First, it allows privileged men to symbolically distance themselves from recognizable embodiments of hegemonic masculinity, which have been the subject of some recent critique in popular culture. Further, it allows the privileged to practice a strategic borrowing of social practices from subordinate groups, in a manner which *disguises* the privileged person's social power. The final consequence is thus the obscuration of symbolic and social boundaries between hierarchical identity groupings, and the entrenchment of those hierarchies along racial, sexual, gendered, and classed boundaries (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014; Segalewicz, 2020).

The order of analysis of these masculinities is not meant to suggest that one supersedes or replaces the other. Rather, these forms of masculinities can exist simultaneously, in conflict and in conspiracy with each other; masculinity can be flexibly deployed to advantage dependent on circumstance. These concepts serve to make concrete an identifiable phenomenon, or pattern, in masculinities in 2022. An example of hegemonic masculinity in this year might be best understood through the concept of 'transnational business masculinity', which emerges through

scholarly examination of the gendered nature of globalization (Elias & Beasley, 2009). Although Elias and Beasley critique the way that the concept of hegemonic business masculinity has been deployed both as an account of “the political mechanism of legitimizing and mobilizing male dominance in the global arena – and as a generalizable list of the characteristics of an elite group of men” (2009, p.4), the term remains useful to use here as an embodiment of the type of hegemonic masculinity that incels worship.

Crucially, Connell and Messerschmidt note that proximity to the hegemonic masculine subject *is not the result of genetic heritage*, but rather is socially constructed, and therefore that hegemonic masculinity is changeable and achievable (Witt, 2020, p.677). As previously mentioned, one of the core facets of the Black Pill is that looks and value are pre-determined by genetics, so an incel’s status within a hierarchy of men would be determined at birth and immutable. It is this author’s contention that this aspect of the Black Pill functions as an ego-protectant. For while research suggests that incels do identify with a conceptualization of masculinities very similar to the model of hegemonic masculinity (Ging, 2019), claiming that incel status is defined by genetics places it firmly outside the control of the individual. This ensures that any blame for the situation is also outside the individual.

Incels are a curious group in that they seem to recognize, validate, and uphold aspects of hegemonic masculinity, while being explicitly clear about their self-positioning at the very bottom of such a hierarchy, in contrast with similar groups such as PUAs or MGTOWs who focus on maximizing their perception as ‘alpha’ or ‘high value’. Research suggests that incel discourse often frames their own masculinity in terms of what physical characteristics they lack, and how those deficiencies are responsible for their lack of success with women (Witt, 2020;

Ging, 2017; Hines, 2019). This is further evidence of the widespread community buy-in to the Black Pill.

As previously mentioned, acceptance threat arises when a subject feels that their status as belonging to a group is threatened, such as the feeling that not measuring up to the hegemonic masculine ideal threatens one status as a ‘real’ man. Incels compare themselves to an archetypal ideal man (Chad, who perfectly embodies the hegemonic ideal) and take castrative pleasure in delineating all the ways in which they fail to measure up. Their shame arises from idolizing the ideal, traditional forms of masculine characteristics and recognizing the lack of those features in themselves. Their anger arises from the sense that they are due something because of their status (social respect, a woman, sexual gratification, etc.). They are denied this, and although the real reason for the denial is unknowable to us, it is undoubtedly more complex than the supposed lack of an alpha jawline.

The model of hegemonic masculinity may also help us understand the presence of racialized minorities within this group. A person with a marginalized identity may easily recognize the ways in which their identity falls short of the cultural ideal, and may experience shame, self-hate, or anger as a result. The incel model of society, which poses (white) Chad as the ideal man which all women are exclusively attracted to and beneath whom all other men compete for scraps, may make a twisted sort of sense to a person already engaged with racist and hierarchical beauty standards.

The incel response to experiencing masculine acceptance threat is a complicated attempt to redefine what constitutes an appropriate or valuable masculinity. While they routinely make fun of themselves, there is also the sense that they are more valuable than Chad, because of their ‘insight’ into society acquired through their status as a ‘sigma’ male, which allows them to frame

themselves as smarter than ‘normies’ and possessed of a unique, harsh truth about the world (e.g. the insights of the Scientific Black Pill). As the first step in the process of hybridizing masculinity, they acknowledge the ways in which they do not meet its standards, thus symbolically distancing themselves from ‘Chad’ and allowing them to claim that they do not hold the social power ascribed to male identities. This also allows them to claim that social power related to maleness does not exist or is overstated by feminists, thus disguising the power they hold. Because of this obscuration, incels are able to argue that their identities are undervalued by society. This evaluation is posed as something that merits redress in the form of social policies enforcing female abstinence, social shaming of pre-marital sex, a ban on miscegenation, and a return to the days where husbands were chosen for women by their fathers and brothers (these suggestions all examples pulled from the forum). The final consequence of this hybridization is thus the entrenchment of symbolic and social boundaries along racial, sexual, and gendered lines.

The adoption of an aggressive online persona may also be a response to not measuring up to hegemonic masculine standards (Scaptura, 2019), and it has been suggested that fantasizing about violence is a way of self-emboldening to commit actual violence (Scaptura & Boyle, 2020). Motivation for joining the group may also be as simple as the desire to overcome social isolation by joining a community (Donnelly et al., 2001). Venting about social isolation is common on incels.is, with members expressing that they entirely lack a social circle or deep friendships. Often their only positive relationships seem to be with close family, and that can be strained as well.

Masculine Victimhood

The technique of positioning themselves at the bottom of the social hierarchy is a utilitarian claim to victimhood. It is a practice which works to flip the script; instead of the wielders of masculine social power under patriarchy, incels become the oppressed victims of a (feminist, matriarchal) society. As Witt contests,

“This approach absolves the violent actor of responsibility for any part or fault in the generation of the strain leading them to violence; it recontextualizes the ‘quality’ (or state) of involuntary celibacy from being the result of personal failings, or an inability to practice successful forms of masculinity, to an interpretive model that blames external, oppressive factors.” (Witt, 2020, p.685)

The result of buy-in to this ideology is a feeling of unmerited suffering and victimhood; of experiencing a denial of something due. Incels have a sense the intimacy they do not experience is rightfully theirs, something withheld that they are owed; what Kimmel has referred to as ‘aggrieved entitlement’ (2013). If one truly believed they were at the bottom of the social hierarchy due to factors outside of their control, such as their genetics, one might feel entitled to a righteous anger about such a perceived unfairness. This is, in fact, a deliberate strategy “to reinstate the normalcy of white male privilege through the articulation of its loss” (Ging, 2019, p.11). Thus, this claim to victimhood serves to justify (any means to) masculine dominance.

This is the danger, and the radicalizing potential, of the incel ideology. As research suggests, many who join incel groups do so out of a desire to overcome social isolation by joining an online community (Donnelly et al. 2001). Many are young men, who express difficulties because of difficulty with social cues stemming from autism, anxiety, or severe shyness - many of which are normal experiences for young men that do not result in radicalization. However, the entrance into this community is incredibly damaging to these young men. Members tell each other there is no hope for improvement in their situation, that their lives

will never get better, that they will never experience happiness or love, and that the source of these problems is outside of their control.

Scaptura & Boyle conducted an examination of the link between endorsement of incel views (including threatened masculinity and masculine gender role stress) and connected a higher endorsement of these views with a higher likelihood to fantasize about committing a mass violent attack, and with fantasies about using powerful weapons against their enemies (2020). Given that the incel worldview includes core ideas about incels being an in-group and that their outgroup is construed as an enemy group directly in conflict with incels for resources (women and sex), this is concerning. Moreover, they are given a scapegoat for their 'righteous' anger in the form of women and Chads. Status threat and aggrieved masculinity are also associated with increased approval of violence, increased aggressive fantasies, and increased offending behaviours (Scaptura, 2019; Isom Scott & Stevens Anderson, 2020).

Images and Racial Culture Online

The twentieth century is marked by a visual turn in culture. The term denotes not only an implosion in the quantity of images the average human consumes in their lifetime, but also a relative dominance of the image over text, and the widespread use of images as communicative tools that replace text (Dussel, 2013, p.30). The introduction of this notion in scholarship was followed by an introduction of tools for image analysis, and for some scholars, tools for looking at and thinking about images of race became particularly crucial. This is relevant especially in digital scholarship concerned with the internet, a platform whose history with race is fraught. The visual turn in contemporary culture means that visuals are an increasingly important tool for communication, and online extremist groups are no different. In fact, visuals such as images and

memes have been found to be extremely important in disseminating radical ideology and in shielding radicalizing messages with humour (Stanovsky, 2017, p.131).

Lisa Nakamura writes that political ideology at the time of the introduction of the internet was ‘colour-blind’, to use the official words of the Clinton administration (2008, p.2). The internet was similarly conceived of as a ‘colour-blind’ space; an unregulated, private place where it would be impossible to discriminate based on race, because there was no way for racial identity to enter inside it (Balsamo, 1995, p.3). This bodiless, raceless space is a far cry from how the internet functions today. The internet gains users and users who unevenly visualize race in online environments (Nakamura, 2008, p.5), and when users choose to present themselves in ways that indicate a racialized identity, “they are choosing to visually signify online in ways that must result in a new organization and distribution of visual cultural capital” (Nakamura, 2008, p.17).

Although it is impossible to know whether the people making claims for racialized identities on incels.is are telling the truth, their claims one way or another are still a part of a project of identity making which relies on a unique organization of visual cultural capital. Images are a crucial part of signifying identity on the internet, and it is therefore important to examine how individuals in a radicalizing space such as incels.is use images to construct social identities and negotiate new forms of cultural capital.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Comment Collection

The focus of this project was the website ‘incels.is’. This website is host to the largest currently active North American and European community of incels (ADL, 2020). Data were collected from the top one hundred threads of the ‘Inceldom Discussion’ section of the website, sorted by most to least views. This section of the website is described as the place to “Discuss your experiences, vent, or share anything related to incelism.” The other sections include ‘Must Read Content’⁴, ‘The Lounge’⁵, and ‘Ban Appeals’⁶. ‘Inceldom Discussion’ was chosen as the site of focus because the content there was thought to be more likely to represent the average views of the community, rather than the more extreme or off-topic conversations in ‘Must Read’ or ‘Lounge’.

