

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Research Background

The incel community, a portmanteau of ‘involuntary celibate’, is broadly known as a community of men who desire but are unable to obtain romantic or sexual relationships with women. As such, incels feel victimised by women, whom they believe control the sexual marketplace and their involuntary celibacy. The term incel can be traced back to a forum started by a Queer Canadian woman named Alana in the mid-1990s. The forum, *Alana’s Involuntary Celibacy Project*, was created as a support space for men and women struggling to find love. Much to Alana’s dismay, the forum slowly evolved into a violent anti-feminist corner of the internet, spreading to different chatrooms, YouTube channels, forums, podcasts, and Twitter timelines (Bates, 2020).

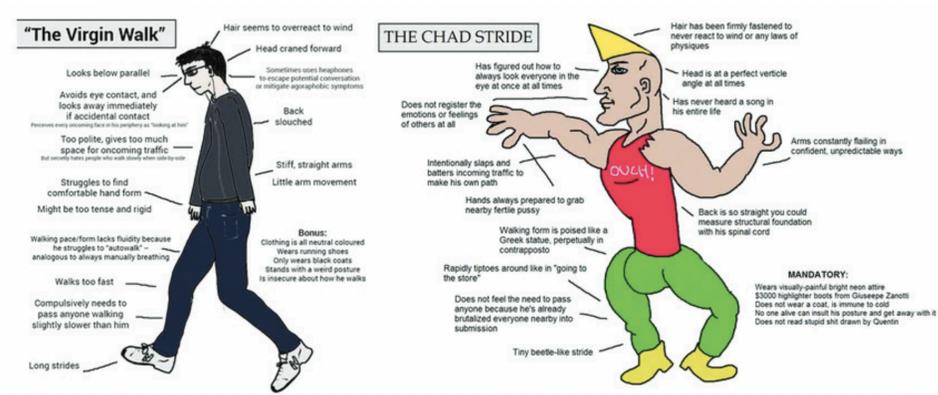
Incels are generally included in the manosphere—an online network of niche subcommunities with a common interest in topics about men and masculinity, such as Men's Rights Activism (MRA), Pick Up Artists (PUA), and Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW) (Ribeiro et al., 2021). It is generally assumed that the manosphere overlaps with the ideologies of the alt-right, with the most notable being male supremacy. Within manosphere spaces, most men subscribe to the idea of taking the ‘redpill’, which references a scene in the film *The Matrix* where the protagonist is given a choice to take the ‘bluepill’, continue to see the world the way he always has,

or the ‘redpill’, to see into the Matrix and the unsettling reality of the real world (Bates, 2020). In the context of the manosphere, taking the red pill represents the moment in which a man realises that within society, men are more disadvantaged than women. As manosphere groups adhere to strict views on gender essentialism and traditional gender norms, male supremacist ideologies such as ‘taking the redpill’ serve as a reactionary strategy to take back men’s dominant power within society.

On the other hand, people within the manosphere may adhere to the ‘blackpill’ instead of the ‘redpill.’ Similar to redpilling, ‘blackpilling’ accepts the reality in which men are placed in a more disadvantaged position than women. However, blackpillers assert that individual solutions, such as changing their appearance and adopting other strategies to achieve sexual relationships with women, are futile unless societal change to address these inequalities is accomplished (Megan et al., 2021). As such, blackpillers believe that involuntary celibacy is predetermined due to genetic factors and the tendency for women to choose their partners based on physical features. Blackpillers may go to extreme lengths when dealing with this reality. On one hand, they can turn to suicide and self-harm, while others turn to extreme acts of violence as a method of change.

Male supremacy within the manosphere may intersect with other forms of oppression, such as white supremacy. According to the Anti-Defamation League (2018), there is a notable overlap between online male supremacist groups and white supremacy, as manosphere groups with alt-right ideologies often support not only gender essentialism but also racial hierarchies. As the root of manosphere spaces is

the need for men to dominate, central to this belief is the hegemonic masculine standard of the heterosexual, masculine, and white male, which continues to reinforce racist narratives that connect white identity to notions of male dominance and societal order. These views complement each other to amplify the marginalisation of racialised men, who are often excluded from the patriarchal ideals celebrated in these spaces. The same sentiment applies in online incel communities, as discussions of racism and white supremacy within these communities are often omitted in the media. Despite the continued misrepresentation of incels as predominantly white, cisgender, and heterosexual men, a study conducted by Costello et al. (2022) found that 63,58 per cent of incels identify as white and 36,42 per cent identify as BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour).



