

The Incel Rebellion

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Over the past two decades, digital technologies have come to permeate ever more aspects of contemporary life. This trend looks to continue and has profound implications for the social sciences, particularly criminology, with technology-facilitated offences now arguably constituting the most dynamic and rapidly growing area of contemporary crime. Despite this development, the discipline of criminology has been slow to embrace the critical study of technology-facilitated offences and social harms, with most research conducted in this area still informed by a relatively narrow range of cybersecurity and applied criminological perspectives.

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The Incel Rebellion: The Rise of the Manosphere and the Virtual War Against Women

BY

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

This book is dedicated to all those whose lives have
been affected by gender-based violence.

Praise for *The Incel Rebellion: The Rise of the Manosphere and the Virtual War Against Women* (KU)

“Drawing on extensive empirical research and a masterful use of socio-criminological understanding, Dr Sugiura’s new book offers an incisive and timely analysis of the realities and the threats of the incel community. I hope this book will soon become a key reference point for anyone with an interest in the relationship between misogynistic ideologies and the wider socio-political climate, online harms, and qualitative digital research approaches.”

*Dr Anita Lavorgna, Associate Professor in Criminology,
University of Southampton*

“In *Incel Rebellion* Lisa Sugiura provides a rare empirical insight into the subcultures and practices of incel communities in the manosphere. The result is a compelling and innovative account of how some men find their way into incel communities, as well as the links between such spaces and wider misogyny in our increasingly digital society. This book is an outstanding contribution to the field of digital criminology and will be an essential resource for those studying cybercrime and other online harms.”

*Anastasia Powell, Associate Professor Criminology &
Justice Studies, RMIT University (Melbourne).*

“*The Incel Rebellion: The Rise of the Manosphere and the Virtual War Against Women* is an extremely timely and brilliant exploration of a pressing and immediate area of concern; one that has direct implications for safety, security, policy, and the general moral health of society. Cutting across various disciplines, including gender studies, criminology, and terrorism studies, Dr Sugiura masterfully navigates a number of important and complex considerations, including why people self-identify as incels, and what motivates them to join these types of communities. The jewel in the crown is the author’s collection and use of qualitative interviews with current and former incels. As far as I’m aware, this is the first empirical academic study of its kind, and the rich data brings this fascinating area of research alive. This book is an absolute must for anyone interested in this topic and should form part of the foundation for any future work.”

Dr Suraj Lakhani Lecturer in Criminology and Sociology Sussex University

“Sugiura’s *Incel Rebellion* is a must read for anyone wanting to understand the history and ideology around the Incel community. In a time where male supremacy is becoming an increasing security concern, Sugiura expertly details the links existing between the so-called ‘manosphere’, white supremacy, and the mainstream political arena. In addition to providing a stellar account of the history of male supremacism, Sugiura reflects on the methodological and ethical issues that come from being a woman studying misogyny, an account that will no doubt be extremely valuable for future researchers wishing to conduct similar studies. Most importantly, this book provides clear evidence that extreme misogyny is not just a problem for the fringe, but rather has crept into the mainstream infecting the normative culture of our western societies.”

*Ashton Kingdon - Doctoral Fellow at the Centre for
Analysis of the Radical Right*

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Abbreviations

Incel – Involuntary Celibate
MGTOW – Men Going Their Own Way
MLM – Men’s Liberation Movement
MRA – Men’s Rights Activist
MRM – Men’s Rights Movement
PUA – Pick Up Artists
SMP – Sexual Market Place
SMV – Sexual Market Value
WLM – Women’s Liberation Movement
XRW – Extreme Right Wing

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Glossary of Terms

Men's Rights Activists (MRAs) are driven by anger and want to effect change, namely a return to the traditional values where women are subordinate to men. Women need to be put back in their place and to do so abuse of women, particularly feminists, is encouraged.

Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW)

Despite what its name may imply, MGTOW members weaponise homophobia in order to solidify their heterosexuality in a space that rejects women, and they use online harassment to police the borders of hegemonic and toxic masculinity. The MGTOW movement differs slightly from much of the manosphere as it rejects any form of relationship with women, but the same issues of violence and harassment are present.

Pick Up Artists (PUAs) view women as mere objects, bodies to be tricked into sex. There is no consideration of women as autonomous human beings worthy of honesty or respect; moreover, they are simply shallow and motivated by looks and money, and thus fair game to be deceived and used for sexual purposes because that is all they are good for. Pick up artistry is informed by a hegemonic ideal of what it is to be masculine evident in the lad culture and banter so pervasive in contemporary society – link with ladette culture in the 1990s/2000s.

