

**Personal Anguish or Public Spectacle?: Understanding Involuntary Celibacy as A Deviant Identity**

by

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## ABSTRACT

Academic research into involuntary celibacy has increased in the past decade, and many studies have succeeded at describing the behaviors which make involuntary celibate people (Incels) infamous online without promoting further application of social theory. This thesis attempts to enrich current understanding of involuntary celibacy as an internet subculture by theorizing as to the function of those behaviors which are considered deviant. Through the application of the exhibitional model of online dramaturgy, tweets produced by Incels were analyzed for evidence supportive of the argument that Incels exhibit both anomic and disciplined protest masculinities. This thesis ends with a discussion of the data produced by the content analysis and recommendations for further research.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Since the launch of the internet in 1991, online media has penetrated every aspect of society, replacing previous forms of media as the global telecommunication platform. The millions of web pages dedicated to social interaction have created a truly unique environment. When online, users may interact as various identities: anonymous, pseudonymous, or digital selves. Digital selves are profiles that purportedly resemble a user's actual lifestyle, but the identities in these profiles may be exaggerated (Billieux et al. 2013; Bullingham and Vasconcelos 2013). Of course, there are online communities which have developed from the discourse of many users with shared experiences, beliefs, and interests.

Some digital communities exhibit interest in content that others find offensive (Gerstenfeld, Grant, and Chang 2003); potentially, these communities have embraced such interactions because of the heavily unregulated nature of online forums (Ganesh 2018). The overuse of insults and hate-speech, including racism and misogynistic comments, may also be intensified by the pseudonymity afforded on most platforms. The infamous online subculture of involuntary celibates, known as Incels, is an example of such a group. Incels have captured media attention in recent years, especially after the violent attacks of Elliot Rodger and Alex Minassian (although their connections to actual Incels are questionable), and this attention has motivated a nascent academic literature since

2017 (Ging 2017). Attention afforded to Incels has been heavily negative, understandably, but there is a noticeable lack of works that theorize why they participate in behavior which ostracizes them from the rest of the internet.

This thesis will attempt to contribute to the literature on Incels by explaining the function of their deviance through existing theories. Through a review of applicable literature, a content analysis of Incel tweets, and a discussion of the results of the content analysis, the argument will be made that disciplined protest masculinity is practiced by Incels within their own setting. Existing studies have only described general characteristics of the population, resulting in a library that is becoming saturated with descriptive literature that do not bolster research with theory.

## CHAPTER 2: INVOLUNTARY CELIBACY

### *The Manosphere*

There is a great emphasis on understanding the *manosphere* as a source of male misogyny on the internet. The term first began to appear in online men's rights forums as early as 2009, before being popularized by media attention aimed at the extreme content of those websites (Ribeiro et al. 2020). It is theorized to be a broad, loose union of groups whose interests include delegitimizing the issue of women's rights and promoting an often militant discourse for men's rights activism (Schmitz and Kazyak 2016). Journalists and scholars alike have been successful in identifying the philosophy at the heart of the manosphere: the figurative Red Pill. The concept of the Red Pill is broadly used across the manosphere, though in the incelosphere it refers to a specific identity (Incels.wiki; Jaki et al. 2019:247; Farrell et al. 2020). The metaphorical Red Pill originates from the 1999 film *The Matrix*, where the main character is offered a literal red pill which will open his eyes to the truth about the grim world in which he resides (Ganesh 2017; Ging 2017:640; Jaki et al. 2018; Bratich & Banet-Weiser 2019; Labbaf 2020). The term is used in the manosphere to refer to one's acceptance of an imagined reality wherein men are weak, and women practice open misogyny. Members of the manosphere exist in a reality where they are facing an existential crisis which requires them to assault, harass, and denounce feminists and their allies before they overthrow patriarchy forever. It should be emphasized that

similar anxieties about the loss of masculine power, also producing aggressive responses towards women, have been documented among men's rights movements prior to the formation of the current manosphere (Coakley and Messner 1993; Messner 1998; Kaufman 1994).

This is a fair effort to categorize a collection of communities that share an agenda arguing that Western society is heavily apathetic to issues faced by men, including loneliness, high incarceration, and unreported sexual and physical abuse among men. However, the variation of these groups is vast as the manosphere has been stretched to accommodate groups that may even be antithetical towards each other. For instance, pick-up-artists are commonly listed as members of the manosphere, but Incels share an overall negative view of them as "scammers" who attempt to trick Incels into paying for pseudo-cognitive behavioral therapy with the promise of increasing their "game." (Incels.wiki).

Debbie Ging's article on the manosphere is particularly interesting because of her engagement with Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity. This is Connell's theory that instead of being a fixed concept of masculinity, there are multiple forms of masculinity with one occupying a hegemonic position (Connell 1995:76). The form of masculinity in this position is entirely contestable, and hegemonic masculinity may in fact disrupt itself by producing oppositional masculinities (Connell 1995:37; Messerschmidt 2000:10-12). The relationship between hegemonic masculinity, non-hegemonic masculinity, and femininity is

not simply one of domination but is rather one of greater social hegemony (Messerschmidt 2016:11).

Ging's study was a content analysis of thirty-eight of the most frequently cross-referenced manosphere websites, which Ging then categorized based on thematic content. The categories of communities were men's rights activists (MRAs), Men Go Their Own Way (MGTOW), pick up artists (PUAs), traditional Christian conservatives, and gamer culture (Ging 2017:644). Interestingly, the homepage of Incels.wiki contains a section on the manosphere that includes links to articles on three of Ging's categories. Her findings suggested that among these diverse groups, which have fundamental disagreement on issues like abortion and eugenics, they shared a tendency to exhibit hybrid masculinities.

Men who exhibit traditionally masculine traits may borrow feminine characteristics without challenging their hegemonic identity; alternatively, men who are non-hegemonic may appropriate aspects of other identities as a form of oppositional masculinity (Messerschmidt 2000:11). In a digital environment where hegemonic standards have less control over one's emotions, the goal of combating feminism has overridden the normal resistance these groups might show to hybridization. Ging noted the willingness among these groups to confound traditional gender norms by adopting a victim identity complete with anxieties over being marginalized and disenfranchised by dominant women (2017:652-653).

Another article, by Schmitz and Kazyak (2016) provides phenomenal empirical data on the strategies used by MRAs to portray hegemonic masculinity as a discriminated identity; however, they do not theorize what type of masculinity MRAs are practicing in the process. Similarly, an analysis of the jargon used across manosphere-related websites revealed that conflicts with hegemonic masculinity were a prevalent theme in discussions but did not speculate as to what impact these sentiments had on the masculinity performed online (Farrell et al. 2020). Ging has been closer than other authors in that she theorized hybrid masculinities may be practiced by manosphere communities.

The bulk of articles addressing the manosphere seem to overlap in purpose as they invariably establish the extent of networked misogyny, the Red Pill philosophy, the off-line violence of male misogynists, the on-line scandals involving sexual harassment and discrimination, and the websites that are hubs for men's rights activists. As such, the manosphere and its affiliate communities are foundational to the subject of involuntary celibacy. There is a lacuna in the literature on Incels that ignores the application of theory to explain online deviancy.

### *Involuntary Celibacy*

Involuntary celibacy has been a subject heavily understudied until recent years, and academic interest has mostly stemmed from fears that Incels represented a network through which young men were being radicalized into

violent extremism (O'Malley, Holt and Holt 2020; Tomkinson, Harper, and Attwell 2020; Witt 2020; Cottee 2021). These fears are understandable as there have been nine instances of men perpetrating acts of violence due to sentiments that are consistent with discursive subjects common to Incel forums. These men (George Sodini, Elliot Rodger, Christopher Harper-Mercer, William Atchison, Nikolas Cruz, Alek Minassian, Scott Beierle, Brandon Andrew Clarke, and Alexander Stavropoulos) have dubious connections to the Incel community. In fact, neither Christopher Harper-Mercer nor Elliot Rodger ever referred to themselves as *Incels* in their extensive manifestos (Rodger 2014; Anderson 2017); Alek Minassian admitted in custody that he only aligned himself with Incels in order to elicit more attention online (Wilson 2021).