**Figure 1.1 "The Virgin Walk" vs "The Chad Stride" Meme**

**Source: Know Your Meme (2017)**

Incels also adhere to the mansphere concept of 'Sexual Market Value' (SMV), which describes the levels of desirability in the dating market. According to

Megan et al. (2021), an individual's SMV is predominantly predicated on physical attractiveness, though other factors such as social skills, money, and status may come into play. In this sense, incels believe that women are only attract to men with high SMV. Individuals with high SMV are often described as 'alpha males' or 'Chads'—men who are sexually active and physically attractive (Menzie, 2022). Chads are often depicted as white, above six feet tall, and muscular. Alpha and Chad depictions of masculinity are thus used as a yardstick for incels to define a superior status of masculinity, while alluding to the the existence of subordinate masculinities and a gendered hierarchy of men within society. Those who do not hold the characteristics of a Chad are thus defined as having low SMV, which further exemplifies their perceived inability to ascend from incelhood.

As incels measure their inadequacies with the physical traits held by Chads, these physical shortcomings have spawned a variety of subcultures within the incelosphere. Racialised incels are often grouped with terms such as 'currycel', 'blackcel', and 'ricecel' to denote Indian, Black, and Asian incels whose racial heritages negatively impact their romantic prospects (Czerwinsky, 2024). These labels are frequently used by both white and non-white men within the incelosphere to express the racist stereotypes and inferiority of non-white incels. Other common intergroup terms and slang used within the incelosphere can be shown in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1 Incel Glossary

Term	Meaning
Chad	A physically attractive man who is typically white.
Gigachad	A man with a higher attractiveness than a Chad.
Stacy	The female counterpart of a Chad, typically described as vain and physically attractive.
Becky	A moderately attractive version of a Stacy, though less attractive.
Beta	A weak or average male, especially in terms of social skills and attractiveness. Betas are below Alphas.
Alpha	A high-ranking man.
Cuck/Cuckold	A weak man with an unfaithful female partner.
-maxx/-max/-maxxing	‘Maximising’ something to improve oneself.
-pilled	Embracing a certain worldview or truth.
Bluepill	To believe in a so-called false reality and live in ignorance of the ‘truth.’
Redpill	The opposite of bluepill, or to accept the harsh reality of the world.
Blackpill	A fatalistic version of the redpill that calls for external and societal solutions rather than individual ones.
-cel	Suffix to denote an involuntary celibate and their perceived insufficiency, interest, race, and other characteristics

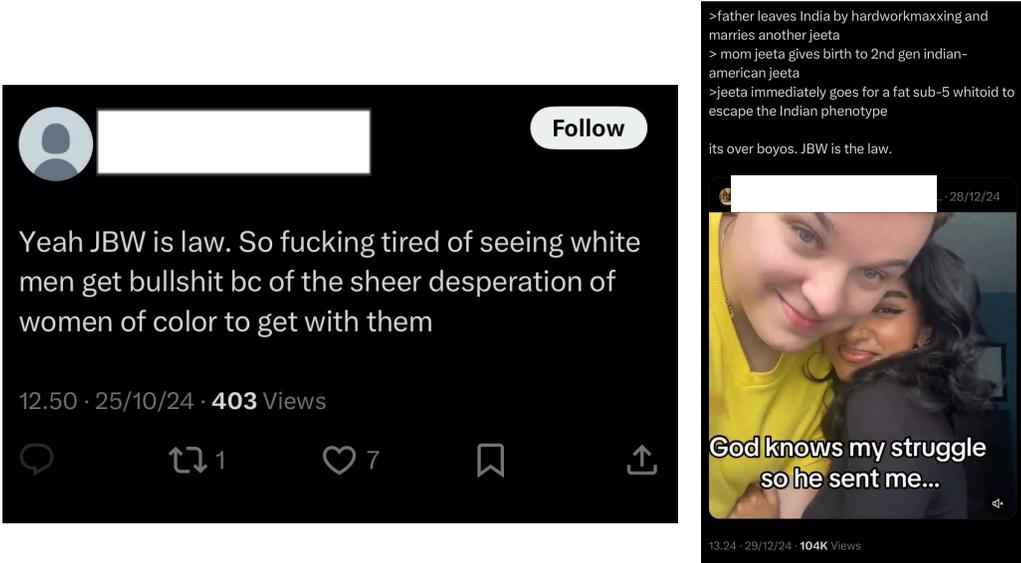
	that they hold.
Mog/Mogging/Mogged	To be dominated by another person.
Looksmax/Looksmaxxing	To improve one's appearance.
Foid/femoid	A derogatory term for a female which suggests that women are not human but rather 'humanoid.'
Femcel	Female incel.
Truecel	An incel that is assumed to be condemned into incelhood due to some immutable characteristics that they possess.
Fakecel	A fake incel.
ER/Going ER	Reference to the 2014 Isla Vista murderer Elliot Rodger. To 'go ER' means to commit an act of violence inspired by Rodger.
Ascend	When an incel gets into a relationship/sexual relationship, thus escaping incelhood.
Cope	Coping mechanism, a term used to express that it is impossible to change their situation given the structural issues of their incelhood.
JBW/JBW Theory	Just Be White, the idea that being white or having a white-passing appearance leads to success in the dating scene.
Racepill	Ethnic men suffer and are unable to obtain sexual or romantic partners due to their racial identity or ethnic background.
Tyrone	Black version of a Chad.