<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2019/nov/05/pickup-artists-teaching-men-approach-women-industry-street-harassment>

Fathers for Justice (FFJ)

Unlike the aforementioned groups residing in the manosphere, the primary focus for FFJ is actual men's problems rather than espousing vitriol against women, progressiveness and feminism. FFJ is concerned with paternal rights and ensuring that fathers have access to their children when relationships break down, when Criminal Justice Systems entrenched in sexist, conservative ideals ordinarily operate in favour of the mother. In this respect, the continuation of traditional gender roles, the desire and ideal of other groups in the manosphere, marginalises men and devalues their status as parents.

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Author Biography

Lisa Sugiura is Senior Lecturer in Criminology and Cybercrime at the Institute of Criminal Justice Studies at the University of Portsmouth. Her research examines the intersections of gender-based abuse, harassment, sexual violence and technology, and she is the author of *Respectable Deviance and Purchasing Medicine Online: Opportunities and Risks for Consumers* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018). She has worked on projects, which includes funding from the UK National Cyber Security Centre and the UK Home Office, investigating the language of cybersexism, victims of computer misuse and extremist and misogynistic behaviours in incel communities. She has been the Lead Investigator on a UK Home Office-funded project on technology-facilitated domestic abuse. She is the Deputy Director of the Cybercrime Awareness Clinic, which won the UK National Cybercrime Awareness award in 2020.

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Thanks to my many feminist friends, colleagues and mentors in Criminology, Cybercrime and elsewhere, in particular to Alessia – working on the cybersexism project with you provided me with the initial inspiration to continue researching this field; Anita – the most efficient writing partner, whom collaborating with is always a joy, and who provided me with productive opportunities to reflect upon the research as well as an empathetic ear; Anastasia – my inspirational mentor and friend who has encouraged me, helped me grow as an academic and who first suggested that I should write this book; and Sarah – who I credit in helping me to have the courage to believe in myself. Thanks also to April, Ashton, Anna, Harri and Kath for your friendship, wisdom and for helping to keep me sane. I am also deeply grateful to my male mentors, colleagues and friends – Mark, Pete, Paul, Vas, Jason, Suraj and Adam – who have supported and encouraged me and inspired me to not set boundaries upon myself. I express my heartfelt thanks foremost to my family – to Dad, Mum, Denise, Kevin, Bill and Dot, thank you for standing by me and believing in me. Josh and Dylan, you are the reason I do what I do, and I hope that in some way I am contributing to making the world a better place for you. Matt, I will forever be grateful for you, thank you for being the most supportive, thoughtful and grounded person I know.

Finally, thank you to my participants who spoke honestly and openly with me and treated me respectfully. Thank you for enabling me to appreciate the humanity within the incel community.

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The Incel Vocabulary

I have tried to include as comprehensive a guide to incel words and neologisms as possible, drawn from my research and the incel wiki page, but there is probably terminology that I have not encountered and so has not been included here. Nevertheless, hopefully, the following is useful in providing insight into the self-created world of the incel, reflecting their worldview.

Alpha – highest ranking (male)

AM – Alex Minassian who killed multiple people in Toronto 2018

Ascension – leaving incelhood behind (usually by entering into a romantic relationship with a woman, unclear how this is distinct from betabuxx or being cucked)

Aspie – someone on the autistic spectrum

AWALT – All Women Are Like That (see also EWALT – Enough Women Are Like That)

Becky – an average young woman, subordinate to Stacy in terms of looks and social status

Beta – below alpha – lacking in social skills and attractiveness to be an alpha – some incels, who do not consider themselves to be that ugly/have some redeeming qualities such as money/good job, etc., refer to themselves as betas

Betabuxx – a man who has been able to find a female partner. However, incels believe that this happens when a woman has ‘hit the wall’ and has lost their sexual market value (SMV) and because they desperately have settled for a man who can (financially) support them. Therefore, incels dislike and are judgemental of men who betabuxx, believing they are being cucked

Blackpill – the incel ideology, the nihilistic version of the redpill (TRP)

Blackops2cel (also known as St.BlackOps2Cel) – drawing on the computer game Call of Duty Black Ops II, where an image of a gamer has been appropriated by incels as physically representative of their community. The individual’s name and the origins of the photo are unknown but he is held to be typical of what an incel looks like

Bluepill – opposite to the redpill (TRP), belief in a false reality, an inability to appreciate nuance and unquestionably accepting conventional sources and convenient tropes

Braincels – r/braincels the most popular incel subreddit after r/incels was removed in 2017. This too was shut down in September 2019, amid concerns that the release of the Hollywood movie *Joker* would encourage further incel inspired attacks.