The forum affords users the ability to mark their threads with a tag denoting the nature of the thread. These tags include ‘Black Pill’, ‘LifeFuel’, ‘SuicideFuel’, ‘RageFuel’, ‘Serious’, ‘Experiment’, ‘Venting’, ‘JFL’, ‘NSFW’, ‘News’, ‘Hypocrisy’, ‘LDAR’, ‘Story’, ‘ItsOver’, ‘TeeHee’, ‘Soy’, ‘Cope’, ‘Discussion’, ‘Toxic Femininity’, ‘Whitepill’, ‘Theory’, ‘Brutal’, and ‘Based’. All threads were eligible for inclusion in the data set, and the conversational tag, if there was one, was recorded. The thread url, thread title, thread tag, username, user description, and user time online were recorded along with the full body of the comment.

Comments were selected for inclusion in the data base based on an assessment determining whether they related to the topics of race, ethnicity, and their effects on the status

⁴ Threads marked ‘noteworthy’ and ‘thought-provoking’ by site moderators.

⁵ For shit-posting and non-incelibacy related content.

⁶ For banned users to make their case to be allowed to rejoin the forum.

and outcome of incelism. Comments which simply contained slurs, or which mentioned race/ethnicity but not in the context of incelism, were excluded.

Data were coded iteratively, beginning with a process of familiarization with the data set. Codes were produced and revised throughout the coding process to ensure refined and fitting categorization. Conclusions were drawn based on the results of a ‘deep reading’ of the data set: “the slowed, thoughtful, and intentional reading of material with reflection on how it relates to the self and broader communities” (Hall et al, 2015). The following data tags were produced:

- An objective, scientifically based racial hierarchy exists
- Feminism ruined everything
- Ethnic women are easy/white women are valuable
- Proximity to whiteness is valuable/valued
- Racial stereotyping
- Pick-up artist advice
- White incels are not real incels
- Pseudo-science posting.

A breakdown of the constitutive characteristics of these core themes is included in Appendix 1.

Image Methodology

Image data were collected in a single session on December 6, 2021, using the chain-referral sampling method. It was predicted that between six and eight images would be necessary and sufficient for a project of this scope. Initial sampling was conducted by navigating to the section of the Incels.is webpage entitled ‘Inceldom Discussion’, which is described as the space to “Discuss your experiences, vent, or share anything related to incelism”.

Thread titles which contained references to race or ethnicity were expanded and explored for comments containing images. The chain-referral sampling method was made possible by the function of the website, which recommends five related threads at the conclusion of the original thread. Once a thread was found which contained references to race, the recommended threads

were also explored for images related to race until the quota was achieved. Images were declared topical if they appeared alongside text that referred to race or ethnicity. Images were analyzed for their visual content and their intertextual references with the comment of the poster and the context of the thread they appear in.

This analysis employed a mix of Roland Barthes' visual semiotics theory and iconographic theory. Barthian semiotics were used to determine the denotative and connotative meanings of the photographs. The denotative value represents the content of the images, as in what they represent and how; the connotative value refers to the 'hidden meaning' of the image, as in what ideas and values do the things represented stand for (Van Leuwen, 2012, p.92). While visual semiotics and iconography are interested in very similar things, Barthian visual semiotics is limited in the sense that it studies only the image itself and treats cultural meaning as a given currency shared by everyone in any given culture. On the other hand, iconography attends to the context of production and circulation, and the historicity of given cultural meanings (Van Leuwen, 2012, p.92). Thus, this analysis attends to the denotative and connotative meanings of the images, as well as the context of their circulation and the history associated with how those meanings came about.

A Note on the Reproduction of Comments

Comments analysed for this project have been reproduced in this paper exactly as they appeared on the forum, using the copy and paste tool. This author has made no attempt to change or correct the spelling, grammar, or sentence structure of the comments. However, best attempts to replicate the formatting of the comments (such as line breaks and stylization) have been made. Incorrect grammar and spelling present in the comments are the work of the original forum user

and have neither been changed, nor specifically marked out. This is a conscious choice made by the author to preserve the character of the data, and to not infringe on its readability with constant interjections of '(sic)'. Comments are presented with the following formatting:

Title: Original Post/Response: (this designates whether the comment begins a thread or is a response)

(Body of comment is inserted here)

- Username, "User tag"

The username is the name of the individual account. The user tag is an affordance of the website that allows users to insert text that appears underneath their name, much like an MSN signature. In some instances, the user tag is replaced by the word 'Banned'. This occurs where the user who posted the comment has since been banned from the forum and their information has been retroactively redacted by the website. In other instances, the user tag remains but the username reads 'Deleted Member'. This occurs where the user has deleted their account. Finally, in repeated instances a user's tag reads "Recruit", "Officer", or 'Overlord'. This is a function of the website which assigns rankings to users based on their level of engagement with the site (e.g., time spent online, or comments posted). Without the researcher making an account, it was unclear what metrics a user had to achieve to get each ranking.

Chapter 4: Results and Discussion

This project examined the following research questions:

- 1) How do incels construct and interpret racialized identities?
 - a. What language do incels use to reference race?
 - b. How do incels engage with users they know the racial identities of?
 - c. What kinds of outcomes does the incel worldview predict for different racial identities?
- 2) How do incels articulate, refute, and embrace racial status and threat?

Racial Hierarchy

For all the scientific racism embedded in the Scientific Black Pill, there was little consensus evidenced in the data regarding the opinions expressed by posters on the attractiveness and inherent worth of any one race. Users almost universally agreed that an objective hierarchy of the races existed, but every user seemed to have a different opinion on the ‘proper’ ranking. Their choices appeared to be influenced by the race of the poster themselves, with users manipulating the hierarchy to place themselves at the bottom. Consider the following comments, posted in response to this proposed hierarchy:

Original Post:

“1) White
Best features overall
Bright skin creates powerful contrast
Colorful eyes and hair
Tall, big frames, good muscle genetics
Big dicks
2) Black
Ugly features but masculinity is off the charts
Scariest most intimidating men possible
Tall, big frames, low body fat, good muscle genetics, athletic
Biggest dicks
3) Latin/Arab
Look white enough in many ways to be "acceptable"
Shorter than whites/blacks
Some Arabs get colorful eyes
Great hairlines
4) Curry
Shitty skin color (literally)

[illegible]

- chudur-budur, "5'2" ugliest currycel, freak of nature."

None of the commenters here, or in the entire body of data, challenged the idea that it was possible to objectively rank racial groups based on universalizing generalizations. This idea can be understood as a foundational assumption of the Black Pill, and potentially of misogynist inceldom itself, despite this contrasting with scientific knowledge about human diversity. While most users agreed that Whites were at the top of such a hierarchy, some users placed them below Blacks, drawing on stereotypes about Black hyper-masculinity and sexuality to do so. It is important to note that hierarchies which place white and black men at the top are rooted in the same racisms. White supremacy contains within it the myth of the Black cuckold.

Just as common as the placement of Blacks and White at the top of the hierarchy was the placement of ‘Curries’ and ‘Ricecels’ near the bottom. While ‘Whites’ were always referred to as ‘white’, other racial groups were more frequently or exclusively referred to with slang often based on ‘cultural’ foods. ‘Curries’ appears to refer to men of Indian descent, but also anyone who ‘looks’ Indian. Similarly, ‘ricecels’ refers to people whose Asian heritage was the ostensible reason for their inceldom, and ‘Rice’ or ‘Noodle’ could be used to refer to anyone who looked Asian. This pattern could be linked to the respective common placements on the hierarchy. This dehumanizing slang is only used for racialized groups, which by group consensus are already deemed less valuable than non-racialized groups. It reinforces the lack of respect for racialized groups in these spaces and tells new users exactly where their place is in the hierarchy.

This is an example of how the incel ideology reinforces a historic-racial schema which values white identities and denigrates, twists, and dehumanizes racialized ones. The self which is handed back to racialized members of this community through this language is one which is not fully human; it compresses internally diverse racial and ethnic categories into foods in exactly the manner noted by Fanon as part of the process by which racialization leads to objectification. Through this language, the entirety of the diverse culture and humanity of Western and Eastern Asia is reduced to representation by two foods.

While the use of this language is likely an example of the edgy, troll culture that characterizes these spaces, this does not diminish the potential for negative psychological impacts of this dehumanizing language on visible minorities within the incel community. Existing within a racist space and even aspiring to the deepest membership possible within it speaks to the degree to which racialized members of the community have internalized negative core self-assessments and warped corporeal schemas. However, a crucial departure from Fanon and Du Bois' theory is that the eyes of the Other here are not necessarily only White. The identities which are handing back such negative assessments may in fact belong to other racialized people who have previously internalized the racist language and ideology inherent to inceldom. In our neo-colonial era, it is not only the White colonist who is capable of creating a historic-racial schema, or a doubled gaze, which has the power to objectify and alienate.

There is another dynamic at play. A few incels expressed an opinion which amounts to the argument that incels are a genetic aberration, and not part of their own race.

Response:

"It's so true what you said about incels not belonging within their own race due to being genetic deviations themselves. *It is precisely because they feel excluded that they feel the need to identify with a facet of themselves they consider superior*, a baseless attempt to compensate for their evident subhumanity.

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.*" (Emphasis mine).

- ColdLightOfDay, "Serge's Alt"

Response:

"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."

- BlkPillPres, "'I'm Not A Monster, I'm Just Ahead Of The Curve'"

This sentiment was not widespread, limited to 4 commenters out of 70 total users captured in the data set of 100 comments. While seemingly a minority opinion, this is an example of incels internalizing the group's dehumanizing rhetoric in an extreme manner. The instrumental purpose of these statements appears to be to make a claim to the greatest suffering. Cottee describes incel culture as a 'wound culture', which thrives on the 'psychological suffering of its members.' Wound culture is the "public fascination" with "torn and open persons, a collective gathering around shock, trauma, and the wound" (Seltzer, 1998). The point of so much incel posting appears to be to display the egregious depth of a wound, and the responses to marvel at or to deny the validity of the injury. Users share stories of their woeful lives and histories of rejection and isolation. These wound stories serve to facilitate a claim to 'truecel' status, or in other words, to prove the validity of their inceldom. Being met with a chorus of 'fakecel' or 'volcel', however, is a threatening claim that functions to question the poster's right to membership in the in-group. Given the way that incels pose normies as clueless suckers or NPCs (non-player characters: the characters controlled by a computer in any videogame), this is a way of mocking and even dehumanizing the interlocuter.