Chaddam/Chabdul	Arab version of a Chad.
Chadpreet/Chaddeep	Indian version of a Chad.
Chang	East and/or Southeast Asian version of a Chad.
Whitemax/Whitemaxxing	Looksmaxxing techniques to look more white.
Currycel	South Asian incel.
Ricecel	East and/or Southeast Asian incel.
Turkcel	Turkish incel.
Whitecel	White incel.
Beancel/Tacocel	Hispanic/Latino incel.
Arabcel	Arabic incel.
Blackcel	Black incel.
Ethnicel/Ethnic	Ethnic or racialised incel.

Source: Moonshot (2021), Pražmo (2024), and Sugiura (2021)

Central to these ideas of non-white incels, otherwise termed as ‘ethnicels’, is the Just Be White (JBW) theory. According to incel terminology, the JBW theory asserts that white men have more dating advantages than non-white men (Megan et al., 2021). The theory is mostly discussed about non-white women as JBWers (ethnicels who believe in the JBW theory) believe that white men have a higher sex appeal on Asian women, South American women, and women from places with a high rate of ethnic minorities. To alleviate their standing in the racial hierarchy, JBWers are often encouraged to pursue ‘whitemaxxing’, which refers to any attempt of a non-white incel to appear more white (Pelzer et al., 2021). Whitemaxxing may

include efforts such as bleaching one's hair, bleaching one's skin, getting cosmetic surgery, and changing one's legal name to hide one's ethnic background. However, most ethnicels believe that these efforts are fruitless. They assert that “JBW is law”, denoting that their ethnic background predetermines their inability to develop relationships with women. This sentiment is otherwise known as “racepilling”—asserting that their prejudice in the dating scene is inherently due to their race, in that women are more racist when choosing their romantic partners (Sugiura, 2021a).



**Figure 1.2 JBW Tweets uploaded on Incel Talk**

**Source: X (2024)**

At present, JBW is a popular topic of discussion within online incel forums. Incels mostly congregate and discuss topics such as JBW on private forums (e.g.

incels.is and looksmx.org) and Reddit. Despite being a niche subcommunity within the manosphere, it has recently gained prominence on more mainstream social media platforms (Solea & Sugiura, 2023). X (formerly Twitter) in particular has been the interest of manosphere scholars over the years. However, some have noted that methods to analyse online misogyny on X have been challenging as communities on the platform are not well-defined (Farrell et al., 2019). First introduced in 2022, X Communities were created to give users space to share and discuss topics of interest (X, n.d.). While most X Communities are publicly visible, some require users to apply for membership to interact and post within the community. Thus, membership requests must be accepted by the community moderators or admins. This feature has been employed by a myriad of communities online, particularly the incel community. Incel Talk has become one of the most popular Incel X Communities on the platform, amassing around 9,700 members. Within the community, Incels post Tweets, memes, videos, and news articles on all things related to involuntary celibacy. As inceldom is entering the mainstream social media platforms, exposure to these communities has a worrying impact of increased online radicalisation, especially as misogyny and racism run rampant in these spaces.

As non-white incels continue to be overlooked in research, there is a lack of knowledge as to how they experience the racialisation of masculinity within their online communities, particularly those active within mainstream social media platforms such as X. As such, this research draws on the intersections of masculinity

and race to explore how racialised masculinity is discussed and contested in online incel spaces.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

The growing popularity of the incelosphere has brought attention to how masculinity is communicated, constructed, and contested in online spaces. While existing incel research has explored gender and misogyny in the incel community, there is a significant gap in exploring how race intersects with gender within these spaces. More specifically, there is limited research on how incels of different racial backgrounds navigate their identities and the racialised hierarchies in response to the inequalities and norms present in the community. As incel-focused research has addressed the presence of white supremacist ideas within the incel community, these studies often lack the acknowledgement of racial diversity within online incel spaces.

Within the incelosphere, race plays a prominent role in discourse and behaviour, with racialised incels often adopting characteristics of white masculine norms to navigate the community, while simultaneously critiquing whiteness as a hegemonic masculine ideal. These dynamics prompt inquiries regarding the power structures that shape the group's cultural logic and reinforce a hierarchy of masculinity. Thus, this study seeks to explore how incels of different racial backgrounds communicate their identities with the dominant and shared norms of hegemonic masculinity. Specifically, it addresses the following questions:

1. How do racialised incels communicate shared rules and premises about race and masculinity?
2. What speech codes reflect hierarchical relationships between race and masculinity in the incel community?
3. How are the speech codes used to critique the dominant norms within the incel community?