Nevertheless, these men have been labelled as “Incel terrorists” due to their shared frustration at women and other men for denying them sex and for maintaining successful relationships, respectively (Tomkinson, Harper, and Attwell 2020). Yet it must be emphasized that the violence perpetuated by Incels cannot be defined as terrorism as such attacks consist of self-identifying Incels attacking others in the name of a cause that has yet to materialize; terrorism is, and should be, limited to describe politically-motivated attacks against civilians (Cottee 2021). These attacks were followed by later instances of “toxic techno culture”: instances of severe gender discrimination through digital platforms,

including the Gamergate scandal and the Fappening (Massanari 2015; Salter 2017).

Such occurrences have supported the argument that Incels should be collectively listed along with larger groups of social and political activism, especially alt-right extremism. Most commonly, Incels are conflated with the greater network of online men's rights activist (MRAs) groups, popularly referred to as the manosphere (Bratich and Banet-Wesier 2019; Farrell et al. 2020). Journalistic attention that the manosphere received was specifically increased by the online reception to news of Elliot Rodger's, Chris Harper-Mercer's, and Alek Minassian's attacks (Ging 2017:639-640). They drew attention with their sudden, indiscriminate attacks as well as their stated motivations: severe sexual frustration and hatred for women. Even more remarkable than their stated motivations for these violent episodes was the celebration they received on social media and forum websites (Ging 2017:640; Spampinato 2018; Jaki et al. 2019; Saptura and Boyle 2019; Bratich and Banet-Wesier 2019; Labbaf 2020; Tomkinson, Harper, and Atwell 2020; Cottee 2021). These men, specifically Elliot Rodger, were canonized as "saints" and "supreme gentlemen" by Incels who viewed their violence as an extreme method of reclaiming power and building a society more equitable for men (Spaminato 2018; Witt 2020). Beyond these examples, Incel discourse is filled with violent, emotional statements that represent a user's efforts to vent their frustrations about being an Incel (Jaki et al. 2019; Witt 2020; Cottee

2021). This discourse understandably alarms outsiders who may find it impossible to distinguish between what is a sincere threat and what is simply an example of what Goffman (1956 [1978]: 203) would refer to as impression management.

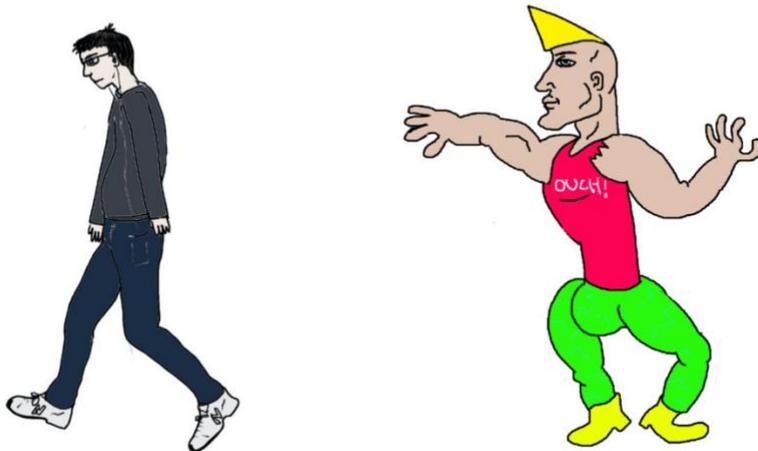
Unlike other communities in the manosphere, Incels represent a large range of identities and feature an extensive glossary of jargon unique to themselves. Involuntary celibacy truly is a subculture as Albert Cohen (1955 [1971]) would define one, because the group displays, “ways of thinking and doing that are in some respects particularly its own.” These discursive practices not only allow an outsider to recognize a member of the community, but they help inform interest in the Incel worldview. The term Incel is one such example of the constructed experiences of involuntarily celibate people. One cannot truly be an Incel if they are voluntarily celibate or have some capacity to maintain intimate relationships; a person who truly believes that they cannot be in a relationship (a *truecel*) is entitled to refer to themselves as an Incel. This manner of gatekeeping is better explained by Frail, the pseudonymous screen name of an Incel who has been active on numerous forums and who created *Incels.blog*.

My take on an incel is simply this: A person, who despite their best efforts (and yes, effort should be made, otherwise it would not be involuntary) cannot obtain genuine, romantic and/or sexual relationships. Nothing more. (Frail 2020)

To be an Incel is to adopt a philosophy on life in which one is opposed to sexually successful men and the women who control access to a supposed sexual market by which they regulate who is to be sexually successful. Men who are

physically attractive, referred to as *Chads* or *Tyrones* depending on their ethnicity, represent hegemonic masculinity that is in contrast to the oppositional masculinity of the Incel. They are capable of achieving sex with attractive and moderately attractive women, *Stacies* and *Beckies*, respectively.

*Figure 1: Memes such as this illustrate the dichotomy between Incels (left) and Chads (right) through humorous caricatures (knowyourmeme.com).*



Incels rank attractiveness based on a decile scale that accounts for one's facial anatomy. According to Incel rhetoric, facial features are the key determinants to one's successes at having a relationship and excelling in life; features such as a small chin or large nose may qualify one as an Incel (Incels.wiki). The obsession with attributing lifestyles to certain facial types is heavily reminiscent of physiognomy.

Figure 2: The decile scale of attractiveness is used by Incels to legitimize their view that attractiveness is objective and only attractive people are easily able to have sex (Incels.wiki).



*Figure 3: Materials that display altered photos of men and women are commonly circulated on Incel websites. In this case, a distinction is being made between an Incel and a Chad with the only difference being "a few millimeters of bone" (knowyourmeme.com).*

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



One of the more criticized claims made by Incels is that women actively behave positively towards the sexual advances of Chads and Tyrones in order to maintain the value of their sexuality. If heterosexual sex is a hallmark of hegemonic masculinity (Messerschmidt 2016), Stacies are responsible for keeping its value inflated by regulating access to it (Incels.wiki). Therefore, Incels attribute a large portion of the force behind hegemonic masculinity, or at least the ability to display one's heterosexuality through intimacy, to women. The meaning of terms like Stacy and Becky inherently direct resentment towards the women

who are supposed by Incels to belong within these categories; these women are more likely to be the victims of online harassment by Incels (Ehman and Gross 2019; Rubin, Blackwell, and Conley 2020).

*Figure 4: This meme illustrates the claims made by Incels that women are hypersexual when around Chads (Incels.wiki).*

## Around incels vs around chad



The fact that a functional knowledge of Incel argot is so important to claim group membership (Jaki et al. 2018), a trait shared by numerous online deviant groups (Gerstenfeld, Grant, and Chiang 2003), suggests that terminology is central to identity. As such, it is practical to briefly explore the most common

terms used to define identities within the incelosphere. The following definitions have been procured from *Incels.wiki*, a large repository of Incel-generated information pertinent to this research.

*-Pills*

The term *-pill* refers to the act of adopting a certain philosophy about life (Incels.wiki). In the incelosphere, this term serves as a suffix which follows a prefix that denotes the specific philosophy that one has adopted. The prefixes are also synonymous with identities performed by Incels.

*Redpill.* In the context of involuntary celibacy, the redpill is one who has accepted that rules of socialization work against one who has failed to meet standards of beauty in a society, meaning that beginning a relationship requires additional assets (such as wealth).

*Bluepill.* The bluepill is an identity of optimism. A bluepill is an Incel who believes that their personality and self-improvement may allow them to attract a partner as well as objective physical attractiveness. Their attempts to improve themselves are known as *maxxing* (Incels.wiki), and their overall optimism that involuntary celibacy is not a permanent condition is referred to as *coping*. This philosophy is opposed by Blackpills.

*Blackpill.* The blackpill is the fatalistic version of the redpill who embraces depression, self-loathing, and perhaps eventually violence. While the correlation between violence towards others and blackpill bitterness has been

argued by outsiders, Randy Thompson (2020), a self-identifying blackpill and author for Incels.blog denied such a connection.