Buster – a Chad version of a dog

Chad (chadlite, chadrone) – the antithesis of incel, a man who is sexually successful with women. Incels have a complicated relationship with Chads; on the one hand, they despise them for being alpha and winning the ‘genetic lottery’, while on the other hand, they idolise them for their ability to access and use women

Chang – East Asian Chad

Chadpreet – Indian Chad

Chaddam – Arabic Chad

Cock carousel (‘riding the cock carousel’) – incels think that women want to have sex with as many alpha Chads as possible

Cope – all incels can do is cope as (according to the blackpill) it is impossible to improve or change their situations, as their problems are structural rather than individual

Cuck – a man whose wife/girlfriend is cheating on him with another man (usually a Chad). There are also racial connotations as the word is often used in relation to a white woman cheating with a black man

Currycel – an incel who is of Indian descent

Dogpill – suggestion that human females prefer to have sex with dogs over human male (virgins)

ER (Saint Elliot, The Supreme Gentleman) – Elliot Rodger, who killed multiple people in Isla Vista, California, in 2014

Fakecel – someone who is not a real incel. They might have had (regular) sex with a legitimate partner (not a sex worker), thus invalidating their incel status

Fap – masturbate

Femcel – female incel; however, (male) incels claim that women cannot really be incels because they all can have sex if they want it.

Femoid (female humanoid, female android) – used to describe women, demonstrating they are subhuman, necessary of dehumanisation

Fuel (suicide fuel, life fuel) – posts which provoke emotion in users

Gf – girlfriend

Gymcel – an incel who copes by going to the gym

Heightcel – a short incel (height is viewed as a determinative of sexual success, and similar to race or bone structure, is seen as immutable and therefore a barrier to incels not being incels)

Hitting the wall – a woman when she reaches her 30s is used up and starts to lose her looks and will settle for a less attractive partner on account of needing the financial security

Hole – a woman, reducing women down to mere sex objects

Hypergamy – originating in the caste system in India meaning dating or marrying up, the belief that women will only mate with high-status males. Involves a co-option of Pareto's 80/20 rule – that the top 20% of men have the top 80% of women competing for them, while the bottom 80% of men are competing for the bottom 20% of women.

Incel – involuntarily celibate, someone who is unable to have sex due to reasons beyond their control

Incels.co (formerly incels.me) currently the most prominent incel forum. Set up in November 2017 after the closure of r/incels and created by Sergeant Incel. Internal surveys suggest that the majority of its members are white.

Inceltears – subreddit dedicated to critiquing incels. Screenshots of extreme and shockingly offensive content are regularly taken from other incel communities and posted, leading to some threads/sites being closed

It – a woman

It's over (followed with 'it never began') – men who are ugly, short, not white, or have small wrists have no possibility of ever being happy or sexually satisfied.

JBW – just be white, belief that women will primarily choose white men to be their sexual or romantic partners

JFL – just fucking lol, used to show incredulity

KTHHFV – kissless, touchless, hugless, handholdless, friendless, virgin – status markers within the incel community

LDAR – lay down and rot

Lifefuel – positivity, enabling incels to regain their faith in humanity (see also whitepill)

Looksmatch – someone who is your match in terms of appearance. Incels claim to be able to objectively rate people's appearance, and optimal relationships are those in which partners are looksmatched

Looksmaxxing – an attempt to improve one's appearance (rejected by incels who in ascribing to the blackpill would not see any point in attempting looksmaxxing)

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LMS – looks money status

Manlet – a short incel

Meeks – the idea that women are attracted to men purely on their aesthetic appearance, with no consideration about personality. Drawn from Jeremy Meeks who was dubbed ‘America’s most attractive felon’ after his mugshot went viral and he received significant attention from women while in prison. He later became a fashion model

Mentalcel – a man who is celibate due to his mental health, for example, those who have autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) but can also relate to low intelligence

Mogs (AMOG – alpha male of group, heightmogged, lifemogged) – to be dominated by another man’s looks

NEET – not in education, employment or training (not viewed positively among the community)

Noodles – persons of East or Southeast Asian descent

Normie – non-blackpillers/believers, those who have an inferior worldview and belief system, people who are neurotypical, average looking and of average intelligence

Omega – incels below beta

Postmaxx – posting to get likes/attention

Racepill – women are more racist than men due to the partners they choose

Ricecel – an incel who is of East or Southeast Asian descent

r/incels – most prolific incel site that was closed down in November 2017 for inciting violence against women, encouraging rape as well as castration of attractive men.