### **1.3 Research Objective**

The objective of this research is to explore the rules and premises on issues pertaining to race and masculinity shared by the incel community. Furthermore, it will identify the speech codes used in community-wide discussions on racial and masculine hierarchies, while also uncovering the speech codes used to criticise the norms held within the community.

### **1.4 Significance of Research**

#### **1.4.1. Theoretical Significance**

This research contributes to a growing body of scholarship on digital subcultures and the incel community. By researching the underexplored intersections of race and hegemonic masculinity, this research will foreground the experiences of non-white men in the incel community to offer an understanding of racialised masculinity within online environments. Furthermore, this research will advance the

field of netnography by applying it to the study of online communities characterised by racial and gendered hierarchies.

#### **1.4.2. Practical Significance**

This study proposes insights into how racialised identities and experiences are shaped, reinforced, or contested within digital subcultures. Furthermore, this research can inform strategies to address harmful behaviours, such as racism and gender-based discrimination, by identifying how these dynamics manifest in online interactions. Additionally, the findings can help educators, policymakers, and non-governmental organisations develop targeted interventions and educational programs that address the intersections of race and masculinity in combating online extremism and encouraging inclusive digital spaces.

#### **1.4.3. Social Significance**

This research holds broader social significance by addressing the overlooked experiences of racialised incels in online incel communities. The study highlights how whiteness is idealised and how nonwhite incels navigate their identities within these spaces. Furthermore, this research will contribute to ongoing conversations about race, gender, and representation in digital culture. The findings can help challenge stereotypes and stigmas surrounding non-white incels, thus encouraging greater awareness of the systemic structures that marginalise them in both online and offline contexts.

## **1.5 Theoretical Framework**

### **1.5.1. State of the Art**

The incel community and the broader manosphere have gained increasing academic attention in recent years, particularly in investigating their links to radicalisation or violence and how those communities uphold misogynistic ideas. At the core of the incel ideology is the belief in biological essentialism and traditional gender roles, leading to the notion that women and men are inherently different. According to Vallerga & Zurbriggen (2022), individuals within the manosphere may have certain views on men and women concerning gender essentialism, the motivations of women, and the typologies of men. The authors analysed two forums named The Red Pill and Incel to explore how posters articulated hegemonic masculinities. Through a reflexive thematic analysis of 227 posts and using hegemonic masculinity as the theoretical framework, the study found that forum posters viewed women's intentions as to deceive and manipulate men, satisfy their own sexual needs, and trade sex for power. On the other hand, men were viewed as either alpha men (attractive and sexually successful), beta men (give in to women as their only route to sexual interactions), and incels (men who are too unattractive to achieve sexual success). The authors note that The Red Pill posters often focus on self-improvement to achieve this Alpha status, whereas Incel posters express hopelessness through endorsements of violence and suicide. Drawing on hegemonic masculinity, which legitimises traditional masculinity with traits such as dominance

and aggression, the research connects these beliefs to potential risks such as radicalisation and sexual aggression.

To understand how masculinity is performed and contested within incel spaces, Andersen (2024) explored how incels manage stigma and negotiate masculinity online through stigma management strategies of normification, minstrelisation, and militant chauvinism. This was achieved by examining three incel forums (incels.is, looksmax.org, and a Facebook group) for six months and 927 comment threads to understand how incels navigate their stigmatised identities. These strategies allow incels to cope with their perceived failure to meet hegemonic masculine ideals, often by blaming women and society for their isolation. Furthermore, the study emphasised the complexity of incel identity, which oscillates between self-pity, hostility, and attempts to reclaim masculinity, while also perpetuating misogyny and antifeminist ideologies. The study highlights the need to understand their behaviour within broader societal structures that impose rigid masculine ideals. Furthermore, the application of Goffman's stigma theory provides an understanding of how incels negotiate masculinity and shame, thus offering an understanding of the intersection of gender, stigma, and online subcultures. However, further research should address the structural issues underlying incel behaviour and intervention methods to challenge these harmful masculine ideals.

The shared feeling of victimhood in constructing hegemonic masculinity within manosphere spaces is further clarified by Demir & Tiryaki (2024) in a study on the misogynistic discourses presented by the 'victims of alimony' within Turkish

manosphere spaces on X. Using the netnography method, the study analysed 10,398 posts shared under hashtags related to alimony. The findings reveal that these groups expressed organised hostility towards laws that they claim to favour women and victimise men. In the process of framing themselves as victims, they justify their misogynistic attitudes by portraying women as “cheaters” and blaming them for their perceived victimisation. As such, the study highlights how discourses rooted in antifeminist rhetoric contribute to the normalisation of hostility towards women and the reinforcement of patriarchal norms in Turkish society. Furthermore, the role of social media platforms such as X is critical in amplifying misogynistic and antifeminist discourses within the manosphere. The study stresses that the “victims of alimony” use X to pressure politicians, influence public opinion, and advocate for legal changes by leveraging religious and cultural arguments to legitimise their claims.