There is nothing dangerous about the conclusions that reached [sic] in the blackpill. Again, people associate lots of bad stuff to the blackpill and sometimes refer to it as “cultish”, but all the blackpill is at the end of the day is theories and the data that support those theories. The blackpill doesn’t advocate for violence or say anything about violence at all. Over the years, detractors and journalists have tried to stretch the meaning of blackpill to mean everything terrible about incels, but that is false. In the community, the blackpill has always had a simple definition, and that meaning has not changed. It has always been a group of theories supported by scientific data (Thompson 2020).

*Purplepill.* A purplepill is an Incel who maintains a generally neutral stance on the issues of feminism and men’s rights activism.

*Whitepill.* A whitepill is someone who has accepted the assumptions reached by blackpill and is either becoming a blackpill or choosing to pursue voluntary celibacy (becoming a *volcel*).

*Pinkpill.* A pinkpill is the female version of a blackpill. The existence of involuntarily celibate women (*femcels*) is denied by blackpill (Incels.wiki), who ignore the fact that women have always been a significant part of the Incel community (Donnelly et al. 2001; Cottee 2021).

Perhaps the most empirical study that has been performed explicitly on the incelosphere was the mixed-method analysis of discourse in the Incels.me forum by Jaki et al. (2019). The researchers in this study employed natural language processing and machine learning software with a manual content analysis of 100 threads that covered a range of topics discussed in the forums (Jaki et al. 2019:245-246). This article provides compelling evidence that language use is the

key to identifying features of an online community. It also provides invaluable information on the incelosphere including documentation of coded vernacular, population efforts to develop in-group and out-group identities, and actual demographics of users.

Important to this research were the data correlating extreme discourse and off-line violence. The authors found that posts threatening explicit violence comprised a smaller amount of the sample size than expected, and they concluded that the idea of the incelosphere as a homogenous, highly aggressive community is not true (Jaki et al. 2019:260-263). Incels do not share a common goal, such as a terrorist organization might, but only share the feature of being unable to engage in social and sexual relationships. Such findings were corroborated by a later analysis of over 8,000 posts from two Incel forums; evidence suggests that a tiny number of individuals are ever likely to act out the violent rhetoric they adopt in online discussions (O'Malley et al. 2020). This aligns with similar research conducted on other extremist websites unrelated to Incels (Borum 2011; Hamm and Spaaij 2017; Greene 2019).

### CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

A goal of this study is to explain elements of the Incel subculture through the application of existing social theory. In order to address this subject, applied theories have been grafted from a spectrum of sciences, including gender studies, sociology, criminology, and network studies. Those theories that are central to this work are those which indicate that Incel behavior is not quite novel; in fact, similar deviancy has been observed by academia for some time. Theories pioneered by Charles Cooley, Erving Goffman, Michel Foucault, Raewyn Connell, and James Messerschmidt are fundamental for this research.

#### *Stigma, Surveillance, and Discipline*

If it is accepted that an individual who identifies as an Incel has adopted a deviant notion of self, which has been informed by terminology and philosophies unique to the Incel subculture, then there is ground to include Cooley's concept of the looking glass self (1902). This describes the process through which individuals self-identify based on appraisals others make of them (Cooley 1902). The crux of the Incel identity is that others have valued the individual as lesser, making them involuntarily part of a deviant group which may be persistent, but feels definitive. Again, one must be *involuntarily* trapped in celibacy in order to be an Incel (Frail 2020). Continuing in this line of thought, symbolic interactionists have well described the role of one's audience in maintaining a deviant identity.

The responses of an audience to deviant behavior may result in the internalization of a stigmatized identity (Erikson 1962; Goffman 1963). Yet, the adopted identity may actually be self-perceived as a privileged status rather than a stigmatized position (Jang and Thornberry 1998; Kaplan 1975; Lofland 1969; Wells 1989). In the case of Incels, both of these statements may be true as performances of the blackpill philosophy display extreme self-loathing, but also a celebration of the acceptance of reality (Thompson 2020). To a degree, blackpillers believe that they have access to a greater set of truths than people who cope with reality by buying into lies. Howard Becker explained, “deviance is not a quality of the act a person commits, but rather a consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions to an ‘offender’” (1963). In the case of performing involuntary celibacy, the audience should be recognized by scholars as an influence integral to the creation of such a stigmatized identity.

Michel Foucault’s theories of *discipline* and *panopticism* assist in the argument that the online audience receives an Incel’s performance through their interactions and becomes integral to the construction of the Incel identity. The theory of panopticism, in which the watcher becomes internal to the watched (Foucault 1975), is applicable to this study as it describes the nature of the digital space in which Incels practice deviance.

The presence of constant, persistent surveillance does not equate to minimal deviance online. In fact, online deviancy often takes advantage of the

panoptic quality of the internet; groups may cultivate larger membership thanks to the benefits afforded by online discourse. These activities are advantageous for stigmatized groups: their interactions are remote, protective of offline identities, and essentially free from the limits of time and place.

Using the internet for deviancy exposes one to formal and informal discipline, but digital space perfectly facilitates such usage (DiMaggio et al. 2001; Garimella et al. 2018; Ging 2017; Holt 2007; Jaki et al. 2019; Jenkins 2001; McGee 2012; Quayle and Taylor 2002). In other words, surveillance by latent audiences (law enforcement and bots) and obvious audiences (users and website moderators) are not capable of fully discouraging online deviance when the benefits of using the internet greatly outweigh the risks. However, it is possible for discipline to be executed online. One's account may be banned from a platform for violating the rules of said platform, or for posting content that is illegal. These would be examples of top-down discipline as described originally by Foucault (1975) in which official authorities regulate behavior through the use of force (albeit a soft force). In conjunction with this, horizontal discipline occurs between users on the internet in the form of sanctions against certain behavior through ostracization and public humiliation (McGee 2012). Accounts and websites dedicated to humiliating and censoring Incel presences on the internet exist (e.g., IncelTears, Xpelincels, We Found the Incel, etc.), but their attempts to

discipline Incel behavior have resulted in Incels embracing their identity as deviant (Ash 2020).

This correlates to Becker's (1963) understanding of deviance and has produced a sense of legitimacy among Incels as they share experiences of ostracization online. If Incels did not perform online, and did not express their sentiments verbally, it is unlikely that there would be anyone aware of them to call them deviant. Such an environment might prevent them from adopting violent rhetoric and unsavory worldviews, which further emphasizes the importance of the internet in the formation of the Incel identity. After all, the Incel subculture has *exclusively* existed on the internet since 1997 when "Alana's Involuntary Celibacy Project," a self-help forum for men and women who could not find romantic partners began (Donnelly et al. 2001; Palma 2019; Cottee 2021).

#### *Recorded Digital Interactions As Exhibitions*

The setting for these interactions is as important as the actors performing in them; in fact, setting may have a greater impact on performance than the audience does (Hogan 2010). To explore the role of setting in the performance of online deviant identities, Goffman's theory of dramaturgy is useful. Dramaturgy is Goffman's metaphoric term which equates day-to-day interactions with professional stage performances in theater (Goffman [1956] 1978). This theory visualizes identity as a role constantly being performed and managed, but it should be modified slightly to apply to online interactions. The online presence of

social actors are pseudonymous, indefinite, constantly observed, and continuously redefined (Hogan 2010; Bullingham and Vasconcelos 2013; Cole and Griffiths 2007).

Bernie Hogan (2010) has tweaked dramaturgical stage play to be more practical for describing online communities with his exhibitionism metaphor. Rather than being a single performance acted out, and possibly repeated, in one setting specific to place and time, online performances are perpetually displayed, like works of art in a gallery (Hogan 2010; Hogan and Quan-Haase 2010). In the exhibitionism model of dramaturgy, actors are replaced by creators who produce products for the purpose of evoking a response or managing an impression which they wish to display for an audience. Creators have little control over the audience that will consume their product, save only for selecting where they will initially present their work. For instance, a zoophilic user may post information about their deviancy on a forum occupied by like-minded people (Jenkins and Thomas 2004). Creators expect a response, positive or negative, and may adjust their future activities to reflect the feedback they received (Hogan 2010). Hogan's adaption of Goffman's theory is very relevant to this study as it provides a mechanism by which one may explain the factors involved in Incel impression management that are unique to online settings. The task of any user performing through online media is to create an identity that is consistent (Hogan 2010: 380); this becomes a challenge on social media websites such as Twitter or Reddit when users may

engage in arguments that are immediately accessible to all other users on the platform that will remain unless one or all users agree to remove their portion of the performance. In other words, online performances produce *artifacts*, literal recordings of past performances, that may be reviewed by audiences who were not originally present (Hogan 2010: 380). Therefore, the performance of an identity online requires careful curation on the part of a user to ensure that the artifacts remaining from their performances display no behavior that contradicts the identity constructed online (Cole and Griffiths 2007; Bullingham and Vasconcelos 2013). The same rule applies to a subculture that risks the negative consequences of being labelled as deviant in order to perform a form of masculinity that opposes hegemonic masculinity.