In addition, the user's comment "It is precisely because (incels) feel excluded that they feel the need to identify with a facet of themselves they consider superior" is extremely close to a description of the instrumental behavioral steps involved in hybridizing masculinity. To reiterate, hybrid masculinization refers to the instrumental adoption of marginalized behaviors by privileged men, to symbolically distance themselves from power, allowing the obscuration and entrenchment of the status quo of racial, sexual, gendered, and classed boundaries to take place. This comment is made in the context of a discussion about stormfrontcels (incels who identify as white supremacists). The user argues that white incels feel excluded from traditional power structures (i.e., that they have been unable to achieve success along socially acceptable lines such as education or employment), so they symbolically distance themselves by adopting identity tags like white supremacist in an attempt to re-valorize their identities, which results in the justification and support of traditional power hierarchies (i.e., the social power and admiration of white, straight, male, cis identities given in white supremacist cultures).

It is crucial here to note that hybrid masculinity theory typically refers to the adoption of behaviors historically coded as black, gay, or feminine – behaviors which are marginal because they are 'Other' to the hegemonic male figure. Instead, for white incels at least, the adoption of marginalized behaviors appears to revolve around an inversion of the ideal male figure, or 'Chad'. Incels argue (correctly, unfortunately) that performances of masculinity which do not stand up to the social ideal established in the form of 'Chad' are penalized. Men who fail to live up to the standards of hegemonic masculinity (for example, who fail to exhibit the sexual, economic, and social power of transnational business masculinity) can find themselves facing social punishment for being viewed as homosexual, feminine, or not sufficiently interested or capable of achieving sexual success with women. Men are expected to walk, act, talk, and

behave a certain way to live up to the standards set for them by patriarchy, in a different but not dissimilar way as women. Incels are excruciatingly aware of their failure to live up to this standard – they live in “a world which can’t help but keep reminding them how inferior they are.” White incels who integrate white supremacist beliefs into their worldview are responding to a world which tells them they are inferior by over-identifying with a facet of their identity (whiteness) that they feel gives them power and/or value.

A key factor which makes this process possible is that Stormfrontcels appear to believe that whiteness (and often maleness) is currently marginalized in society. Even users who do not explicitly identify themselves as white supremacists can be found complaining about the way that ‘the media’ or ‘society’ supposedly degrades white male identities, or unfairly valorizes black identities. Consider the following comments, posted in response to a thread about a viral security video of two high school students, a white girl and a black boy, captured having sex in a school hallway.

Response:

FUCK!!!!!!!!!!!! THIS SHIT!!!! FUCK1!!!! WHY COUNDLT WE BROWN SHITSKINS FUCK HER!!
FUCK THE WESTERN MEDIA MAKING NIGGERS GODS!!! FUCK THIS LIFE!! FUCK.

- SuperSaiyanGymcel, “SandNigga”

Response:

White men are good looking imo, but white women have been brainwashed into hating them. Just look at any feminist or liberal white women's twitter account, and they have nothing but hatred for white men. Reality is black men have by far the highest SMV of any man, because they are valued for sex by neurotypical women, and they are far more popular, more normie, more athletic etc. than white men. If more and more white men become autistic, our SMV will drop lower than Asian men's imo.

- Dsar9012, “banned”

These comments draw on cultural stereotypes that construct black men as athletic, virile, and hegemonically masculine, and pose “the Western media” and “feminist and liberal white women” as forces which supposedly devalue white male identities while overvaluing black ones.

Other comments more explicitly describe their perception that whiteness is being socially ‘devalued’.

Response:

I have literal ginger skin without the freckles. It is impossible for me to tan.

Palecels have it the worst.

- IncelDisciple, “Banned”

Response:

Uggo Mongo said:

If he's 6 foot he can't be an incel. 6 foot and white is all it takes :feelstastyman:

Used to be man. Even 5 years ago I think that was all you needed (plus being NT). Now even for whitecels looks like it's getting insane.

This is what posters here keep talking about I think how it's no longer even enough to be white - you have to be the RIGHT KIND OF WHITE. Ie. Germanic/Nordic.

He looks like Southern or Eastern European which is no longer even white enough.

It just keeps escalating.

The acceptable phenotypic range of men keeps shrinking.

- RageAgainstTDL, “Overlord”

Predicted Outcomes for Incels of Different Identities

There is therefore widespread acceptance on the forum of a racial hierarchy very similar to the construct of hegemonic masculinity, where the most privileged position is occupied by white men (with the caveat that sometimes users draw on racial stereotypes to place black men in that location). Despite the lack of consensus on the ‘true’ locations of each group, there is some amount of agreement that Indian and Asian incels are the worst off in terms of their chance to ‘ascend’. As Jaki et al. note, these placements are possibly a reflection of the ethnic makeup of the forum (2019). In addition, there is evidence that many users believe that white incels are ‘volcels’, or ‘voluntary incels’, meaning that they are faking being an incel and could ‘ascend’

based on their skin tone if they tried harder. Consider the following responses to a post showing a photo of a user's body accompanied by the text below:

Original Post:

(ITS OVER) this is my disgusting low T⁸ truecel curry body taken after 5 years of ldar (literally laying in bed 24/7) taken from my shitty desktop cam

I have no muscle on my body whatsoever, none. Even my legs and spinal muscles have deteriorated to the point I find it stressful and painful walking or standing upright. Now the time has come for me to wage slave, otherwise im gonna become homeless after parents threatened to disown me but my body just cant take the pressure of living like normscum. I wish I could NEET forever but my family is of course, below middle class and ive been leeching off of them forever. The rope is calling me, i don't think I can hold on like this for much longer. My depression is hitting me full force now and I've stopped feeling human along time ago. I hope in the next life I'm able to reincarnate as a chad.

- Deleted member 16359, "Certified Driver license cel"

Response:

Currycels are trucels

- Blackpilled-cel, "Christmas avi mogging all non-christmascel"

Response:

With that skin color its over, with that body its even more over

- Truefaithneworder, "Officer"

Response:

i_DareYouREEme said:

tbh you still have more muscle than me in your arms.

It's over boyo when curry arms mog u

- Boiiboi69, "Recruit"

The use of the phrase 'it's over' occurred most often in this thread. 'It's over', in incel parlance, means that achieving any sort of unpaid intimacy with women is hopeless. This is unsurprising, given the widespread notion on the forum that incels with Indian features are particularly poorly off. This thread is also notable for the user's claim that "the rope is calling me", a metaphor for committing suicide. None of the comments in this thread address this user's threat; none of them seek to dissuade him or tell him that it is an unreasonable response to his situation. In fact, they reinforce his supposition.

⁸ Low testosterone.

It may be tempting to dismiss incel claims of suffering as the whining of entitled man children. While some stories may in fact take this form, many more may be the result of deep psychological distress. It is worth recalling that in the 2020 community survey, 67.5% claimed to suffer ‘long-lasting’ depression; 88.3% said they were not happy, and 74.1% said they experienced anxiety, stress, or emotional distress ‘in a constant manner’ (Anti-Defamation League, 2020). This story is a prime example of incel wound culture.

Cottee argues that these wound stories serve a cathartic, community-reinforcing function; I concur, and extend this through the lens to hybrid masculinities to argue that the stories serve to position incel masculinity in a state of permanent victimhood. Incels claim a position linked with extreme social humiliation and shame, as a means of claiming a status associated with being a ‘truecel’; one of the members of the community who never had a chance from the start, whose situation is truly ‘valid’. While this story obviously involves aspects of severe psychological distress, the poster also claims to be a truecel, and in the comments references his ‘shitty curry genes’. This poster has internalized and seeks to reinforce the negative perceptions of ‘curries’ present within the group’s ideology. While I do not seek here to act as a psychiatrist, it appears clear that this member has a damaged core self-assessment/corporeal schema to the extent that he claims to experience difficulties walking and standing upright, based not in any noted physical disability but attributed to his inability to ‘take the pressure of living as normscum’; a fact which he relates in comments to his parentage and genetics.

Similar claims seek to position Indian incels (referred to here as ‘pajeet(ce)’ or ‘Curry’) at the bottom of the hierarchy, which is implied to be an inescapable position. For example, the below posters are responding to a user who proposed a hierarchy based in ‘objective looks’, not

‘cultural status’, arguing based on the trailers for the Bollywood movie *Loveshhuda* and the movie *Crazy Rich Asians* that Indians should be placed above Asians.

Response:

I disagree, every race mogs pajeets into oblivion and back

- BansBandit, “Banned”

Response:

Curry shouldn't be above Asian, plenty of woman find (good looking) Asian men exotic. No women find pajeetcells attractive.

- NotQuiteChadLite, “The Meeks⁹ shall inherit the Earth”

The racial identities of these posters are unfortunately unknowable. It is therefore not clear whether these users are making these claims from a position of social power (whiteness), or about their own group in a manner which draws on internalized racism as a functional protection for core self-evaluations. Nevertheless, these claims work to normalize the division of the world into discrete racial categories and reinforce logics of white racial superiority. These statements help construct an incel-specific historic-racial schema which tells Indian incels that their opportunities and potentialities as humans are fundamentally limited by their genetics. The second claim also establishes women as the sole enforcer of beauty standards and the controller of access to sex. This commenter makes clear that women are the agentive force constructing the perceived racial hierarchy within the incel historic-racial schema. This reinforces Chang’s (2020) research, which found that racialized incels often blame (supposedly) racist women for their situation.

Other posters seek to stake out the lowest position for Asian incels. In a post drawing on data released by the dating application Bumble, users were quick to point out that Asian men received far fewer matches on average than men in other racial groups.

⁹ This may be a reference to Jeremy Meeks, a former Crips member whose mugshot went viral, and who then received a modelling contract.

Response:

this study CONFIRMS absolutely that ricecels are at the bottom

- SlayerSlayer, “Luminary”

Response:

Long story short, over for ricecels

- Deleted Member, “Banned”

Once again, the instrumental purpose of these claims appears to be to stake out a claim of ‘true’ inceldom, or the deepest ‘wound’. These claims appear to be based in at least a semblance of a social awareness of systemic racism; the fact that these claims refer to dating app data and the choices of women would at least point to a superficial awareness, although this awareness is never accompanied by a refutation of the assumptions of systemic racism. Instead, incels speak as though stereotypes about racial groups, whether negative or positive, are factual and merited. The incel historical-racial schema is thus likely constructed and influenced in large part by the processes, institutions, and ideas constituting systemic racism. This means that any incel engaged with this ideology is at risk of damage to their corporeal schema, for the internalization of these assumptions means accepting that one’s agentic power is fundamentally limited by one’s racialization.