Similarly, Uzun & Tiryaki (2024) aimed to identify discourses of hegemonic masculinity within online Turkish Incel communities. The research paper sought to explore how Turkish Incels utilise digital platforms to perpetuate gender ideologies contributed by the cultural characteristics of Turkish society. The study analysed comments on posts made on the TurkIncelTV YouTube channel using the netnographic method. The findings of the study found that Turkish Incels construct a form of hegemonic masculinity that advocates for a male-dominated and patriarchal society. Furthermore, the paper also revealed that incels portray men as innocent victims. They posit that as innocent men are not portrayed as ‘strong men’ by Turkish

standards, women do not perceive them as men, therefore exacerbating their loneliness. This is often used as a defence against their role in cases of violence against women, as incels argue that it is the fault of the women themselves for their choices in violent men. This sentiment of men's victimisation is prominent within Turkish incel spaces, as incels note that they continue to be victimised by women who misjudge them based on their physical and monetary shortcomings. Incels also frequently show hostility toward men for having relationships with women, as they believe these men are to blame for women's dominant role in society by accommodating their demands. An important finding to highlight is the influence of Turkish cultural and religious values within these discourses, such as the emphasis on virginity and traditional gender roles. The study is significant for its focus on a non-Western incel community. Moreover, it highlights the need for more research on the influence of the manosphere on gender relations in Turkey and beyond by offering information about how internet platforms aid in the dissemination of extreme gender ideology. Nevertheless, it is limited by its lack of acknowledgement of race within incel spaces, despite touching on the impacts of cultural norms in non-Western incel spaces.

The critique of race being ignored in incel research is further noted by Czerwinsky (2024). A systematic review of 47 studies evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of current research on the incel community. This literature review highlights key themes in incel research, including misogyny, masculinity, radicalisation, and violence as predominant focus areas. The paper emphasises that

current incel-focused research is based on understanding and theorising how the language used within incel spaces impacts women and promotes misogyny. Furthermore, most research focuses on victimhood and hopelessness and their potential routes to radicalisation and mass violence, especially concerning how digital technologies support the misogynistic indoctrination within these communities. The research paper highlights the lack of intersectional analysis in contemporary incel research, namely in the context of mental health and neurodiversity, non-English incel communities, and race and racism within the incelosphere.

To conclude, the research above highlights important advancements in understanding the incelosphere, particularly through the lenses of hegemonic masculinity, misogyny, and radicalisation. These studies reveal how incel communities construct and negotiate masculinities, often framing themselves as victims and perpetuating harmful gender ideologies. However, a critical gap within existing incel research is understanding how race intersects with gender to shape incel ideology, as most research overlooks racism and racial dynamics entirely. Though some studies above provide insights into non-Western incel communities, there is no analysis of the racial dynamics at play within those communities. Czerwinsky (2024) explicitly states that there is a lack of intersectional analysis regarding race and racism within incel research. This gap is especially pertinent given the role of racialised hierarchies in shaping masculinities in incel ideology and discourse.

### **1.5.2. Research Paradigm**

The paradigm used in this research will be the critical constructivist paradigm. The critical paradigm emphasises power relations and inequality in society. Rather than merely studying the social world, critical theorists conduct research to transform social relations by unearthing the inequality, structures, and social control to expose the hidden truths, especially to empower individuals with less power (Neuman, 2014). As such, the critical paradigm highlights that reality is shaped by and interacts with various power entities and structures ranging from political, gendered, religious, and ethnic factors.

On the other hand, the constructivist paradigm asserts that individuals derive meaning from their social environment (Creswell, 2009). As such, subjective meanings of certain experiences and items are developed. Within constructivist research, the main objective is to understand the participants' views and their construction of the meaning of a given situation. Constructivist researchers also assert that these subjective meanings are formed through interaction with others and cultural and historical factors within the individual's environment and life. As such, constructivism focuses on interaction processes within the individual's specific context.

Critical constructivism merges the critical paradigm with constructivism, emphasising how individuals think while engaging with their social surroundings (constructivist) and how these perceptions are shaped socially (constructionist), all under the influence of societal power structures (critical) (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009).

As such, critical constructivism focuses on the individuals' process of constructing reality, in which knowledge construction is seen as an interpretive process that is contextually specific and constructivist knowledge is considered culturally negotiated rather than produced in isolation (Kincheloe, 2005). Within the critical constructivist paradigm, the role that power plays in the construction and validation process is of concern, especially in regards to how these processes benefit or marginalise certain individuals. Critical constructivism is thus most determined to understand the perspectives of marginalised groups and individuals.