#### *Involuntary Celibacy As Protest Masculinity*

It is reasonable to posit that those deviant behaviors which Jaki et al. found to be characteristic of the incelsphere actually suggest that a different form of masculinity has been developed by Incel behavior. Connell introduces the term protest masculinity (1995:109-112) to describe a hybridized, directionless form of masculinity which arises as an opposition to hegemonic masculinity and femininity. Protest masculinity is a feature of individual men who believe themselves to be without power; however, the manifestation of protest masculinity is a collective practice that does not remain individualized. Protest masculinity has been attributed to American and Scottish street gangs, young men

in political activist groups, Australian construction worker unions, male vegans, and factory workers (Connell 1995:111; Walker 2006; Nath 2010:274-275; Muir 2013:38; Holligan and McLean 2018; Ashlee, Sasso, & Witkowicki 2020).

Protest masculinity is “frenzied and showy” (Connell 1995:110) and is not only an adoption of conventional masculine stereotypes, but a pressured drive to exaggerate one’s potent masculinity through harmful behavior. Between the interviewees Connell attributed protest masculinity to, there was an excessive tendency towards conspicuous symbols of machismo paired with hostility towards others. This hostility included homophobia, misogyny, and racism that were paired with behaviors classified as self-harm. They shared similar histories of practicing masculinity: opposition to authority, violence, minor crime, substance use, manual labor jobs, short heterosexual relationships, extensive tattooing, and an affinity for driving recklessly at high speeds. Connell attributed these traits to the developmental environment of the men, noting that the only thing they shared was a sense of tension created by poverty and an atmosphere of violence (1995:111). The environment exaggerated their feelings of powerlessness and inspired them to create a haphazard male identity that made a claim to power through a façade of violent protest. Maintaining this façade through dramatic displays of masculine potency, including excessive tattoos and a narcissistic use of hate speech, is a strategy to reject femininity without totally adopting hegemony. Such behavior is employed to give the illusion of power while none of

the power typical of hegemonic masculinity is actually present. The concept of protest masculinity is descriptive of Incels, and later adaptations to the theory make this claim more reasonable.

Gregory Wayne Walker (2006) conducted participant observation and interviews at an American factory, MacDowell's Grain Company (MGC). Walker argued that there are actually two distinctive forms of protest masculinity: anomic and disciplined. Anomic protest masculinity refers to a dysfunctional form of masculinity that is freed from societal regulations, and which exhibits the chronic depressiveness and self-destructiveness described by Connell. Alternatively, disciplined protest masculinity occurs in close-knit, interdependent groups where masculinity is pushed to its extreme by narcissistic individuals and has negative consequences for the group. This is an identity that is regulated by masculine peers through informal sanctions. Therefore, disciplined protest masculinities stand in opposition to hegemonic masculinity and anomic masculinities (Walker 2006:6-9).

Walker observed disciplined protest masculinity in the interactions between workers at MGC. In the outdoor stockyard, there were seven full-time employees who were tasked with training sets of seasonal workers multiple times a year. The work they performed was dangerous, laborious, and constantly scrutinized by managers (who represented hegemonic masculinity to the workers). From this environment, a culture of powerlessness and interdependency emerged

as the full-time workers knew that if the seasonal workers did not learn proper behavior, then their work could result in life-threatening accidents or employment termination. So informal sanctions were employed by the regular workers against dangerous behavior; in this environment, a guy who was macho would be seen as dangerous because he would let his ego influence his mannerisms (Walker 2006:10-13).

The regular workers identified problematic behavior and employed sanctions quickly to discipline anomic protest masculinity. For instance, when a new worker began to brag about how good he was at driving equipment and fishing on the Gulf Coast, the regular workers labelled him a “bullshitter” and disciplined him by keeping him away from equipment and excluding him from their conversations (Walker 2006:12-13). In this instance, what would be an anomic attempt at emulating hegemonic masculinity (being in control of a situation even if one does not know what they are doing) was disciplined by members of the masculine peer group. The regular workers were careful to discipline other attempts by new workers to portray themselves as macho, especially by targeting their own sexuality.

That central facet of hegemonic masculinity, heterosexuality, was not used by MGC yard workers as an avenue to boast about their frequent liaisons; it was used as a way to self-deprecate. Since a typical, machismo performance of masculinity would dictate that a man has frequent and good sex, the regular

workers used humor as a way to emphasize how desperate for sex they were. This is in complete contrast to the discussions of sex that the managers and new workers had. Hegemonic and anomic protest masculinity hold that men should be hypersexual and dominating of women; however, the regular workers constructed disciplined protest masculinity in opposition to hegemonic ideals by humiliating narcissists who bragged about their sex lives (Walker 2006:14). The sex talk of the regular workers was oriented around homosexuality, bestiality, autoeroticism, or even asexuality. They would engage in banter with each other about the diminutive sizes of their genitals and even embody these jokes by making self-oriented jokes. The workers made mockeries of coworkers who bragged about their sexuality by unanimously emphasizing that they were powerless to receive sex from their wives or girlfriends. They also engaged in consensual homosexual play by pantomiming sex acts and making derogatory remarks to each other; however, they were sure to only do this with consenting workers who reciprocated the role-play (Walker 2006:16-17). Walker explains that the functional role of these interactions is to discipline narcissistic, dangerous attempts by coworkers to emulate hegemonic norms in a work environment where such norms are nonsensical.

In a bureaucratic environment, men may be expected to excessively display their masculinity, but MGC was an environment where solidarity could not be exchanged for narcissism (Walker 2006:19-20). Through the humiliation of

oneself and their peers, the workers established that ego would not interfere with solidarity, and the norms at MGC reversed scripts so that behaviors emulating hegemony were mocked (Walker 2006:15). These interactions purposefully violated masculine norms in various ways because the men were willing to talk about sex, women, and male recreation as long as they could subvert normalcy. Disciplined protest masculinity in this setting enforced order among a group of peers through informal control without sacrificing the shared consciousness that these men did not embody hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity at MGC was embodied by the managers, so the yard workers actively cultivated a stable opposition in a disciplined way (Walker 2006:20-21).

It is insufficient to attribute macho or toxic behavior to all men practicing protest masculinity, as numerous studies have found this dichotomy to be applicable in other contexts. Nath (2010) identified a protest masculine identity among members of male vegan groups who subverted the hegemonic view that men should be heavy consumers of red meat by observing alternative diets. By encouraging each other to continue with their dietary lifestyles, male vegans and vegetarians practice disciplined protest masculinity, emphasizing the solidarity they share from choosing what they eat (Nath 2010:275-275).

Muir (2013) recognized that Australian construction industry union members were demonized by union opponents because of their willingness to engage in anomic protest masculinity. The workers made themselves nuisances to

union officials and labor activists by exhibiting a “swaggering hyper-masculinity” which made them willing to engage in violent confrontation with any authority figures or regulations, even those imposed by their own union (Muir 2013:39). Holligan and McLean (2018) attributed violent behaviors, like street fighting, among groups of working-class teenage boys in Glasgow, Scotland to anomic protest masculinity. The concentration of so many narcissistic, marginalized young men in this environment produced a masculinity that the authors referred to as “toxic,” and lacking a sufficient form of discipline to serve any purpose other than to perpetuate violence (Holligan and McLean 2018). Ashlee, Sasso, and Witkowicki (2020) proposed that white male college students are participating in neo-conservative political movements as a response to feeling marginalized by the changing composition of college campuses. While joining campus organizations and clubs with political purposes may be a constructive, disciplined form of protest, the authors hold that anomic protest is more common. In this case, young men practice anomic protest masculinity by disengaging from their academic lives and becoming involved in extracurricular groups that present more radical ideologies (Ashlee, Sasso, & Witkowicki 2020:42-45).