Racial Status/Status Threat

Incels articulate an understanding of sexual relations based in conceptualizations of realistic threat, where women are understood as sexually available objects to be competed for in a zero-sum game with other men. The organization of the social world in terms which makes women sexual resources draws on a traditional patriarchal worldview. In particular, the world is divided into racial factions, and incels are concerned with losing access to women of their own race. Consider the following responses to a thread made by an incel who identifies himself as an

ethnic. The thread is an explicit call for debate with ‘SFcels/WNs’, which is short for Stormfrontcels, or White Nationalists.

Original Post:

Post here why you believe in WN, and I, an ethnic, will attempt to rebuke it. If I'm ever absent, it means I'm at school (where Incels.me is blocked for "muh h8 sp33ch!!1111") asleep, or elsewhere where I can't access Incels.me. Don't worry in that case, for I WILL address your concerns when you return. You will not be left abandoned!

- ProudIncelistani “Son of Incelistan”

Response:

I want to fuck white women, and white women are the most attractive race of female by far and as a white male I am entitled to having them, not a bunch of mongrels or darkies who get them because of >muh dick or >muh media diversity"

- HarvestorofInceldom, “Incels of the World, Unite!”

Response:

”ProudIncelistani said:

Ok but how are nonwhites inferior and whites superior in terms of beauty? By your logic JBW is true and JBE is false!’

Objectively, white women are the most beautiful given their paleness and blonde hair. Darkness and strength is a more masculine trait, and ethnic men have that, especially black men. Therefore the most superior attractive pairing is BM/WF. I want that to be eradicated, and force individuals of all races to fuck within their own races. Thanks to the media perception of ethnic men, I will never be able to reproduce with a white women I will be stuck with ugly black and curry women."

- HarvestorofInceldom, “Incels of the World, Unite!”

A sense of aggrieved entitlement to women whom they consider to be the most attractive is present here; the commenter feels that he is being unjustly denied a resource which is his rightful due. ‘Media perception’ or ‘media diversity’ are presented not only as threats to the rightful status of white men, and to their just reward for their status, but also as a threat to the due of all men. This suggests that incels conceive of sexual relations in terms of realistic threat. In this sense, women of given racial groups are articulated as resources for the men of that racial group, to which access can be threatened by racial intermixing.

It is common to find incels blaming social media for their situation (since it supposedly gives women an ‘inflated’ sense of self-worth). It is also part of an expression of the worldview

which places incels at the bottom of the food chain. Social media, Hollywood, and society writ large are supposedly corrupted by feminism, Judaism, and progressivism to unjustly allow women control over who they have sex with and therefore to deny incels sex. The sentiment is that without those things, in a more traditionalist society where men had control over women, that women would be forced to be with men lower on the food chain (incels) and that this is a more ‘natural’ way to organize the world; whereas the current organization is unnatural, corrupted, and in need of redress. Consider the following comment, which presents a solution to the posed problem:

Response:

The best solution I have seen first hand myself is sticking to your own race. We curries are less cucked then ricecels us simply.because of our foids still hold some dignity and sticks to us (That and probably they don't get good white guys mad we are super low inhib¹⁰ opressors). Same way if white woman are rescued from the judan brainwashing called femiism white woman shall once again be attractive to white guys and they'll leave noodle hires for ricecels. Restoring balance in the world.

- SLAVICMorPheus, “Let the Poor thing just DIE”

This comment is evident of a branch of antisemitism present on the forum, amounting to the typical stereotype attributing hidden social power to Jews. Specifically, this links feminism to ‘judan brainwashing’, evidencing antisemitism and misogyny. This comment poses anti-miscegenation as a solution to the status threat posed by race mixing. An alternate solution is also present on the forum in the form of race mixing to eradicate racial differences; the logic is that by eradicating the supposed racial hierarchy, incels would be emancipated; however, other posters argue that women would still select away from incels because of their looks. There is no sense that greater efforts towards tolerance and inclusion could be helpful.

¹⁰ Low inhibition.

The historic-racial schema articulated here is one in which the natural ‘balance’ of the world is threatened by the progress of feminism. Some inherent but unexamined quality has been supposedly stripped from white woman (most likely the mythological sexual purity assigned to white female sexuality, the protection of which has been an express goal of the new alt-right). This poster describes how his understanding of this schema limits his ideas of his own potentiality: he thinks that as a ‘curry’, his best chances are with women of his own race, and he holds this to be true for other males as well. He also describes himself/males of his race as ‘super low inhib(ition) oppressors), suggesting that he ascribes to the hegemonic masculine principle that views the dominance of women as an important part of the expression of masculinity. The impact of this historic-racial schema results in his view that to express his masculinity, he and others like him must control and direct the actions of women (for their own good, since they are brainwashed and don’t know any better) or be cuckolded by men of other races. Again, this suggests an historic-racial schema based on understandings of sexual activity as a means of establishing status, and where the uncontrolled sexual activity of women poses a realistic threat to their access to such resources.

Women and Race

White supremacism was evident on the forum, emerging in several distinct threads which were based in foundational social myths about the sexual value of women of different races and ethnicities. The first aspect of the incel historic-racial schema can be summed up with the following dialectic: ‘ethnic women are easy, white women are valuable’. It was coupled with a more general expression that ‘proximity to whiteness is valuable’, either in terms of white partners being desirable/socially valuable, or in the genetic expression of ‘white’ features. There

is a degree of self-awareness present, with some members writing that not only do they find white features the most attractive, but that they think that ‘society’ values white features the most. Racialized and non-racialized members may thusly be *aware* of their doubled-consciousness without working to resist it; they are indeed cognizant of the ways that they have internalized the ‘value’ of whiteness, or that Western society reflects back the value of whiteness in myriad ways. Yet, they express no desire to free themselves from what Fanon called the colonial mindset. Instead, they seek to validate and reinforce the values of colonialism.

For racialized members engaged in this schema, it was most often accompanied by a feeling of rage or aggrieved entitlement; they expressed fury at the Western media or at Western women in the context of perceived individual slights, rather than awareness of a systemic form of racism that negatively impacts the core self-evaluation of racialized men. As noted by Chang (2020), when users expressed awareness of a concept like a social beauty standard, their suggestion to improve the admittedly dour impact was not to expand the schema of what is considered beautiful, such as through increased representation in media, but was rather expressed through a desire to punish the outgroup for their crimes against the ingroup. Additionally, consider the following examples of comments expressing the sexual availability of ethnic women to incels compared to white women:

Response:

I can't get foids from my race because they all wait for white guys to date them.

- NeetSupremacist, “Incel Revolutionary”

Response:

If he's 6 foot he can't be an incel. 6 foot and white is all it takes

- Uggo Mongo, “Who me?”

Response:

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.

- BlkPillPres, "I'm Not A Monster, I'm Just Ahead Of The Curve"

Response:

There actually was an autistic 5'1 white guy who was over 30 who posted on RVF forums. He went to China, approached 2000 girls there to finally lose his virginity. His thread definitely was inspirational... Proof that all whites are volcels. Proof that all whites just need to Aproachmaxx.

- Rabitter, "Incel Blanquist"

This last user is responding to thread about an incel looking to 'approachmaxx': PUA slang for approaching women in public spaces and striking up conversations. The PUA theory justifying this has to do with increasing the number of women approached to maximise the chances that one woman will say yes, and with increasing the social skills and confidence of the PUA. On the face of it, this is somewhat reasonable, although PUAs tend to ignore statements by women that emphasis their discomfort at being approached in places like grocery stores or malls, instead framing such discomfort as a 'shit-test' to ignore. These are the techniques that Eliot Rodger became disillusioned with before his attack.

The incels in the thread counsel the original poster (OP) to approach fewer white women, and to concentrate on ethnic women. The articulated logic of this schema is that white women are either inherently more valuable, or at the least aware of their supposedly higher social value, and therefore less likely to give OP attention. In contrast, ethnic women were assumed to be interested in whiteness and to have lower social standing which might allow OP to approach many women without facing social sanctions. This post also evidences aspects of what I term 'pseudo-science posting', whereby incels draw upon anecdotal evidence and frame it as scientific fact to reinforce their worldview. Appearing scientific and objective is viewed as credulous on the forum, and users often make calls to 'peer-reviewed research' and 'natural law'.

The poster mentioned an infamous incel who engaged in sex tourism. It is commonly accepted as fact on the forum that a white incel who travels to Asia has a better chance of

‘ascending’ there than in a white, Western country. This practice is called SEAmassing, or Southeast Asia maxxing. This sentiment is tied up in the notion that white incels are volcels, or fakecels, which is posed as one of the highest crimes on the forum.

Response:

SEA is easy for white guys. We already know this by now.

3.5+ white guy = volcel by default.

- Coping Gymcel, “poop”

Response:

GL man. Im pretty sure most of us whitecels could escape in an asian country, but im too poor to move their.

- Deleted Member, “25yr NEET virgin”

Response:

Literally all the average white incels on this site needs to do, is go to thailand, follow his guide, and they'd get laid, JUST FOR BEING WHITE, so please stop pretending like we all have it equally as hard, we don't.

- Deleted member, “free him or cuck”

This construction of ethnic women as resources readily available to white men is crucial to the group’s framing of white incels as ‘volcels’. This aspect of the incel historic-racial schema draws on logics of colonialism and orientalism. Although critiqued since its introduction (Prakash, 1995), Orientalism was the first major theory to draw attention to the ways in which Western discourse constructs Oriental women as hypersexual and sexually available for White men (Said, 1978). Incels who engage in or fantasize about sex tourism in Asia are drawing on the same historic-racial schema as those scholars critiqued by Said.

StormFrontcels and Big Black Cock Theory

It may also be of interest here to consider how this discourse hands back non-racialized identities to incels. Based on this historic-racial schema, non-racialized incels may perceive

themselves to be more personally at fault for their situation than racialized incels. Racialized incels are afforded the potentiality that *not only* may their inceldom be the result of genetic expressions such as skin tone and racialized facial features, but that they are the victims of the hegemonic overvaluation of Whiteness in Western culture which fairly or unfairly means that their cultural, ethnic, or racial identity is socially denigrated. Non-racialized incels must interpolate a discourse which tells them that they should be able to leverage their skin tone to solve their inceldom. This may be one reason why non-racialized incels were perceived on the forum to be engaged disproportionately in the ‘Just Be Black’ theory (JBB)/Big Black Cock theory (BBC), which both consist of the proposition that that Black male sexuality is more socially valued than White male sexuality, based largely in contentions about the average size of the male genitalia of Black men.