The critical constructivist paradigm is therefore helpful for this research, as it will explore how incels produce meaning about race and masculinity. Furthermore, this research will also critically uncover the ideological and structural forces that shape these meanings, such as whiteness as the hegemonic ideal and the marginalisation of racialised incels. By exploring the incel community through the critical constructivist paradigm, this research assumes that the communicative conducts within the community are shaped by structures that shape systems of racial and gendered hierarchy. As such, this research will uncover the cultural logic and power relations in incel discourse.

### **1.5.3. Theory**

#### **1.5.3.1. Speech Codes Theory**

In understanding the connection between culture and communication, Speech Codes Theory examines how people use and evaluate communication to create shared

meaning. As defined by Philipsen (2014), speech codes are systems of terms, meanings, premises, and rules created and influenced by social and historical contexts. ‘Speech’ in this context refers to any form of possible communicative conduct, such as verbal and non-verbal communication. On the other hand, ‘codes’ refers to the words, meanings, premises, and rules compiled within a system used by individuals to interpret and shape communication. Among these components, premises and rules are central within this theory in that they reflect the cultural beliefs and behavioural expectations when communicating in a given community. A ‘premise’ in Speech Codes Theory refers to expressions of ‘beliefs of existence and of value’ (Philipsen, 1992, p. 8). In this regard, premises may uncover assumptions about what a culture deems to be valued in social life, such as what is considered good or bad. Meanwhile, ‘rules’ are ‘a prescription for how to act, under specified circumstances, which has force in a particular social group’ (Philipsen, 1992, p. 8). As such, rules are expressed to instruct members of a group on how to behave within a given context. According to Hart (2017), these rules can have differing levels of force, including strong prescriptions, proscriptions, preferences, and permissions.

Speech Codes Theory operationalises culture not merely as something tied to a nationality, race, gender, and other identities, but as a code that shapes how individuals practice and evaluate communication (Hart, 2017). Instead, communication can be seen as a cultural activity that is unique to a particular group and serves a performative role for its members to participate and establish themselves within the community. Codes can also serve as a way to establish or criticise group

relations in a given community, including examining its norms, rules, values, and beliefs. As such, this theory serves as a way to study a particular culture by examining its communicative conduct and speech codes.

Philipsen (2014) further contends that Speech Codes Theory is based on six propositions, namely:

1. In a distinct culture, distinct speech codes are present.
2. Multiple speech codes are used within a speech community.
3. A culturally distinctive psychology, sociology, and rhetoric are indicated with speech codes. In this regard, 'psychology' indicates the notions of personhood or how certain people should act. 'Sociology' in this proposition refers to how a person interacts and defines themselves in relation to people within and outside of the group. Finally, 'rhetoric' encompasses how group members communicate to accomplish a desired goal. In a study uncovering how Teamsterville men talk about women, the code of honour grants an individual worth as they adhere to the values of their community (Philipsen, 2014b). On the other hand, the study on Nacirema found that the prevailing code was of dignity, or the worth an individual possesses by being a human being.
4. The speaking significance depends on the communicator's use of speech codes to create meaning for the communicative acts.
5. Speaking is linked to the terms, rules and premises of a speech code.
6. Intelligibility, prudence, and morality of communication conduct can be predicted, explained, and controlled by the artful uses of a shared speech code.

As Speech Codes Theory is often used to explore how certain cultures perform and examine communicative conducts, this theory will be useful in uncovering how communication forms collective group identity within Incel Talk, particularly in the premises and rules pertaining to race communicated by racialised incels and the link of these communication conducts to the norms and and beliefs of the incel community.

#### **1.5.3.2. Hegemonic Masculinity**

Based on the Gramscian analysis of class structures, by which a group of individuals in positions of influence gain domination and a leading position within society, Connell (2005) defines hegemonic masculinity as the arrangement of gender practices that reflects the prevailing solution to the legitimacy of patriarchy, ensuring or believed to ensure, the superior status of men and the subordinate role of women. In other words, hegemonic masculinity is the dominant form of masculinity within society, which sustains patriarchal power and marginalises other forms of masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity is not dormant, as the form of masculinity that holds the dominant position in a specific gender relations framework is always subject to challenge. Those who uphold hegemonic masculinity do not always have significant social power. Regardless, hegemony occurs when the cultural ideal and institutional powers align. As Connell (2005) puts it, “It is the successful claim to authority, more than direct violence, that is the mark of hegemony (though violence often underpins or supports authority)” (p. 77).