Returning to the literature on the incelosphere, the work of Donnelly et al. (2001), which first included the term involuntary celibacy in an academic study, found that individuals who identified as involuntarily celibate invariably did so after concerted efforts to engage in relationships. The “Donnelly Study” is

celebrated by Incels as their first entrance into mainstream awareness (Incels.wiki). The respondents were mostly single men in sex-segregated careers who spent a large amount of time on the internet; in contrast to the blackpill view that women cannot be Incels, 108 of the 300 respondents were women. A sense of emotional inferiority was shared by the respondents. As early as 2001, the involuntary celibate community used the internet to create a supportive community rather than to fill sexual desires (Burgess et al. 2001; Donnelly et al. 2001:167).

The nature of the community changed dramatically over the course of a decade as the foci of discourse altered from support and self-improvement to bitterness, violent fantasies, and an acceptance of powerlessness (Ging 2017; Bratich and Banet-Weiser 2019; Labbaf 2020; Cottee 2021). Behaviors indicative of protest masculinity are found among Incels. In contrast to hegemonic masculinity, where athleticism and strength are celebrated (Coakley and Messner 1993), Incels embrace their lack of strength (Witt 2020). Unlike privileged men, who may display hybrid masculinity by dabbling with aspects of femininity, Incels outright oppose femininity (Jaki et al. 2018). In fact, Incels appear to be more interested in expressing anger towards women than to the Chads that they would otherwise be in competition with; yet there are not more mass-shootings and attacks occurring.

Although Incel rhetoric is far more antagonistic towards women than towards sexually successful men, those men who have committed acts of mass violence were indiscriminate in who they attacked. Furthermore, data suggesting that there is no correlation between participation in Incel discourse and offline violence has led to the conclusion that those who perform violence have self-radicalized offline (Jaki et al. 2019; O'Malley et al. 2020; Cottee 2021). In other words, Elliot Rodger and similar criminals represent an anomic protest masculine version of the Incel, performances that were well-received by journalists prowling for dramatic headlines. That is not to say, of course, that violent rhetoric should be disregarded; instead, there remains a topic to be explored further. To understand what disciplined protest masculinity, as opposed to the mass-violence of Rodger, looks like, it is necessary to analyze artifacts left by Incel performances. Perhaps evidence may be gleaned that explains the method by which Incels discipline each other's masculinity through such an analysis.

#### CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

This research represents efforts to analyze a sampling of very recent tweets produced by twitter users employing Incel jargon. The analysis was conducted in order to identify discursive topics of Incels on a platform that is more public and regulated than an Incel-operated forum, and to examine the extent to which Incels embrace the deviant elements of their identities on such a platform. The occurrence of arguments between Incels and efforts to subvert those elements may be evidence of a disciplined protest masculinity among the subculture.

## CHAPTER 5: METHODOLOGY

To accomplish the goals of this research, this study involved a qualitative analysis of data from Twitter accounts producing content related to the Incel community. To ensure that this study represents contemporary interactions, this analysis consisted of 1,000 tweets selected from 2020-2021; roughly 650 tweets were collected for 2020, and 350 were collected for 2021. Twitter data was accessed using the Twitter API, Twitter's proprietary application programming interface. The tweets were procured via Boolean searches with the Twitter API using 13 terms that Jaki et al. (2019) identified as among the top one-hundred most used terms by Incels. These terms are alpha male, bad boy, beta, black pill, blue pill, incel, Chad, red pill, Stacy, ugly, want, why, and women. Some tweets were also procured directly by text searches of the key terms using the search bar on Twitter's homepage.

The use of tweets as data sources for this research is justifiable given the theoretical foundation behind the analysis. Social media platforms, such as Twitter, host interactions in a space that is not bound by time or space, making them an appropriate stage for the exhibitional approach to be utilized. Twitter is an open platform, through which anyone with an account can engage in active conversations, effectively generating artifacts at a higher rate than most other social media platforms allow. Tweets as artifacts are tiny in comparison to those found in other social media platforms (limited to 140 characters or less), which

allows tweets to serve as ideal units of analysis (DeWever, Schellens, and Van Keer 2006). The audience responding to a tweet provides a better reflection of communities most likely to consume that information (Hogan 2010; Murthy 2011). This is due to Twitter's algorithm, which acts in contrast to platforms such as LinkedIn by allowing users to largely curate their own feed of information through interactions built into the platform including tweets, retweets, and follows (Murthy 2015: 1061-1064). Twitter also provides users with curatorial powers that are not present in all social media platforms. These include filtering content by subject, searching for artifacts by multiple metrics (user, subject, date, hashtag, etc.), and the actual ability to revisit entire past, public interactions in a totally preserved state that is in reverse-chronological order. These features suggest that Twitter as a platform is a literal repository of stored artifacts that provides users with multiple options to curate past representations of online identities (Hogan 2010: 381-382). Perhaps the only exception to this would be content that is removed by Twitter for violations of the website's guidelines. Still, the archived content accessible through Twitter allows for qualitative analyses of social interactions.

### *Content Analysis*

To code the tweets collected for this dataset, an inductive approach was adopted. This allowed the brief content of individual tweets to inform the creation of multiple codes which reflected the nature of each tweet (e.g., violence,

misogyny, fatalism, etc.). A potential problem arising from the use of social media artifacts as a data source is that neither the identity of users nor the validity of their posts may be verified as genuine. This issue may be even more compounded by the practice of trolling, that is the production of disingenuous content for the sake of eliciting negative reactions, which has been known to skew the veracity of research into online communities (Nagle 2017; Greene 2019; Witt 2020). The true identity of the users who created the tweets cannot be verified, but that does not mean that these are received as satire or dark humor.

Evidence from Incel forums following the attacks perpetuated by Elliot Rodger and Christopher Harper-Mercer revealed that users were celebrating the acts of violence, elevating the two men to “sainthood.” Nikolas Cruz, who killed 17 of his peers at a high school in Florida, has been linked to Incel forums (Branson-Potts and Winston 2018; Shukman 2018; Baele, Brace, and Coan 2019). Therefore, it is necessary to assume that posts do originate from Incels, or at least individuals who share their jargon and worldview when generating content, and that they are intended to be received positively by Incels, and perhaps negatively by others. The goal of this research was to understand performance of masculinity by Incels through recorded interactions, and not to provide offline demographic data of the community, as has already been accomplished (Ribeiro et al. 2020).

Curated tweets were analyzed for the presence of words, phrases, or sentiments which correspond to certain recurring themes. As tweets were

analyzed, similar themes were eventually incorporated into broader, functional codes that represented core values of protest masculinity as constructed by Incels. This process followed an inductive form of conceptual mapping (DeWever, Schellens, and Van Keer 2006).

Certain codes (racism, violence, homophobia, fatalism, and misogyny) were assumed to be present from the outset of this analysis based on findings from previous studies of Incel forums. On the other hand, there were sufficient occurrences of some themes that warranted the creation of a new code. For example, although there were many themes critical of women initially coded under the predicted code misogyny, there were enough themes specifically critical of movement feminism that it was necessary to create a separate, novel code, anti-feminism. Finally, the occurrences of each code were tallied and presented as percentages based on frequency for each separate year and the two years combined.

### *Code Descriptions*

Fifteen codes occurred during 2020 and 2021. These codes were either initially assumed at the outset of the analysis based on previous research, or they were induced by frequent instances during the analysis. The following section describes each code along with any expectations which were held for them prior to analysis.

*Racism*: The occurrence of racist rhetoric among online Incel discussions has been a well-documented phenomenon which has led some researchers to link Incels with other deviant groups maintaining online presences. These communities include white supremacists and neo-Nazis, to name a few (Gertenfeld, Grant, and Chiang 2003; Bratich and Banet-Weiser 2019). The *Racism* code included derogatory language towards certain races, ethnocentric sentiments, and racial slurs. Considering the frequency at which racist discourse has appeared in past interactions, including racialized Incel argot, such as the term “Tyrone,” this code was anticipated to be frequently found.