Response Chain:

a-virgin-nigger, “Ultimate Wagecuck” said: it never began.

11gaijin¹¹, “Escortcel” said: You black?

a-virgin-nigger said: Yes. Inb4 run bbc game

11gaijin said: Blacks are Volcel

a-virgin-nigger said: You are a fucking delusional bbc worshipping faggot.

11gaijin said: BBC theory is legit. Also black females are least desired so you should get one even if you’re ugly. Volcel imo

Response:

Crazy how stormfronters have managed to delude them¹² so much to buy into the BBC meme.

- Bronzehawkattack, “Mythic”

Response:

¹¹ ‘Gaijin’ is Japanese for foreigner, often used to mean a white person.

¹² Likely a misspelling of ‘themselves’, based on the context.

dumb alt right cel, your white women are fucking tyrone

- TheVman, "Catfish master, women abuser!"

The commenters here are engaged in a thread about White nationalist incels on the form, also called WNCels or Stormfrontcels (the latter being a reference to the explicitly White nationalist website/community called Stormfront). At least one user here is likely to be White based on their username (11gaijin) who expresses belief in the BBC sub-theory of the incel worldview, while fighting with a Black incel who refutes it. Other users express their perception that alt right incels and Stormfronters at least partially blame Black male hypersexuality for their incelibacy, although notably the users disagree on the actuality of this phenomenon.

Nevertheless, these comments seem to evidence a phenomenon of white incels buying into and instrumentalizing a belief in the stereotype of Black male hypersexuality and hyper masculinity. This could be one way in which non-racialized incels are able to mentally maintain membership in the group while interpolating the incel historic-racial schema which tells them that their skin tone should make things easier for them.

And yet to colour in another facet of this complex discourse, consider how what the following user appears to be describing, albeit unknowingly and in rhetoric coloured by incel jargon, seems to approach a description of Du Bois' double-consciousness.

Response:

You'll claim that Whites are obsessed by irrational racial loyalties when you and everyone like you bands together to whine about whymay¹³ 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. Difference is, "ethnics" have no coherent historical or genetic ties; *"ethnic" is nothing but the negative of the loathed whymay, a tenebrous mirage that collapses upon itself the moment the White man is no longer around to cast his shadow.*

¹³ A mocking onomatopoeia standing in for 'White male/man'.

(Emphasis mine).

- BlkPillPres, “I’m Not A Monster, I’m Just Ahead Of The Curve”

He claims to be annoyed by the prevalence of ‘ethnic’ incels who attribute their sexual difficulties to their ethnic identities, noting that his perception that White incels seem to not discuss their race as a source of inceldom (or discuss race at all, ‘until provoked’). This does not appear to him as evidence that racialized incels might genuinely struggle with dating in a culture that valorizes Whiteness, or that White incels might not mention race because it is not a barrier for them. Rather, he argues that ‘ethnics’ are obsessed with Whiteness, and *that their ethnic identities are constructed through the inverted reflection of White identities*; that ‘ethnicity’ means nothing without the shadow of Whiteness. Granted, this perception is self-evidently biased and not necessarily evidence of the actual experience of racialized incels. However, it seems significant that this user’s understanding of the identity-construction of racialized incels closely mirrors the very language used by Fanon and Du Bois to describe doubled-consciousness and the alienating process of racialization. Although in a manner saturated with hate, this user is describing observing something close to Fanon’s colonial mentality in his interactions with racialized incels.

Chapter 4.5: Use of Images on Incels.is

A Note on Captioned Photographs

Walter Benjamin wrote that the caption to a photograph in a newspaper acts as a ‘signpost’ for the viewer, a key for interpreting the photograph. In this rather prescient example, he notes that the signpost can be right or wrong; it matters little (Benjamin, 1986, p.217). Now, captioned images are the lifeblood of the internet. Visual meme formats, image macros, remixed sounds and videos, all rely on text either superimposed over a visual or as the caption to the post to provide extra information, perhaps contrasting in tone, that allows the viewer to interpret the post in more detail (Stanovsky, 2017, p.133). In the analysis that follows, the captions for the images are treated as crucial equal elements in the interpretation of the images. Since the internet is a multimediated zone, and these images are not divorced from text in the context in which they are produced and consumed, it would be folly to attempt to divorce them from their text in analysis.

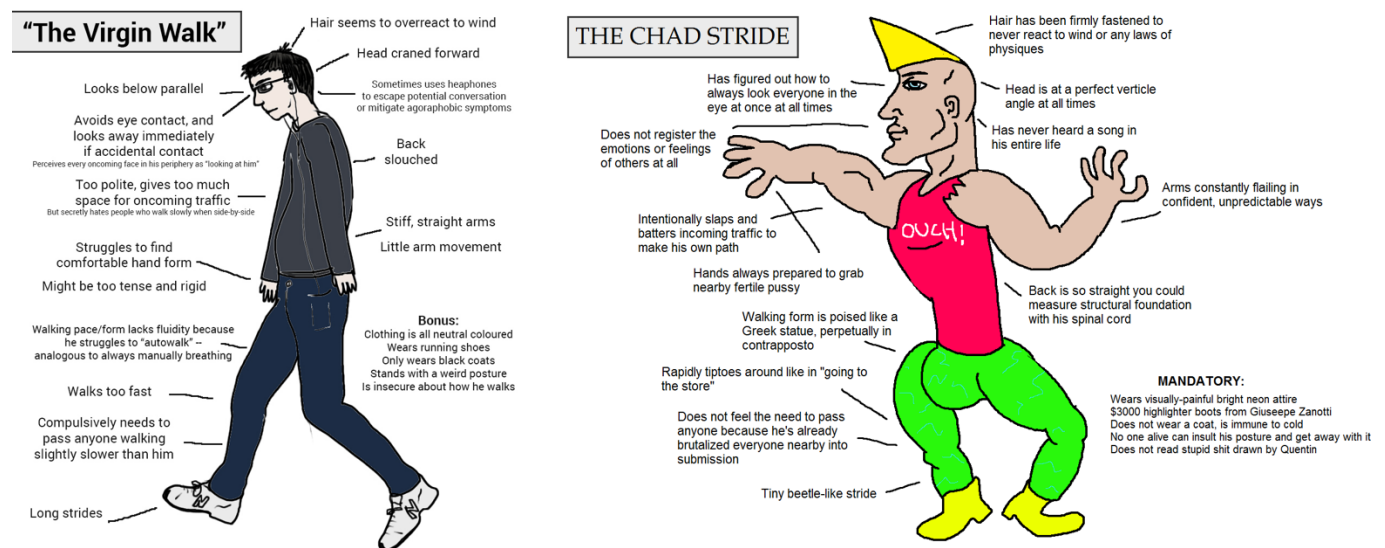


Figure 2: Example of a Chad vs Incel Meme

The Looks Economy

The first trend that emerges from the analysis is that images were used to deploy perceptions of ‘looks’ as insults or as argumentative tools. For example, a photograph of a handsome Taliban fighter is used in conjunction with a call for “afghans to kill the abos in India and Pakistan”. This image draws on the concept of a ‘Chad’, a handsome man with particular features (a strong square jaw, a protruding brow, a large straight nose, large eyes, clear skin, full lips, shiny hair). Chads are understood to be socially and physically dominant over other men and women. The image is posted in a thread called “Why are there so many creepy Indian men on the Internet”. It is in response to a comment saying “Over for us curries. India should have blocked off the dumb fuck curries with a great firewall. They’ve ruined reputation (sic) for overseas curries,” followed by three emotes of a red-faced screaming Pepe and one emote of a Pepe hanging in a noose.

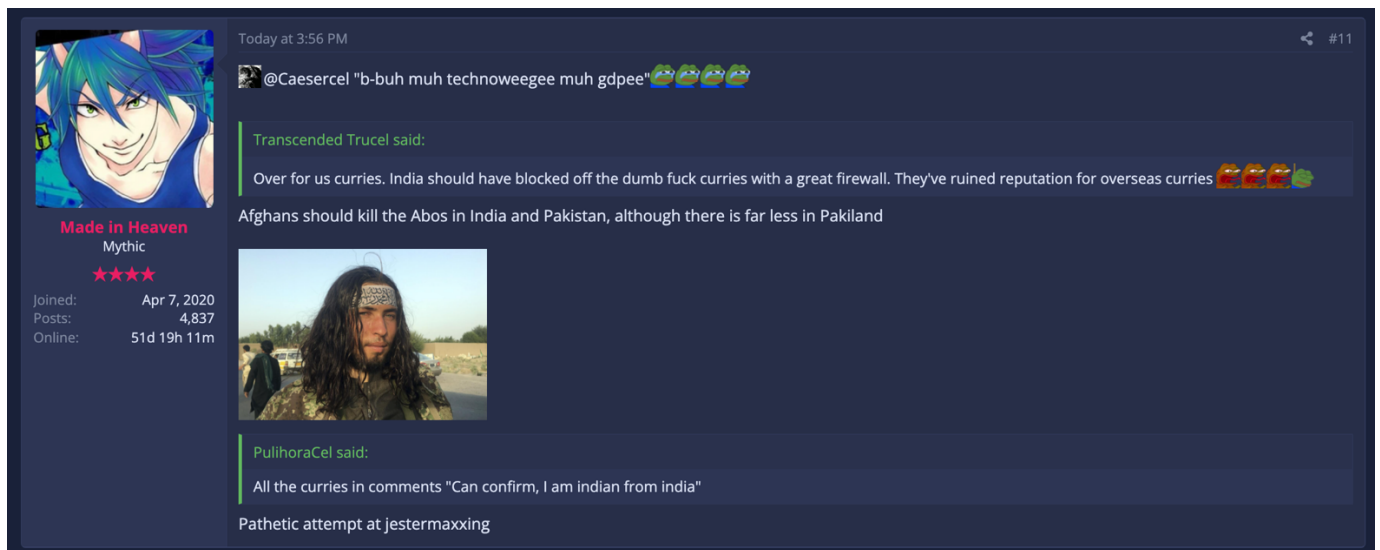


Figure 3: “Over for us curries” – Transcended Trucel

Pepe the Frog is a meme format whose history merits an article of its own. Briefly, the frog is a cartoon character with ‘normie’ origins who has been co-opted by 4-chan shitposters, white supremacists, and alt-right posters alike (Stanovsky, 2017, p.134). Pepe the Frog memes appear across the internet and although the use of the meme does not mean one is in the alt-right, he is beloved in these spaces. It is therefore significant to note that Pepe the Frog is a standard emoticon in use on Incels.is.