As such, hegemonic masculinity views patriarchy as a gender structure that makes it easier for men to oppress and dominate women. However, it is also predicated on a hierarchical power dynamic between males and various masculinities. This idea of a social ascendancy of one group of men over other men was later defined by Demetriou (2001) as internal masculinity, while external masculinity refers to the systemic domination of men over women. Within internal masculinity, Demetriou refers back to Connell's original proposal of the various patterns operating within masculinity, which are:

1. Subordinate masculinity, which refers to the subordination of men at the bottom of the gender hierarchy, such as gay men.
2. Complicit masculinity, wherein very few men practice hegemonic masculinity in its entirety, though benefit from the patriarchal dividend.
3. Marginalised masculinity, wherein the hierarchical positions of men are predicated on the relations of gender and other structures, such as race and class.

In the context of this study, hegemonic masculinity is used to examine how incel communities, specifically Incel Talk, uphold and reproduce this ideal. Thus, this theory will be used to understand how whiteness is positioned as the standard for desirability and masculine identity within the Incel Talk community.

#### **1.5.3.3. Intersectionality**

Intersectionality was first coined by Crenshaw (1991) to analyse the interactions of race and gender to shape the experiences of Black women in the

context of employment, particularly stating that the discrimination of people of colour cannot be captured by looking at gender and race as two separate dimensions. As such, Crenshaw observed the intersections of race and gender in shaping structural, political, and representational elements of violence. Intersectionality has since been used as a framework to understand how different social identities, such as gender, race, class, and sexuality, intersect to demonstrate power and discrimination.

Intersectionality has proven to be useful in its application in qualitative communications research. As co-producers of social power relations, studying the media is crucial for intersectional analysis. Intersectionality in media studies often involves analysing media production, content, and reception through an intersectional lens (Gouma & Dorer, 2019). As such, studies have examined how media representations reinforce or challenge social inequalities such as gender, race, class, and sexuality. For example, in an article exploring the impact of avatars and virtual bodies on identity in virtual reality (VR) environments, Szita (2022) applied intersectionality to examine how different social identities form experiences of privilege and oppression within VR platforms. The paper found that as users are presented with the option to customise their avatars to represent different genders, body types, ethnicities, and other characteristics, avatars with particular traits face discrimination that reflects real-world inequalities.

In this research, intersectionality will be especially useful with hegemonic masculinity. While hegemonic masculinity has been a popular and useful framework in masculinity and feminist studies, scholars have critiqued its vagueness and

ambiguity. As such, an integration of the theory with an intersectional approach has been proposed. On the benefits of combining intersectionality and hegemonic masculinity, Christensen & Jensen (2014) argued that Connell's early idea of hegemonic masculinity has been unclear in its analysis of power dynamics between men and women, as well as among various groups of men. As such, the authors propose an approach that combines hegemonic masculinity and intersectionality, which allows for a more nuanced analysis of power relations and differences among men. Through intersectionality, it is argued that different types of social differentiation will influence the experiences and power relations of masculinity. Furthermore, categories of gender may be altered by the intersection with other categories.

*“One way to think about this is that class, race/ethnicity and sexuality can support the dominant position and male privilege of some men because it strengthens the legitimacy of their masculinity. Likewise, masculinity can intersect with other categories in specific configurations that challenge or even subvert male privilege”* (Christensen & Jensen, 2014, p. 69).

Thus, categories such as class, race, and sexuality may undermine the legitimacy of some men. As such, they are left unable to access patriarchal privileges or are only able to assert a symbolic form of masculinity in situations where they have little else to claim.

As a framework, intersectionality will be applied to examine how racialised incels on Incel Talk navigate racial and gendered identities. Intersectionality thus ensures that this research will account for multiple intersecting identities that shape incel's experiences within the community.

#### **1.5.3.4. Racialised Masculinity**

This study will be guided by the concept of racialised masculinity, which examines how racial identities shape societal expectations and performances of masculinity. Thus, it creates distinct forms of masculine identity for men of different racial backgrounds. When discussing “racialisation,” this research examines racial identity not as a predetermined fact but rather as the process by which an individual or a group of people are seen to have a racial identity. As stated by Ahmed (2002),

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

Previous research has placed ‘race’ and ‘masculinity’ as separate identities. Archer (2001) conceptualised racialised masculinity to understand the contextual and relational links of race and gender, particularly how men who identify as ethnic minorities negotiate patriarchal power. While researching British Muslim young men’s constructions of race, religion and masculinity, Archer argues that Black, Asian and Muslim men use their masculinity in different ways, particularly *“as a shared site of solidarity against racism, as a resistance to whiteness but also as a means of drawing divisions between black groups, and as an assertion of masculine power”* (Archer, 2001, p. 98). As such, Archer outlines how young British Muslim men negotiate their identities with reference to their racial and religious background,

refusing to be assimilated into prevailing white norms while simultaneously challenging stereotypes that envelop Muslim men.