Roastie – a woman whose labia has stretched to replicate a roast beef sandwich from having sex with lots of men

Rope (fuel) – suicide ideation, something that causes a non-whitepilled incel to want to end their life

SEA – Southeast Asia

SIMP – Suckas Idolising Mediocre Pussy, guy overly desperate for women, puts women before men in order to obtain sex, does way too much for women who don’t deserve it

SMV – sexual market value

Snake – a woman

Stacy – the most attractive of women, has sex with lots of men (usually Chads) on account of their looks, is stereotypically an unintelligent bimbo

SUI – suicide

Tallcel – a fake incel (tallness equates with sexual success)

Toilet – a woman

TRP – the redpill – rejection and opposite of the bluepill. Allows people to understand the truth about the world. Differs from the blackpill in that it offers the belief that the system can be played

Truecel – true incel, purity of the incel ideology – have never kissed/touched a woman and genuinely are unable to have sex despite having tried

Tyrone – a black man who is a Chad equivalent, has racist and classist connotations. Tyrone might cuck other men, but Stacys will always seek out a white man to settle down with because they have more power and status

Validation seeking – seeking out compliments to boost one's own confidence, for example, women (Beckys) using dating apps for this purpose

Volcel – incels who could have sex (with women) but have voluntarily chosen not to

Whitepill – worldview based on the maximisation of happiness through an individual accepting his situation, a stoic extension of the blackpill

Wristcel – incels who have small wrists

Zeta – incels who consider themselves to be the absolute lowest of the low

Epigraphs

There are two reasons why people don't support the word feminist: The first is they don't know what it means. The second is they do know what it means. Gloria Steinem

Male fantasy is seen as something that can create reality whereas female fantasy is seen as something used for escape. bell hooks.

Chapter 1

An Introduction to Incel

Humanity ... All of my suffering on this world has been at the hands of humanity. Particularly women. It has made me realize just how brutal and twisted humanity is as a species. All I ever wanted was to fit in and live a happy life amongst humanity, but I was cast out and rejected, forced to endure an existence of loneliness and insignificant, all because the females of the human species were incapable of seeing the value in me.

Twenty-two-year-old Elliot Rodger uploaded a 141-page manifesto online shortly before he stabbed and shot people in Isla Vista California 23 May 2014, killing six, and then himself. Rodger was a member of PUAHate (Pick Up Artists, PUAs) and ForeverAlone, online communities that actively espoused misogyny and promoted techniques to manipulate women into sex. ‘The girls don’t flock to the gentlemen. They flock to the alpha male’, Rodger wrote to support his violence. ‘Who’s the alpha male now, bitches?’ His attack spurred women to share their experiences of misogyny online via the hashtag #YesAllWomen and highlighted the lure of the men’s rights movement (MRM). Prior to Rodger, though, the term incel was relatively unknown in the wider public sphere, confined to spaces online within the so-called manosphere. The manosphere is comprised of disparate, conflicting and overlapping men’s groups, which share a hatred of women and antifeminism (Ging, 2017). After Rodger’s attack and subsequent acts of violence inspired by him (see in particular Parkland, 2018; Toronto, 2018, 2020), media attention has turned to incels, presenting them as violent and extremist misogynists. It is notable, however, that Rodger never used the term incel to describe himself, yet he has become an idol, a martyr for the incel cause, revered by many in the community.

Previously, these groups were able to operate relatively undetected or were dismissed as minority deviant fringe groups and subject to limited concern about the harmful impacts of their ideologies. Although there are now significant amounts of interest in online Men’s Rights Activists (MRAs) more broadly (Ging, 2017; Jaki et al., 2019; Marwick & Caplan, 2018; Nagle, 2017) due to concerns about

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their incitement of hatred and violence, particularly against women, there is little understanding about the evolution, formation and spread of incels.