The call for ‘afghans to kill the abos in India and Pakistan’ is confusing at first glance; it seems unlikely that the poster is referring to the aboriginal peoples indigenous to India and Pakistan, although ‘abo’ is incel shorthand for aboriginal in the researcher’s experience. The implication, from context, appears to be that the Afghan race ostensibly represented in the image is superior to Indians or Pakistanis. By virtue of his association with traditional (violent) masculinity and the symmetry of his face, the Taliban fighter is presented as a valuable, admirable man, who ought to replace the ‘dumb fuck curries’ in India.



Figure 4: taliban2.jpg

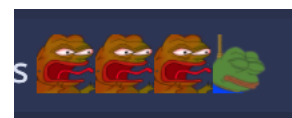


Figure 5: Pepe emotes

The image connects physical beauty with genetic superiority. This is an interesting example because it does not pose whiteness as the superior model as is the norm in incel spaces, but still draws on the common incel assumption that ‘curries’ (people of Indian descent, or simply people with brown skin) are worse off in the dating market (as in, dating is ‘over’ for them). It is unclear from this thread if the person calling for ‘afghans to kill the abos’ has referred to their own racial identity, making this difficult to interpret.



Figure 6: BummerDrummer & Startheon

On the opposite end of the spectrum, two images shared by user BummerDrummer appear to be used to insult the presumed race of another commenter, Startheon. The images, respectively, are of a man and a boy with brown skin, with silly and contorted expressions on their faces. BummerDrummer is responding to a jibe from Startheon, who implied that

BummerDrummer was hypocritical for calling someone a ‘mongrel’ because he is American. BummerDrummer writes, ‘gee I sure am distraught some brown guy thinks im (sic) not racially pure enough’. The implications these posters are making appear to be that America is a ‘mongrel’ country, as in it is a country where races mix (and that this is a negative thing); and that brown skin is evidence of racial impurity. The photographs appear to be used as evidence of that impurity. The silly and contorted expressions are meant to belittle and demean the interlocuter and his presumed racial identity, comparing him with an imagined subject in the images that is childish or ugly.

Decorative Shitposting

Two other images of a face were posted by two different commenters in the same thread. The images are representations of Genghis Khan which are both commonly available through a search engine. In the images, which represent a painting and a statue respectively, Khan’s gaze is directed out towards the viewer, which is a pose that creates the sense of connection between the object of the image and the viewer (Lankshear & Knobel, 2019, p.46). The thread, started by the first poster, praises Genghis Khan for his virility and the beauty standards he ostensibly held for women. Khan notoriously fathered many children during his conquests. The poster refers to this and then writes:

Response:

“BRUH THIS MEANS I PROBABLY HAVE HIS DNA SINCE IM A CHING!
BRB IM GONNA GO RAPEMAXXING AND STEAL PEOPLE’S DAUGHTERS AND
WIVES AFTER KILLING THEM”

- GripMaxxing, “GenghisKhanMaxxing”

The poster then shares a Vice documentary entitled “Bride Kidnapping in Kyrgyzstan”, and several GIFs from South Park that show jokes based on stereotyped Mongolian and Chinese characters. This is an example of the kind of semi-ironic ‘shitpost’ that is common to incel

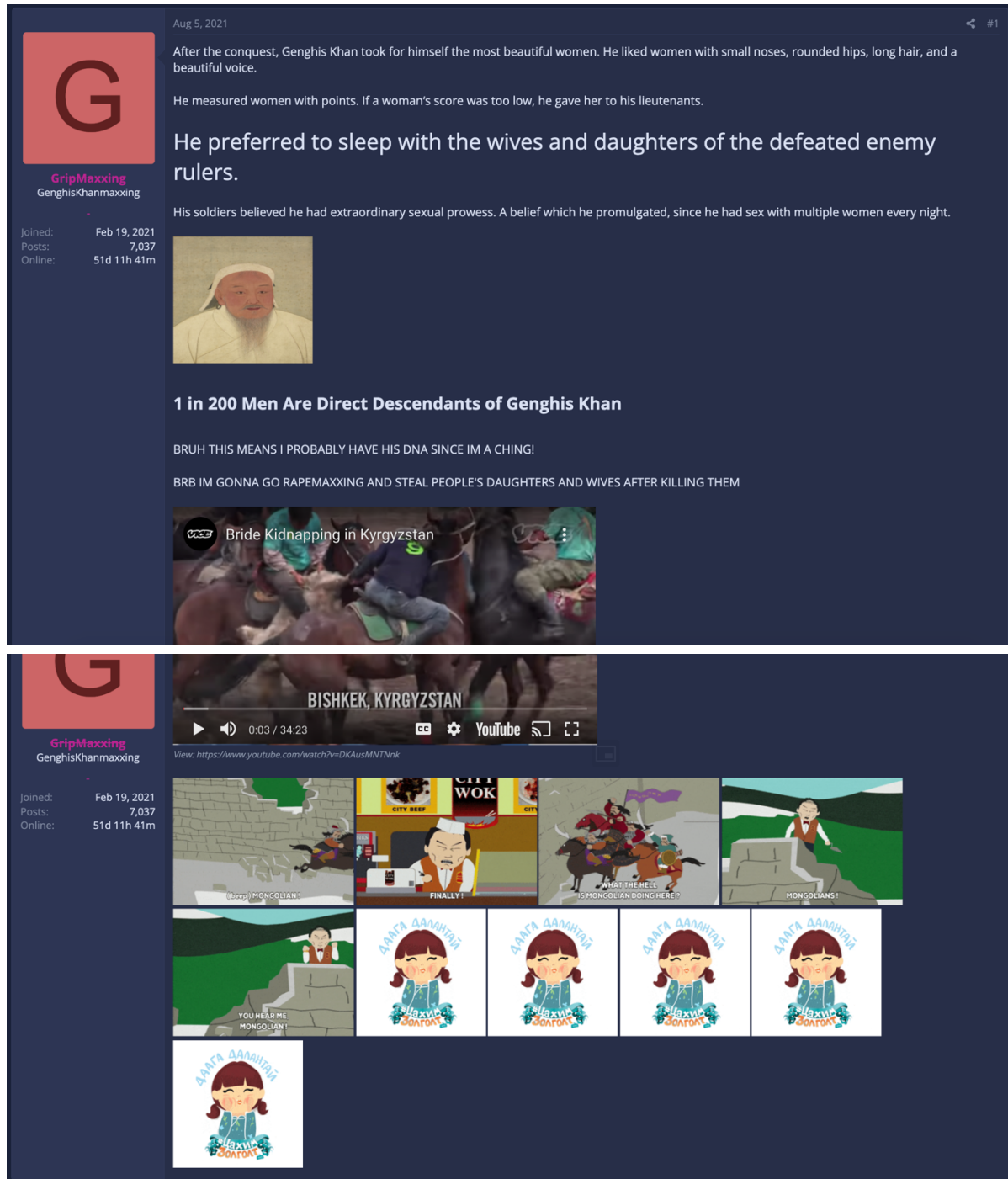


Figure 7: GripMaxxing, “GenghisKhanMaxxing”

spaces. Continuing in the grand tradition of internet communities that compete with one another to post the edgiest, most offensive, ‘tongue-in-cheek’ content, posters make jokes designed to be hurtful and then make fun of anyone who gets offended (Lankshear & Knobel, 2019, p.52).

Although ‘shitposting’ is not meant to be taken seriously and the implications of this post are not necessarily that the user wants to rape and kill, the impact is still unsettling. Jokes based on dehumanizing language are one way that violence is normalized against marginalized groups (Kelly et al., p.6, 2021). The poster shares a video of the very real violence committed against women stolen to be brides in Kyrgyzstan alongside jokes implying that the rape of women, or the treatment of women as sexual objects to be obtained and exchanged among men, is a funny and aspirational thing. Although we cannot make assumptions about the likelihood that this specific poster will commit rape, we can take this post as an example of the kind of discourse in this space which normalizes and makes light of the violent objectification of women.

This is the kind of post which has the potential to radicalize members through humour. The irony, or the joke, allows an interlocuter to say something which would be met with condemnation were it to be presented in a flat, straightforward, or sincere manner; through the protective shield of irony, the poster is able to say what they really mean (Lankshear & Knobel, 2019, p.52). Others who read this post and learn how to conduct themselves in this community learn what is okay to joke about, and these observations about who can be joked about and who can be dehumanized may carry over into their offline lives.

In Irving Goffman’s famous text “Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity”, he wrote about the way stigma is attached to identities through three categories: abominations of the body, blemishes of individual character, and tribal stigmas (race, nation, and religion). Stigma arises through negative (self) labelling and stereotyping of people who possess

discrediting attributes, which leads to a 'spoiled identity' (Goffman, 2009, p.7). Most relevant here would appear to be shame attached to racial identity. In recent popular culture, there is an observable trend towards radical self-acceptance. In the era of body-positivity, Slut Walks, and the reclamation of slurs, it is common for people to 'own' their stigma, and proudly declare themselves members of a stigmatized group. This comment appears to be a rather twisted example of the same phenomenon. The derogated racial identity and some concomitant history is claimed and celebrated by the poster. Rather than feeling shame at his Asian identity as the incel and broader community might expect, the poster celebrates his ethnicity, albeit in a manner swathed in irony and dark humour. Using a lens of double-consciousness, it would appear that this user has seen himself through the eyes of the other and interpolated a negative assessment in a manner which is psychologically protective of his core self-evaluation.

The static images in this context do not appear to be a primary ideological tool. The video and GIFs play a more prominent role in this commenter's argument. It is therefore important to note that incels are digitally competent, and that the forum is a multi-mediated space. Future research should consider the finding that still images are not the only form of media which contribute to the race-making apparatus.

Contrasting Narrative Making through Visuals

An interesting exchange happens between two posters in a thread entitled "Interview with Australian chads who mogged ricecels (that famous photo)". The OP is a member named 22yearoldcel, who starts the thread by posting a photograph of a group of Taiwanese and Australian firefighters posing on a flight of stairs. The Taiwanese firefighters stand about four steps behind the Australians. Due to an optical illusion called 'forced perspective', the

Taiwanese group look shorter and less muscular than the Australian group. The photograph is captioned as though it were a screenshot of an article which included a little of the article's text, although it is unattributed. The associated text reads: ““Their (the Taiwanese) physique's a bit smaller so they're just really interested in how we train, gym, nutrition... stuff like that,' Mr. Wallace said.” The photo is accompanied by several emotes of Pepe the Frog, manically laughing with tears coming out of his eyes.