*Violence Towards Others*: Of all the codes that were assumed at the outset of this research, violence seemed like it would be more obviously recurring than the others. As has been explained already, fear of the association between violence and involuntary celibacy has been one of the main factors thrusting Incels into the public’s attention. Content was coded as *Violence* if it included a direct threat towards a person or group, explicit interest in harm towards others, information pertaining to terrorism or weaponry, and fantasizing about harming others.

*Trans-/Homophobia*: Another assumed code was that of *Trans-/Homophobia*, based on previous findings that Incels were likely to engage in such rhetoric online. Messerschmidt (2000) proposed that men performing a subordinate masculine identity met homosexuality with hostility as a performance

of violence intended to align them closer to hegemonic masculine ideals. The *Trans-/Homophobia* code included derogatory language towards LGBTQ+ communities.

*Misogyny*: This code was predicted at the offset of research to occur frequently, as expressions of resentment towards are an apparent hallmark of the Incel community. The *Misogyny* code included instances of general discourse regarding women in a negative light, broad generalizations of women as either positive or negative (e.g., “All women...”), statements equating traditional feminine qualities with negative behavior, and aggressive sentiments towards women.

*Anti-Feminism*: This code emerged from the dataset after instances of misogynistic sentiments specifically targeting movement feminism were found to be frequent. Like Misogyny, such sentiments were expected, especially as Incels have often been associated with other men’s’ rights activists groups (MRAs) including Meninists, the antithesis of feminists.

*Political/Media Organizations*: The *Political/Media Organizations* code arose from frequent themes expressing frustration and anxieties over contemporary systems of politics and information. This code encompassed political opinions, engagement in discussions on power, expressions of anger towards media censorship, and general opinions of media. This code was not

anticipated at the beginning of the research as it represented a range of views that extended into policy and events unrelated to involuntary celibacy.

*Academia:* The code for *Academia* was created based on several instances of mistrust towards academic researchers and their work pertaining to Incels. These included statements describing academic researchers as interested in villainizing Incels.

*Networking/Informative:* This code encompasses tweets that served the purpose of social networking between users or of relaying information from the Incel community. Typical examples of this included retweeting tweets from larger accounts and sharing links to and updates about forums and websites dedicated to Incel community discussions, including articles from Incel.blog, Incels.wiki, and other relevant websites.

*Denouncing Violence:* This code arose due to the higher volume of tweets expressly denouncing a relationship between involuntary celibacy and a propensity for violence.

*Responses to Criticism:* This code needed to be included because numerous tweets contained arguments between users and counterpoints to external criticisms.

*Fatalism:* The *Fatalism* code was an expected code, as it included sentiments of self-loathing, evidence of depression, suicidal ideation, and self-defeating terminology (“It’s all over”). These sentiments align with the Blackpill

philosophy, which is apparently the dominant philosophical camp within the Incelosphere. A distinction was made between expressions of interest in self-harm and violence towards others following previous linguistic studies of Incel discourse that distinguished between suicidal sentiments and threats to perform off-line violence (Jaki et al. 2019; O'Malley et al. 2020). Realistically, it is almost impossible to verify whether or not an anonymous user threatening suicide actually will harm themselves; whereas a perpetrator of mass-violence may be associated with online aliases after the fact, providing evidence that they were indeed interested in violence. This is not to say that suicidal ideations may be overlooked as disingenuous but based on existing knowledge it is appropriate to code such expressions along with similar sentiments that are directly associated with similar notions commonly shared among Incels.

*Anti-Normie/Anti-PUAs:* The content of this code included expressions of resentment towards “normal” people (that is, non-involuntarily celibate people), pickup artists, and anyone offering advice as a solution to involuntary celibacy. Such advice includes recommendations to improve one’s personality, exercise routinely, “just put yourself out there,” and the likes.

*Blackpill/Anti-Coping:* Similarly, this code represents negative responses to Bluepills and other Incel identities which seek to “cope,” meaning that they ascribe to advice and the belief that they may acquire a relationship through self-improvement. This code correlates to a Blackpill view of other Incel identities.

*Bluepill/Maxxing*: On the other hand, this code demonstrates the opposite: that one may improve themselves in order to acquire a relationship. This code included mentions of self-improvement, optimism, and encouragement of others and themselves.

*Pro-Femcel*: Finally, this code included mentions of the notion that women can experience involuntary celibacy, which is eschewed by the typical Blackpill view.

## CHAPTER 6: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In total, thematic codes were recorded in 615 instances for the 2020 dataset, and in 399 for the 2021 dataset, for a total of 1014 instances during 2020 and 2021. Each of the fifteen thematic codes was present in 2020 and in 2021, though the distribution of code occurrence varied greatly between codes. The following is a breakdown of the code occurrences for each of the two years, as well as in totality.

### *Codes found for 2020*

The code occurrences documented for 2020 are listed below, as well as in Appendix A and Appendix B, Figure 6.

*Racism: 2*

*Violence Towards Others: 2*

*Trans-/Homophobia: 2*

*Misogyny: 97*

*Anti-Feminism: 18*

*Political/Media Organizations: 86*

*Academia: 8*

*Networking/Informative: 116*

*Denouncing Violence: 54*

*Responses to Criticism: 38*

*Fatalism: 68*

*Anti-Normie/Anti-PUAs: 30*

*Blackpill/Anti-Coping: 68*

*Bluepill/Maxxing: 23*

*Pro-Femcel: 3*

*Codes found for 2021*

The code occurrences documented for 2021 are listed below, as well as in Appendix A and Appendix B, Figure 7.

*Racism: 1*

*Violence Towards Others: 4*

*Trans-/Homophobia: 1*

*Misogyny: 46*

*Anti-Feminism: 12*

*Political/Media Organizations: 73*

*Academia: 19*

*Networking/Informative: 110*

*Denouncing Violence: 41*

*Responses to Criticism: 31*

*Fatalism: 18*

*Anti-Normie/Anti-PUAs: 6*

*Blackpill/Anti-Coping: 18*

*Bluepill/Maxxing: 18*

*Pro-Femcel: 1*

*Codes found in total*

The code occurrences documented for 2020 and 2021 are listed below, as well as in Appendix A.

*Racism: 3*

*Violence Towards Others: 6*

*Trans-/Homophobia: 3*

*Misogyny: 143*

*Anti-Feminism: 30*

*Political/Media Organizations: 159*

*Academia: 27*

*Networking/Informative: 226*

*Denouncing Violence: 95*

*Responses to Criticism: 69*

*Fatalism*: 86

*Anti-Normie/Anti-PUAs*: 36

*Blackpill/Anti-Coping*: 86

*Bluepill/Maxxing*: 41

*Pro-Femcel*: 4

### *Discussion*

*Racism, Violence Towards Others, and Trans-/Homophobia*: The results for these codes were surprising, as they comprise a negligible portion of code occurrences, though they were predicted to be prevalent. This could be a result of sampling bias due to Twitter's role in removing extreme content that would be permissible on Incel-operated websites and forums.

Perhaps another explanation for the lack of racial derogation in content stems from the fact that Incels are more ethnically diverse than outsiders may expect. Two surveys conducted by moderators on Incel websites revealed that Caucasians comprised roughly 52% of the community (Incels.wiki).

*Misogyny*: Misogyny accounted for a significant portion of the code occurrences. This fits with existing research (Ganesh 2017; Ging 2017; Jaki et al. 2018; Bratich & Banet-Weiser 2019; Labbaf 2020), which found that Incels were quick to adopt misogynistic rhetoric and attribute negative qualities to women in their discourse. Misogynistic content appears to be less regulated by Twitter moderators, as opposed to *Racism, Violence, and Trans-/Homophobia*, likely

because Incels' use of misogyny is more subtle and not overtly violent. This could provide further evidence of the protest masculinity performed by Incels, as, once again, a rejection of femininity is prioritized over attempts to promote a hegemonic masculinity within the community.

*Anti-Feminism:* While not constituting a significant portion of the code occurrences, the anti-feminist content was noteworthy because it specifically targeted movement feminism and issues of women's rights with derision and counterpoints typical of the redpill philosophy. In a break from traditional gender norms, a sentiment of panic stemming from the fear that women were too powerful underlined some of the Incel content. This solidifies the connection between Incels and the greater manosphere in terms of shared beliefs regarding movement feminism.