Incel as a subculture is not an isolated phenomenon; it is part of larger backlash against feminism propelled by the manosphere, consisting of groups of men all connected by their belief that feminine values have corrupted society and men need to retaliate against this misandrist culture to preserve their very survival (Marwick & Caplan, 2018). Web 2.0 has facilitated an assortment of particularly toxic digital MRA spaces, what Massanari (2017, p. 329) terms 'toxic technocultures'. These are a loosely connected and amorphous hub for 'men's issues', noted for its virulent antifeminism, extreme misogyny and connections with the alt-right. The uniting ideological feature of the manosphere is an antipathy towards feminism and a pervading sense of (white) male victimisation. Groups within the manosphere involve MRAs, PUAs, Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW), Tradcons, NoFappers, Fathers for Justice, as well as incels. Although the main interests of each group may differ, their common language creates a unified identity. Although incel is receiving increased academic scrutiny, when undertaking the research for this book, there was limited engagement with those who self-identify as incel to understand their motivations and behaviours and their evolution and spread. Studies focussing on incels have been notoriously difficult to conduct, due to the evasive and hostile nature of those who are involuntarily celibate (Burgess, Donnelly, Dillar, & Davis, 2001). Research of the incel community is in its infancy but is a growing area of interest; to date, incel studies have examined the underlying misogynistic framework constructing the incel ideology (Baele, Brace, & Coan, 2019; O'Malley, Holt, & Holt, 2020; Witt, 2020); some have compared (Hoffman, Ware, & Shapiro, 2020) or contrasted (Cottee, 2020) what they perceive to be incel terrorism with Islamist and right-wing counterparts; others have done this alongside policy framework suggestions seeking to prevent future attacks by the radicalised (Tomkinson, Harper, & Attwell, 2020). There have also been notable analyses of the content of specific online forums frequented by incels (Ging, 2017) – demonstrating the world view therein (Baele et al., 2019), the presence of femmephobia and the hatred of hyper-femininity (Menzie, 2020) and, finally, misogyny, victimhood and fatalism (Cottee, 2020). There is also literature regarding incels written from a journalistic standpoint (see Beauchamp, 2019; Kim, 2014; Penny, 2014a, b; Tait, 2018; Williamson, 2018). This book, however, addresses the void within the current cannon relating to the examination of the culture and formation of incels and situates this within a criminological feminist framework.

The purpose of this book is to provide an informed and cultural understanding into incel and more broadly the scope and nature of the manosphere. Although this book explores the rhetoric and ideology espoused within the manosphere and the sorts of groups encompassed within these online spaces, the particular focus is on those who identify as involuntary celibates. This book will consider the historical origins of the MRM pre-internet and how it evolved, including its change in perspective from initially supporting feminism to viewing it as problematic and the cause of men's emasculation and wider societal failings; to show how the emergence of incel aligned with this ideology.

The link between the alt-right, incel and the larger manosphere has been debated (Beauchamp, 2019; Nagle, 2017; Ribeiro et al., 2020; Stokel-Walker, 2021; Young, 2019). Consisting of people on the political right who have established their own movement distinct from the mainstream Republican establishment, the alt-right relates to white nationalists, white supremacists and race realists, as well as neo-nazis or neo fascists. Incels deny any connections with the alt-right or, indeed, having a political purpose; however, there are overlapping ideologies, which will be addressed in this book.

I also consider the role digital technologies play in propagating violence and hatred against women, particularly the ways in which anti-feminist rhetoric and ideology on platforms such as YouTube, Reddit and 4chan appears to be deliberately targeted towards young men and boys and presented as harmless or satirical media in the forms of images, videos and memes. Reddit, in particular, was a key location for this research. A social news platform enabling users to discuss and vote on content submitted by users, Reddit originated from the United States and is one of the most widely used platforms globally with 430 million active users monthly worldwide.¹ Comprising myriad topics, including niche information undiscoverable elsewhere, Reddit is a hotbed of satire and memes birthing cultural trends, hence it is extremely popular with younger people. While there is some moderation, there is abundant inappropriate content including pornography, violent material, suicide tips and hate speech, thus providing the natural environment for incel to flourish.

The central argument of this book is that although incels are an extreme manifestation of misogyny, their problematic attitudes are not contained to the online spaces they frequent, rather they are symbolic of structural misogyny and patriarchal systems of socialisation. Moreover, the ideology espoused within incel communities is interwoven with the wider socio-political climate. This type of extremist behaviour is not confined to online spaces but is exacerbated by digital technologies. Providing significant implications for research, policy and practice in regard to new forms and representations of hatred and extremism, this book is of interest to a broad range of practitioners, law enforcement and scholars across criminology, sociology, terrorism studies, gender, media and cultural studies, politics, as well as expanding the field of cybercrime research and beyond.