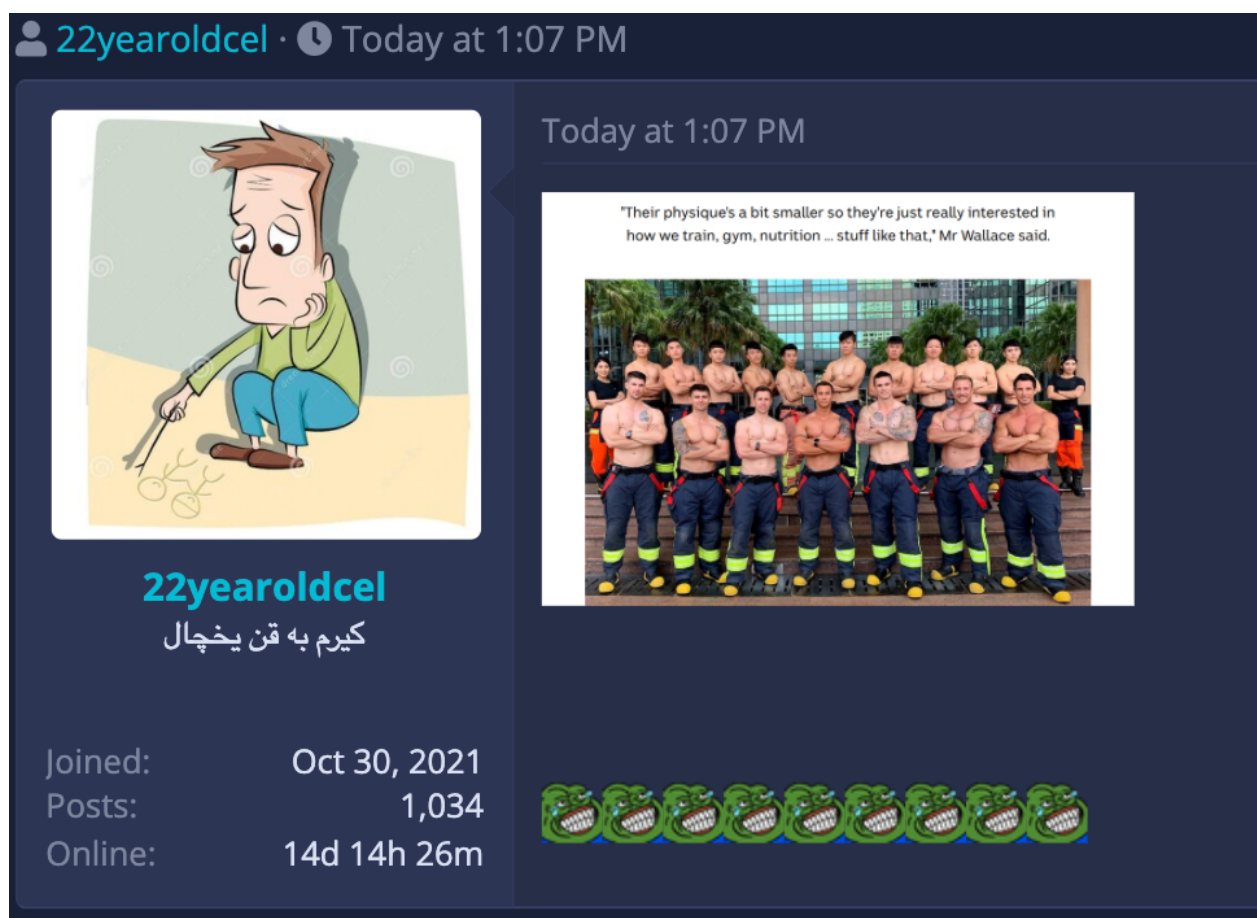


Figure 8: 22yearoldcel

The screenshot comes from a profile of Mr. Wallace, one of the Australian firefighters in question. In the sentence immediately preceding the screenshotted text, a little more context is

provided: “In between hair and makeup sessions, the Australians were fielding questions from their Taiwanese co-stars, mostly younger men — and two women — early into the firefighting service.” The story that is initially presented by the OP relies on in-group assumptions about the inherent masculinity of different races. Asian men are often stereotyped as effeminate, weak, or non-sexual (Shek, 2007, p.381). This is an assumption that is elevated to the level of race science in incel groups. The Incel Wiki page for ‘ricecels’ notes,

“Asian people also have very neotenous (cute) faces, possibly in relation to the aforementioned life history speed. For example, Asian men generally lack facial and body hair. This neoteny makes Asian girls cute, while having disadvantageous effects on the men, who tend to look slightly more harmless, feminine and prepubescent than other races.” (Ricecels).

This genre of argument is a concrete example of the Scientific Blackpill. To reiterate, the Blackpill argues that systemic and genetic factors are a more important factor in incel dating issues than potential personal ones. This refers to factors like facial bone structure, height, muscularity, body frame, race, mental and physical health, and social and economic status (Scientific Blackpill). By posting the original picture, the OP is making a joke about the inherent masculinity of the East Asian group compared to the white Western group, with the implication that the East Asian group is naturally and inevitably less muscular and therefore less masculine than the white Australian group. This is a common aspect of the incel historic-racial schema. With the left-out context of the photo, we understand that the Taiwanese group may be composed of firefighters who are newer to the service than the Australians.

More interestingly, later in the thread, another photograph of the same group is posted. This time, the firefighters stand side by side in a long line on even ground. This photo lacks the forced perspective of the first. It is apparent that the Taiwanese and Australian firefighters are all extremely tall and muscular, with *no clear differentiation* in height or muscle between the

groups. Although the photos were taken at the same time and were likely posted at the same time, the first photo went viral and the second did not.

The user who posts the photo without the forced perspective does so in an attempt to correct the narrative put forth by the first poster. He writes “Actually in reality they didn’t mog¹⁴ shit... The biggest mogger turned out to be Taiwanese firefighter [laughing crying emoji]”. These two posters get into a fight in the thread; the second poster says that he is attempting to correct the facts of the record, and the OP calls him ‘blue pill’d’. In calling the poster who attempts to correct the misleading photo ‘blue pill’d’, the OP is attacking the poster as a ‘normie’, or not sufficiently incel. The other commenters in the thread did not interact with the comment of the second poster, responding instead to the OP as though the second, contradictory photo was not in the thread.

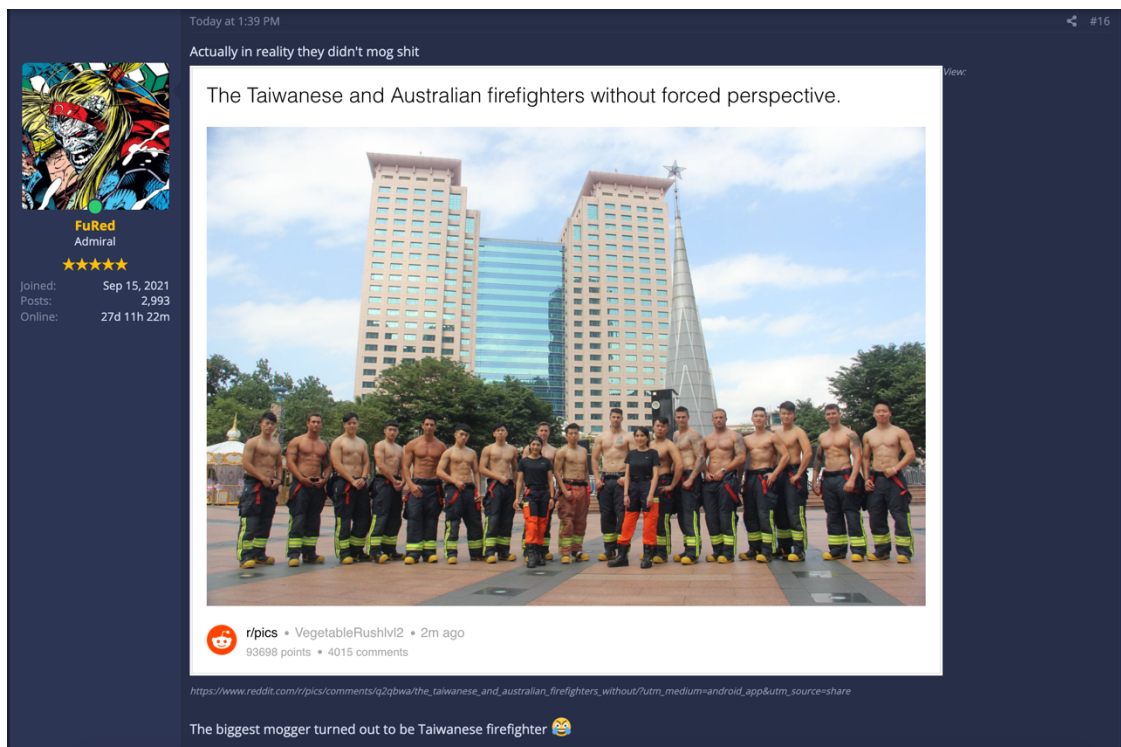


Figure 9: FuRed, “Admiral”

¹⁴ To mog or mogging means to be more attractive than someone else.

It is not as though the second poster is directly trying to contravene the incel narrative that Asian men are less masculine than men of other races, but in providing evidence that contradicts the attempt to use this photograph to support that claim, the second poster calls into question the surety of that narrative. It is a mark of cultish thought that any challenge to the claims of the cult cannot be merited, and this interaction is an example of the staking out of ideological ground: to be an incel means to accept that all Asian men, always, are less masculine than other men, and challenging this narrative is enough to put the second poster's membership in the in-group on shaky grounds. These images and their context are thus another way for incels to articulate and construct a historic-racial schema within which there exists an objective hierarchy of the races based in the biological expression of traits associated with masculinity. Valid membership in the group appears to be somewhat contingent upon the subject's interpolation of this schema, which at least a few racialized members of the group have expressed here.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This project set out to examine how incels construct and interpret racialized identities, and how they articulated, refuted, or embraced racial status and threat. The group was found to use neutral language to refer to non-racialized incels, but dehumanizing language to refer to racialized incels. Racialized incels were typically referred to in broad strokes with language that collapses internally diverse categories into representation by ethnic foods, notably curry, rice, and noodle. Through such rhetoric, the racialization taking place online in this forum is thus notably a process of objectification as described by Fanon, which turns people into things, identified only by their features or culture. Whereas racialized incels were objectified and alienated from their humanity through the constant use of racial slurs and such ironic food-related language, non-racialized incels were permitted to retain more neutral identity markers, such as ‘White’ or ‘Italian’.