*Political/Media Organizations:* Surprisingly, content under this code contributed to a large portion of the code occurrences. Of course, this could be skewed as 2020 and 2021 have been fractious political years, but importantly, the political views varied greatly, ranging from far-right to far-left and everything in between. The overarching fear of censorship was shared across the political spectrum, as was a contempt for mainstream media and social media platforms, including Twitter, to whom the Incels attributed censorship of their materials.

*Academia:* This code occurred nearly as frequently as *Anti-Feminism* and demonstrated Incels' explicit distrust of academics, especially the social sciences.

Such distrust seems to arise from the belief that academics are attempting to villainize Incels without properly understanding Incels. Some Incels even proposed that academics enjoyed villainizing Incels because doing so justifies greater funding for their research.

*Networking/Informative:* This most frequent code provides strong evidence that a mechanism of discipline occurs between Incels. More than any other purpose, Incels use Twitter for social networking and to relay information pertinent to the Incel identity. Such information includes biographies of historical figures believed to be Incels (H.P. Lovecraft and Isaac Newton, to name two), articles written by Incels (on topics such as the real meaning of being a blackpill), and criticisms of Incel accounts deviating from standard behavior.

These critical tweets serve a disciplinary purpose in informing the performance of involuntary celibacy online. Ostracization, humiliation, and castigation by one's peers are tactics culminating in a discipline protest masculinity (Walker 2006).

Further, the phenomenon of social networking within a group of people for the purpose of support (which was also observed) is not uncommon among groups of men using the internet (Addis and Hoffman 2017; Iwamoto et al.2018; McKenzie et al. 2018; Cole and Davidson 2019;); however, the sheer volume of networking and informational tweets was unexpected. This suggests that the

original function of support is still at work for Incels on Twitter, with discipline serving a secondary function (Donnelly et al. 2001; Cottee 2021).

*Denouncing Violence:* Unexpectedly, a significant number of code occurrences arose from an active denunciation of violence. Though Incels promoting violence is well-documented (and perhaps dampened on Twitter due to Twitter's moderation), their reprimands against violence appear novel. If offline violence represents anomic protest masculinity (which makes the experiences of nonviolent Incels much more difficult), then online repudiation of violence may be a form of discipline in terms of damage control against the stereotype of the violent Incel.

*Responses to Criticism:* These were simply rebuttals by Incels towards outside criticism. Oftentimes, the Incels were responding to users interested in harassment rather than debate.

*Fatalism:* Expectedly, this code comprised a significant percentage of the code occurrences. This follows previous findings, as self-loathing is a core philosophy of the Incel performance (Ganesh 2017; Ging 2017; Jaki et al. 2018; Bratich & Banet-Weiser 2019; Labbaf 2020).

*Anti-Normie/Anti-PUAs:* This code represented a moderate portion of the code occurrences. Instances of this code mostly included accusations that pickup artists were scammers and that people offering advice were trying to force Incels to cope. It makes sense that this code would comprise a moderate portion, because

generally, Incels harbor resentment towards normies, pickup artists, and those who promote coping.

*Blackpill/Anti-Coping*: Falling in line with the *Anti-Normie/Anti-PUAs* and the *Fatalism* results, this code also represented a moderate percentage of the data. Certain Incels (mostly blackpills) not only harbor resentment to outsiders and those who promote coping, but to the notion of coping itself. Therefore, Incels who are optimistic and believe in coping (bluepills) received criticism for such belief. It should be noted that the *Blackpill/Anti-Coping* and *Fatalism* codes occurred the same number of times in both data sets. This finding further informs an understanding of the role blackpilled Incels are expected to play, as publicly threatening self-harm and professing the meaninglessness of one's life are methods to convey one's alignment with the blackpill philosophy.

*Bluepill/Maxxing*: Unlike the codes corresponding to blackpill philosophy, tweets featuring this code expressed support for maxxing and a tone of optimism, in accordance with the bluepill philosophy.

*Pro-Femcel*: Unsurprisingly, this code only occurred in 4 instances total. This was expected, as Incels are generally hostile to the notion that women can experience involuntary celibacy.

## CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

Although the results were unexpected in some instances, findings generally aligned with expected outcomes based upon previous research into Incel discourse. Similarly, the code occurrences did not vary much in terms of proportionality between the two years, further solidifying theories behind Incel discursive practices.

Rather than directing violence indiscriminately towards others, Incels use Twitter primarily as a networking platform where communication between members may take one of two forms: express support for or, explicit animosity to, content. In either case, it should be noted that publicity is employed to garner support or opposition towards another's tweet. As an example, during this research it was discovered that an internal conflict exists between Incels who follow the bluepill-aligned *Incel.wiki*, and those who subscribe to the blackpill-aligned *Incels.wiki*. The animosity between these camps was publicly displayed through interactions between users.

An analysis of artifacts depicting Incel interactions on Twitter revealed that they engage in some types of discipline typical of groups portraying a protest masculinity (Walker 2006; Nath 2010; Muir 2013; Holligan and McLean 2018; Ashlee, Sasso, & Witkowicki 2020). Tactics for discipline between users include argumentation, ostracization, slander, humiliation, and endorsement; these

informal methods are publicly applied by users to correct behavior in others, a phenomenon that has been noted in online communities before (McGee 2012). This fact produces two noteworthy points: that a disciplined form of involuntary celibacy may be performed by some Incels, and that expressions of personal anguish appear to be less important among Incels on Twitter than disciplining problematic behavior within the subculture. If the former point is accurate, then disciplined protest masculinity is an appropriate theoretical approach to help future researchers rationalize involuntary celibacy. In upcoming research, an Incel may be conceptualized as a person performing a non-hegemonic masculinity that is developed through discipline performed by other individuals performing the same role.

Addressing the later point, the content of tweets in response to a user's ruminations on suicide or depression heavily expressed solidarity with such feelings. Respondents shared similar experiences, but not words of support or encouragement; instead, these responses often exhorted others to ignore encouragement and to embrace the blackpill philosophy. Such discussions frequently included mentions of "cucked bluepills" who embraced supposed falsehoods by choosing to pursue self-improvement as an avenue to change their condition. In such cases, community discussions were not focused on nullifying the anger that the original poster expressed, instead they directed that hostility to members of the incelosphere who did not share their opinions. Moments which

otherwise might allow users to express anguish in a supportive environment are converted instead into debates where opinions are posited for an audience to view. Therefore, it can be concluded from this data that Incel discourse is primarily public spectacle rather than reflective of the raw, personal anguish of individuals.

Overall, the results showed an adherence to the expected Incel networking and discourse, as well as evidence of a strong discipline usage of Twitter between Incels. As this study examined posts only on Twitter from and from the last year-and-a-half, there are significant limitations which hamper the generalizability of these results. Yet the fact that misogyny and self-hatred remain so characteristic of their discourse suggests that these are core values within the subculture; values that are not specific to Twitter but seem shared across all platforms where this community manifests online.

Further studies should attempt to identify mechanisms of discipline within Incel discussions on websites that are less regulated than Twitter, and perhaps through longitudinal analyses of user activity. Such work could test the validity of this research by applying a theoretical framework incorporating protest masculinity to analyses of Incel behaviors on platforms other than Twitter. Additionally, it will be necessary for scholars to study the people behind the online personas in their offline lives in order to advance the literature on Incels. Connecting real people and experiences with digital identities could be one of the

greatest ways to confirm the extent to which Incels constitute a threat to others, if at all.