The growth of a misogynistic ideology manifested in incel has discreetly grown more ubiquitous leading to the emergence of what has been termed a domestic terrorism threat (Hoffman et al., 2020). It is difficult to ascertain the exact numbers of incels worldwide; however, users and visits to incel sites indicate that members are in the tens of thousands, while the media has emphasised an apparent significant following in North America and Europe. Although only a small minority of those ascribing to the incel ideology mobilise to actual physical violence, incels are presenting a major challenge for law enforcement and security services focussed on countering terrorism and extremist violence, with fears about

¹<https://www.statista.com/topics/5672/reddit/#dossierSummary>

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incel and male supremacist radicalisation and ideological grooming amongst the cacophony of misogynistic and hate-fuelled bile on incel spaces.

Drawing on extensive research involving analysis of various types of online data and interviews with incels, this book provides original and timely insight into this subcultural group, the development of the ‘Manosphere’, how and why people join these communities and self-identify as incels and the extent to which the influence and philosophy of incel and the incelsphere draws on and is penetrating mainstream culture and political discourse, as well as the harmful impacts. This book also explores the assumption that it is ordinarily young white Western males who not only appear to populate the majority of such groups but who are also targeted by the men’s rights discourse and propaganda disseminated on social media platforms. Discussions within this book will highlight the many contradictions present in incel ideology, arguments and behaviours and to question whether these are deliberate – in order to confuse outsiders, or if these are unrecognised or ignored within the incel community, obscured by a greater purpose of adhering to incel culture. There is a great deal of content within incel communities, designed to troll or snare outsiders, who can then be accused of cherry-picking content. It is fundamental to be critical of the material available, and I have attempted to parse out what is bona fide incel subject matter or representative of incel philosophies, informed by the individuals I directly spoke with.

Incel

The term incel is a portmanteau of the words involuntary and celibate, those who adopt the name view themselves as unsuccessful in obtaining sex and romantic relationships, with those they desire. The etymology of the term can be traced to a queer female student – Alana Boltwood – in 1993, who in seeking support from like-minded others, on her website, described incel as ‘anybody of any gender who was lonely, had never had sex or who hadn’t had a relationship in a long time’. From its original virtuous intentions, incel has since been appropriated (foremost by men) and has come to represent a community solidified in its hatred towards women. This is in contrast to the gender inclusive community formerly envisaged.

In much of the academic literature, incel has been described as a movement (Conley, 2020; Hoffman et al., 2020; Menzie, 2020; Palma, 2019; Papadamou et al., 2020; Salojärvi, Rantanen, Nieminen, Juote, & Hanhela, 2020; Tomkinson et al., 2020; van der Veer, 2020; Witt, 2020). The incel wiki, however, describes incel as ‘a life circumstance not a movement/community’ – thus rejecting the notion of incels being members of anything. Regardless, the position of this book is that community is a more accurate term to describe how incels operate. This is not to say that there are no attempts to change or develop society (in their favour) and certainly there are definite efforts to influence their perspectives upon others, to disseminate the ‘blackpill’ – the overarching incel philosophy – and understand the ‘truth’ about not only incel’s existence but how and why the world is unfairly structured for women and good-looking men. What draws men into incelism, however,

and to self-ascribe the incel moniker, is the sharing of the common attitudes and interests that have brought together many who are lonely, vulnerable and seeking solidarity, as well as an explanation for their problems. Further, there is an element of revelling in superior clandestine knowledge, which contradicts the notion of attempts by the community to embed incel in the mainstream (although this is occurring nevertheless). How and why young men are becoming and remaining incels is explored further in Chapters 3 and 4, in terms of the appealing mechanisms (Chapter 3) and the responses that validate and perpetuate individuals to continue their incel journey (Chapter 4). Also, in the latter, interestingly ex-incels, those who have ascended – were able to leave the community – speak of feeling as if they were part of a cult. This is an interesting and concerning claim, and although I do not explore incel as a cult in depth, there is scope to describe it in this manner, albeit with further research.

I adopt the position incel as a community – as per Rheingold's (1993) 'virtual community' – incels are a form of social aggregation that have emerged online from sufficient amounts of people interacting and conducting in public discussions, sharing alliances and forming bonds, which are also grounded in their everyday physical worlds. It is not my intention, however, to present incels as one homogeneous community devoid of individual thought or behaviours. Due to the many different spaces utilised by incels online, there are differing incel communities, which demonstrate some variation in the content they post (and the levels of hate they present) depending on what platform is being used. Nor, am I suggesting that there are different incel communities in accordance with different platforms or websites that they frequent, as that is simply not the case. Many incels engage with a variety of different online spaces – those who are completely dedicated to incel as well as more mainstream social media and may post as an incel or pertaining to other aspects of their identity. Regardless, the term community will often be used throughout this book rather than the plural communities; however, the term should be noted as incorporating these recognised distinctions. There are diverse members, interpretations and applications of the ideologies encompassed within the umbrella identity of 'incel'.