Incels also predicted significant disparities in outcomes for incels with different racial identities. There was a noteworthy degree of consensus that incels with racialized identities were significantly worse off than incels without, and within that, a somewhat contested consensus that Indian and Asian incels were the least likely to ‘ascend’ from incelldom. There is some evidence that non-racialized incels were believed to have the highest chance of ‘escaping’ incelldom. White incels were often labelled ‘fakecel’ or ‘volcel’, and specifically told to target ethnic women (either in their own country or through sex tourism), because ethnic women were presumed to value whiteness. The use of ethnic food language to refer to racialized women may be worth further examination through the lens of bell hooks’ ‘eating the other’, wherein cultures (and people) are consumed and controlled through food (hooks & Gigi, 1992).

These predicted outcomes for incels with different racialized identities are situated in a group logic which is founded on precepts of scientific racism, the adoration of traits associated with hegemonic masculinity, and the interpellation of a colonial mindset. The group believes that it is possible to divide the world into mutually exclusive and immutable racial and ethnic groups, which are respectively associated with positive and negative traits that are posed as inherent, genetic, and absolute. While the group may be said to express a nominal awareness of systemic racism, their expressions are largely utilitarian and meant to demonize women of all races for not expressing attraction to incels, reinforcing Chang's (2020) research. The group conceptualized the world in terms of realistic threat, wherein women were constructed as sexual resources to be competed for in a zero-sum game with other men; specifically, women are resources for the men of their ethnic/racial group, to which access is threatened by men of other racial/ethnic groups.

Overall, the group appeared invested in the interpellation of a historic-racial schema heavily shaped by (neo)colonialism. Assumptions about the relative value of racial and ethnic groups were influenced by a hegemonic culture that values white skin, white 'culture', and white babies. Racialized incels expressed feeling limited by their identities. They suggested that their worthiness, effectiveness, and capability to achieve their goals (their core self-evaluations) were negatively affected by their racialization (their goals being largely expressed as acquiring sex from women they consider attractive, but also in terms of acquiring positive platonic relationships and social/financial status). This suggests that their corporeal schemas may be 'crumbled' in the manner described by Fanon in his articulation of the colonial mindset.

This project also set out to explore the ways in which incels used images to create and hand back interpretations of racial identities. It found that images were used to reinforce approximations of beauty as value, of darker skin tones as markers of ugliness and racial

impurity, and as tools with which to establish the inherent genetic value of different races. Members made images function as evidence of factual reality, even when that reality was actively disproved by another image. Images were used as evidence of aesthetic value, or its absence, and this was respectively associated with positive or negative qualities. ‘Beautiful’ features were associated with moral goodness, righteousness, and value, and ‘ugly’ features with the opposite. Images of a person with a skin colour associated with a race were used to make universalizing generalizations about that race, based on whether the person in the photograph looks beautiful or not. Though limited by a small sample, it is interesting to note that text and images that were both complimentary and derisive of different racial identities were deployed by incels who may have been mocking themselves, suggesting that at least some of the racist rhetoric on incels.is is ironic self-talk.

Evidence of internalized racism in the group may be best understood with a lens of wound culture. Users made claims to the most extreme or most ‘valid’ victimhood to stake a claim for ‘truecel’ status. Other users gathered to both mock and endorse these users’ self-conceptualizations. These stories seem to serve as a way for members to deflect blame for their situation onto society, and to functionally protect their core-self assessments by internalizing negative stereotypes. This evidence of internalized, ironic racism has important implications for any scholar exploring avenues for incel de-radicalization. Hybrid masculinities were also found to be a key dynamic in the construction of non-racialized identities. There was evidence that white incels turned to endorsements of white supremacy as a way of retaining value in an identity that they perceive to be victimized.

These findings reinforce those of Jaki et al. (2019) who found that incels felt that race was a large part of looks. The presence in this sample of discussion about race that was mostly

about how hard Indian and Asian men have it also reinforced and expanded their finding that the community felt that Indian incels were the worst off. This research also directly supported Chang's (2020) findings that while users display an awareness of white-centric beauty standards, these lamentations appear alongside (possibly ironic) denigrations of non-white people with racist stereotypes which are used by both white and non-white incels. Users embraced their racial identity while degrading it. Any apparent awareness of the structural factors of racism did not result in a claim to challenge the structure that creates these standards, but instead in calls to punish women through sexual and physical violence, whom they see as the primary enforcers of these structures.

In wrapping up this project, I am conscious of exhortations towards scholarly praxis. Having been frustrated myself by the tendency towards deconstruction without solutions, I originally desired to examine routes of deradicalization, or in problematizing, to find solutions. Now, at the end of the road, I find myself stymied by the conclusion that the problem of incel violence is a symptom of a sick system, and like so many things, the solution cannot be individualized. Incels seem to me to be a part of much broader reactionary and regressive trend of movements seeking to reverse advances made in civil rights for women and racialized minorities, and to be tied tightly to the alt-right white supremacist movements that seek to re-establish (white) masculine dominance over (all) women. Given this, it seems that any solution I may propose would have to involve changing the foundational societal values of white supremacy and hegemonic masculinity.

I am incapable of seeing incels as a bogeyman; my interactions with them are too coloured by my familiarity with family who could easily be on this path. And yet, as a person assigned female at birth, socialized as a woman, and inextricably from that, as the survivor of

repeated instances of sexual violence, I have sought to understand this groups rationale for spectacular violence and sexual assault. In my examination, I have found hatred, but I have also found pain. I am reminded of the circular nature of trauma, of Emile Durkheim's treatise on the link between social alienation and suicide, I am forced to think of acts of spectacular violence as a cry for help.

Incels do not deserve or need the solutions that they propose. Their pain and their violence, however, represent a problem with the way our society is organized. The identities of racialized and non-racialized incels are both damaged and distorted by a white supremacist and hegemonically masculine culture. The pain of this population of disaffected and alienated young men merits being addressed insofar as their maladaptation threatens the rest of us. Their foundational grievance, underneath the layers of racism and misogyny, appears to be a profound loneliness. Yet because this loneliness makes them ripe for the purposeful and targeted radicalization by alt-right, white supremacist groups, it must needs be addressed.

So, I must end, as others always do, with only problems and few solutions. The historic-racial schema which I have found to so threaten the corporeal schema of incels will not be changed by any policy but total system change. It seems likely that things will get worse before they get better, though incremental social and policy changes may be able to help shift the self-evaluations of racialized incels towards a more positive space. Early life-course interventions designed to improve the social skills and self-worth, particularly of racialized boys, seem like a potential pedagogical avenue for intercession. Continued popular resistance against white supremacist messaging, and the building of resilient identities in non-racialized boys where value is situated outside of their race, would also appear crucial. Pedagogical and cultural work to expand and change the forms of masculinity that are rewarded, towards ones less informed by

the values of transnational business masculinity and masculine hyper-sexuality, represents another avenue for change. The order I put forward here is undoubtedly tall. And yet it does not appear to me as impossible work; despite everything I have outlined here, I retain hope.

Appendix 1: Coding Categories

This appendix contains descriptions of the qualitative categories produced during the content analysis. These categories represent the *core* themes encountered during coding. These codes were not evaluated quantitatively, and their order here does not reflect the frequency of their occurrence in the data set.

1. An objective, scientifically based, racial hierarchy exists: Any sentiment expressed which includes the understanding that it is possible to create objective, mutually exclusive racial categories of human beings; that these categories may be placed into a hierarchy; and/or that this hierarchy is objective and scientifically based. Includes assertions such as, but not limited to: some races are inherently ‘better’ or ‘worse’ than others, based on the quality of their DNA, general attractiveness, intelligence, promiscuity, masculinity/femininity, etc.
2. Feminism ruined everything: Sentiments which amount to the supposition that feminism as a movement/individual feminists have undue power and control in society. Includes ideas such as, but not limited to: feminists hate white men, feminists control the media, feminists are responsible for cultural messaging that devalues cis, straight, white, male identities and elevates other racial identities such as black men; or that feminism is a form of Jewish brain control.
3. Ethnic women are easy/white women are valuable: Two sides of the same preposition. These assertions rest in stereotypes about white women as pristine, virginal, sexually pure and extremely desirable, in need of protection, and hard to get. On the other side, this includes stereotypes about ethnic women as overly sexual/promiscuous, especially compared to white women, or as easy to get.
4. Proximity to whiteness is valuable/valued: Assuming an objective hierarchy of races is possible, this is the assertion that in such a hierarchy, white or white passing people are situated at the top in terms of looks, abilities, and genetics. Due to a lack of a clear distinction, this can be either in the sense that the user *agrees* with this preposition or in the sense that they believe that *society* values whiteness.
5. Racial stereotyping: This category includes the rhetorical deployment of all manner of stereotypical qualities associated with different racial/ethnic groups. Notably, this category includes BBC/JBB theory (Big Black Cock/Just Be Black), a common argument on the forum which amounts to the supposition that black men are (the most/more) sexually desirable because of sexual attributes supposedly linked to race (penis size, masculinity, height, masculine features).
6. PUA advice: Pick-Up Artist tips, including advice for how and where to approach women, how to manipulate women into agreeing to dates/sex, how to display sexual value to prospective partners, etc.

7. White incels are not real incels: The proposition that because whiteness is valuable in society, that white incels could acquire sex based on their skin colour (such as by lowering their standards for women) and are therefore faking incelhood or choosing to remain an incel on purpose. Includes JBW theory (Just Be White), a common argument on the forum which amounts to the supposition that white men are (the most/more) sexually desirable because of sexual attributes supposedly linked to race (penis size, masculinity, height, masculine features) *and* cultural factors such as the over-valuation of whiteness in Western society.
8. Pseudo-science posting: This category includes comments which draw on academic papers or the reporting of scholarly work in the news, and comments which includes pseudo-scientific assertions where the user makes an appeal to 'natural law', or 'it's just biology'. For example, users might back up their invented hierarchy of the races with claims that their post is 'objective, not cultural', back up assertions about the probability of getting a match on a dating app with cherry-picked data, or rely on data gathered informally from within questionnaires on the forum.

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