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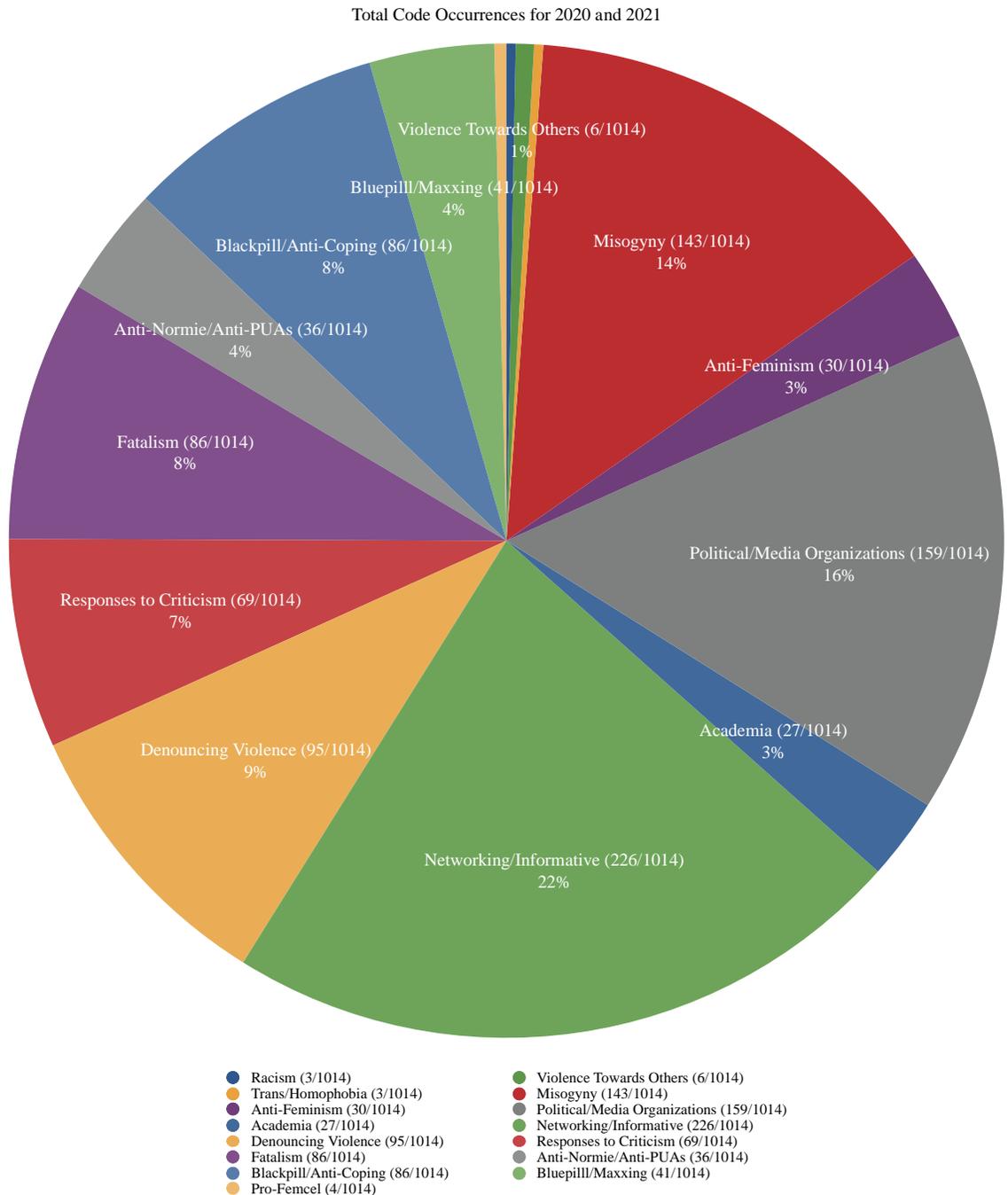
## APPENDICES

### *Appendix A: Total Instances of Code Occurrences in 2020 and 2021*

*Table 1: Total Instances of Code Occurrences*

<b>Code</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>Total</b>
Racism	2	1	3
Violence	2	4	6
Trans-/Homophobia	2	1	3
Misogyny	97	46	143
Anti-Feminism	18	12	30
Political/Media Organizations	86	73	159
Academia	8	19	27
Networking/Informative	116	110	226
Denouncing Violence	54	41	95
Responses to Criticism	38	31	69
Fatalism	68	18	86
Anti-Normie/Anti-PUAs	30	6	36
Blackpill/Anti-Coping	68	18	86
Bluepill/Maxxing	23	18	41
Pro-Femcel	3	1	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>615</b>	<b>399</b>	<b>1014</b>

Figure 5: Total Code Occurrences for 2020 and 2021



## Appendix B: Percentages of Code Occurrences, by Year

Figure 6: Total Code Occurrences for 2020

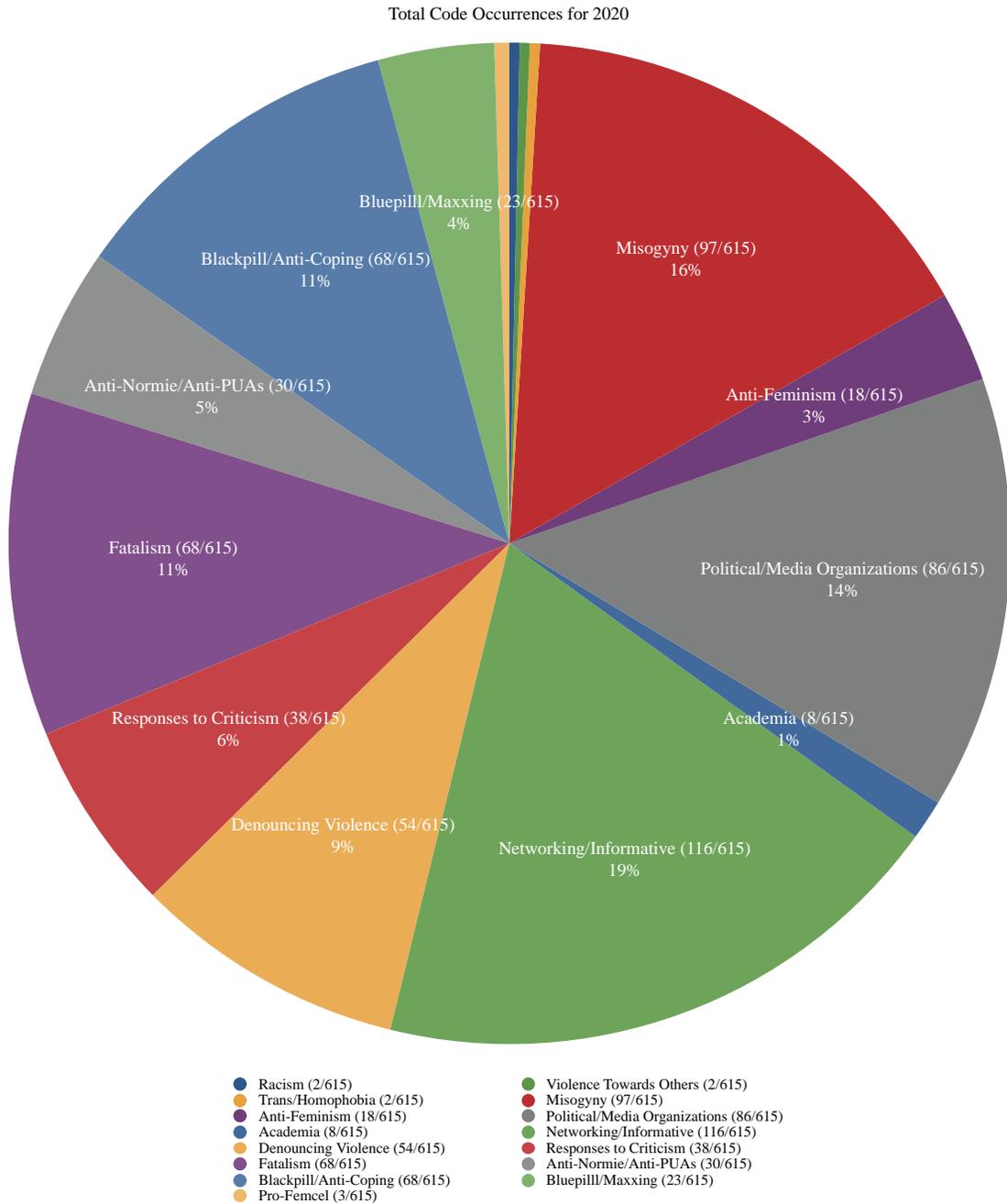


Figure 7: Total Code Occurrences for 2021