Incels like to present themselves as countercultural to the mainstream (Chang, 2020) and are recognised as a subcultural group (O'Malley et al., 2020). Here though, Rheingold's (1993) insight into the workings of virtual communities is helpful to appreciate the subtleties involved in what on the surface appears to be a homogeneity of misogynistic attitudes and behaviours, 'there is no such thing as a single, monolithic, online subculture; it's more like an ecosystem of subcultures, some frivolous, others serious' (p. 3).

Much of what occurs within incel spaces is deliberately provocative and shocking, a form of shitposting and ironic humour. Yet, this does not dismiss how the encouragement and incitement of hatred and violence propagated by some incels could also be viewed as a movement to strike back at feminism and women's increased rights. Posts with the phrase 'going ER', meaning to go Elliot Rodger, or even describing the mass murderer as 'saint Elliot' are worryingly plentiful on incel forums. Whether this is a genuine desire to enact violence or an attempt at warped humour, though the intentions may differ, symbolically they form part of

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a call to arms to engage in a virtual war against women, that has very real and very harmful offline consequences. As Powell, Stratton, and Cameron (2018) note in their book *Digital Criminology*, this type of extremist behaviour is not limited to online spaces and is exacerbated by digital technologies, which is embedded within our everyday lives as a result of the symbiotic relationship between society and technology.

The incel community that is recognisable today has developed online since the mid-2000s and has particularly gained traction since 2015. Although there has been an emphasis on frustrated virgins, some incels have had sex, but have since been rejected, been single for a long time or slept with a sex worker (which in the incel community doesn't count). The emphasis is on heteronormative partnerships, and generally incels are men who are unable to attract [the] women [they want]. There is a mass of contradiction amongst incel beliefs. First, the adoption of the name itself, involuntary implies that this is something which they have no choice in, but there is indeed an element of choice in self-identifying as an incel as it is not a term ascribed by others. Certainly, the labelling process (Becker, 1963) and resulting negativity applies, but this is only after the individual establishes themselves in those terms. Furthermore, the application of the term celibate is also problematic, as already highlighted, sometimes it is not the fact that such men are unable to attract women, rather it is more that it is not the type of women they think they deserve. This is even acknowledged by incels who adopt volceldom – whereby some choose to be voluntarily celibate; however, the distinction between inceldom and volceldom is undeniably blurred. This leads to another conundrum, incels view themselves as zeta males, the lowest of the low. If this is indeed the case, then according to the incel attractiveness scale, they would not be able to appeal to the more aesthetically beautiful woman, nor should they believe they should. The way they present themselves is that they are unattractive to any women but also they in turn don't find all women attractive, for example, they are quick to call overweight women 'landwhales' and emphasise how they would not want to be intimate with them. The significance placed on looks is also antithetical to the criticisms levelled at women for being uniquely superficial and shallow. In selecting to become an incel, there is a conscientious rejection of women and sexual and romantic relationships with women, which ironically then causes bitterness and resentment as these are the very things that such individuals are craving.

There are some small numbers of women who identify as incel; however, they are less conspicuous and not entirely welcomed within the communities, certainly with the levels of hatred that are directed towards women in these spaces. These are men who have very little, if any, interaction with women, and so the irony is that they are barring women who can empathise with their issues of loneliness and rejection. Women who identify as incel are known as femcels. Femcels' legitimacy is generally rejected by incels, who believe that women will always be able to procure sex, irrespective of their looks or circumstances, as men have higher sex drives and so are willing to perform sexually with all and any women (again contradictory to the ethos of incel as described previously). Femcels have been described as 'entitled women who play the victim to get sympathy and attention

from men but refuse to lower their standards'.² The notion that it is necessary for men to have sex whilst women just submit to it is deeply entrenched. Due to the fact that the majority of incels are indeed men, and to date, there have been no issues or concerns regarding female incels in terms of espousing hatred against others or violent enactments, this work is focussed on male incels, and where gender is not explicitly mentioned when the term incel is presented, the default position is that male incels are being referred to.

A misconception of incels is that they are predominantly all angry white Western young men. In a survey conducted of incels by incels on the incel.co site around half of the members stated that they were white. However, there is an increased focus on white young male incels, mainly originating from North America and Europe in the media and academia, perhaps in part due to those who have engaged in violent attacks (though it is noted that Elliot Rodger was Asian American and Alek Minassian is Armenian, although they could be described as 'white presenting'). Moreover, there does appear to be an increased presence of white, English-speaking men on incel forums, which could be explained in terms of privilege and access, as well as English being the dominant language of the internet. However, incel communities also include specific groups of incels based on ethnicity, who, as a result of not being white, face further rejection from women. As many incel communities are English speaking, such non-white individuals may face further discriminations in not being confident to engage in many conversations due to not being fully articulate in the English language, and so it is not necessarily the case that there is a lack of representation from incels of different ethnic backgrounds but that they are not at the forefront of incel activity. The different intersections between gender, ethnicity, class and ableism in the representation of incels will be explored further in this book, as well as how homosexual sexual orientation, as well as transgenderism are disregarded as they have no place within the incel world view.

The link between incels and those who are neurodiverse has received increased attention following the trial of Alek Minassian in which he attempted to use this as a defence. Many incels are thought to be on the autistic spectrum, demonstrating characteristics such as problems in socially interacting with others and having unusual and prolonged emotional reactions. It could well be the case that those with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) are more vulnerable to the lure of the ideas espoused within the incel community; however similar to the stereotyping of all hackers as autistic (Bolgan, Mosca, McLean, & Rusconi, 2016; Seigfried-Spellar, O'Quinn, & Treadway, 2015), making such connections as an explanation for deviance or criminality leads to stigmatisation and alienation. Moreover, with significant numbers of people believed to be neurodiverse worldwide, for example, in the United Kingdom, 1 in 100 people are on the autism spectrum, with around 700,000 adults and children,³ the odds are likely that there will be incels with this condition, especially because online they may be more comfortable interacting

²<https://melmagazine.com/en-us/story/femcels-vs-incels-meaning-reddit-discord>

³<https://www.autism.org.uk/>

and often frequent the web spaces where they may be exposed to incel ideology and, not least, may identify more with what the incel philosophy presents them about a world which they may find difficult to understand.

The Blackpill

Incels ascribe to a nihilistic ideology named the blackpill, which cements the realisation of being an incel. The blackpill is comprised of commonly held beliefs, such as hypergamy, the 'just be white' (JBW) theory, the 80/20 rule of dating, lookism, the halo effect and sexual racism that rely on pseudoscience – where incels seek evidence to support to their claims, rather than a scientific approach, which would strive to prove a claim by seeking evidence, which may prove that claim to be false, amid uncritical interpretations of evolutionary biology and psychology studies, as well as studies undertaken by dating sites. At the core, feminism is viewed as the scourge of all men's, but especially, incels' problems, obstacles that are due to genetics, cannot be overcome. Deconstructed, the blackpill involves the accumulation of statistics used to validate their perspectives, along with images and memes used to describe and visualise incel thoughts and feelings, which are usually bleak and denigrating women for being egocentric, cruel and shallow.

In becoming 'blackpilled' incels accept their lot in life – that they are the zeta males who will never attract the women they want, and so turn their backs upon women and societal values regarding relationships and equality, which often manifests as hatred. It is important to note that often frustration is exerted about the type of women incels believe they should be entitled to, which appears contradictory when incels also present themselves as the lowest status of male. It is not necessarily the case that incels are unable to obtain sexual or romantic relationships with women, rather it is not the women they believe they should be with nor is it on the terms they want to determine. This suggests that choice in partners is something that only men should benefit from, and so when men are affected by past experiences where women have refused their advances, the blackpill provides an appealing explanation for their rejections external to themselves. Instead of viewing disinterest from some women as natural and to be expected, rejection is something that most people will encounter; it has devastating impacts whereby it shapes an individual's identity making them susceptible to this ideology, which provides them with the reasons for such failures. Incels are eager to validate their ideas and rely on various pseudoscientific studies and research, which they claim substantiates their blackpill ideology. Incels accuse others, who don't share their viewpoint, of not engaging with or not being open to such research, and therefore disregard dissenting opinion as being uninformed and unworthy of consideration. Though the incitement of hatred is not explicitly part of the blackpill philosophy, the deprecation of women and progressiveness is unmistakable to see. Therefore, to incels, misogyny is a natural outcome of being blackpilled; this is reinforced by broader structures that denigrate women and support the violence that is conducted on an endemic scale against them. Hence, though violence isn't necessarily sanctioned by the incel world view, it is undeniably attractive to those who are that way inclined as well as presenting some