Expanding on the concept of racialised masculinity, a study conducted by Ganapathy & Balachandran (2019) defined racialised masculinity as a performance that contextually blends multiple identities to subvert or enact definitions of power. Drawing on interviews with Malay youth in Singapore, the research paper explored how Malay men compensate for their marginalised status by developing racialised masculinities to negotiate structural exclusion and dominance in legitimate and illegitimate societies. The authors argue that Malay men adopt exaggerated forms of masculinity as a strategy to balance their marginality, incorporating aspects of "Malayness" and "Chineseness" to negotiate gender identity and acquire status and economic mobility in the illegitimate society.

Racialised masculinity thus provides a framework for exploring how race shapes the construction and performance of masculinity on Incel Talk. Furthermore, it will be useful in understanding how incels navigate complex power dynamics to assert their identities in opposition to dominant norms.

## **1.6 Research Assumption**

This research assumes that discourse within the incel community plays an important role in shaping the collective cultural understandings of race and masculinity, as community members communicate and reinforce a hierarchical model of masculinity that privileges whiteness as the hegemonic ideal. The dynamics of

racialised masculinity are thus perpetuated and amplified on Incel Talk, showcasing how race and gender intersect to produce exclusionary and hierarchical ideologies that structure group identity and belonging within the incelosphere.

### **1.7 Conceptual Operationalisation**

In this research, racialised masculinity is operationalised as how masculine ideals are articulated differently across racial identities within a system that privileges whiteness as the hegemonic norm. This includes understanding the expressions of racial inferiority and comparisons between racial groups that reveal racialised understandings of masculinity. Drawing on speech codes, this research treats communication as a cultural practice that reproduces group norms. As such, it will focus on how racialised masculinities are expressed through the speech codes on Incel Talk, such as the shared premises and rules circulating within the community. The analysis will examine the recurring speech codes used by incels to communicate beliefs about race and masculinity, especially in relation to how whiteness is expressed as the dominant ideal and how racialised masculinities are positioned in response to this standard. In doing so, premises such as codes of dignity and codes of honour, along with rules that discuss ways of behaving, are uncovered and criticised.

This research will look at how incels communicate masculine identity as something that is culturally coded within the groups shared system of communicative conducts. In analysing these codes, the research will focus on the themes and patterns

in incel discourse that reflect premises and rules of racial hierarchy and masculine ideals.

## **1.8 Research Method**

### **1.8.1. Research Design**

This research will employ a qualitative approach. Qualitative research seeks to explore the meaning that individuals or a group of people attribute to a social problem (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Qualitative research thus allows researchers to obtain insights into the lived experiences of individuals.

Furthermore, the method used for this research is netnography. Netnography can be defined as a qualitative interpretive research method that examines the cultural experiences within social media (Kozinets, 2019). As a variant of ethnography, netnography collects and analyses online traces—data in the form of images, videos, and text accessible to anonymous or identifiable individuals on the internet. Netnographic research thus studies social media or a specific topic on a social media platform, where the researcher will then collect, reflect, and interact with online traces through various forms of data collection such as interviewing, personal observation, and recording.

The research will be carried out with the covert access or lurking approach where the researcher does not make their presence known to the group (Addeo et al., 2020). There are certain ethical arguments to be made about this method, but it was chosen due to the potential threat it poses to the researcher. In a reflexive account

detailing her experience with direct research with incels, Daly (2022) noted that incels are often hostile towards journalists and researchers as they assume that they may have bad intentions. Furthermore, Addeo et al. (2020) stated that a covert approach may be appropriate not only when researching a community with extreme activism or an unwelcomed reaction to the researcher, but could potentially reduce distortion of data and bias. Within the Incel Talk community,

Aside from considering the safety of the researcher, there are ethical considerations to be made regarding the privacy and consent of the community members when conducting a netnographic study. The first inquiry is whether the data collected constitutes ‘public’ or ‘private.’ As stated by Conway (2021), content posted in public and open settings is generally considered public information to the researcher, comparable to texts such as a newspaper or letter. It is assumed that posters are aware of the public nature of their content. Kozinets (2019) also contends that public data from public sites does not need additional ethical procedures in conducting netnographic research. In this regard, it should be noted that Incel Talk is a public community and users regardless of membership can view all content uploaded within it.

## **1.8.2. Type and Source of Data**

### **1.8.2.1. Primary Data**

The primary data for this research will be obtained through the observation and documentation of text and multimedia forms of X posts uploaded on the Incel Talk community on X, specifically those with relation to race-related topics.

### **1.8.2.2. Secondary Data**

This research will also utilise secondary data in the form of research papers, news articles, books, and other supporting literature relevant to the racialised masculinity of incels.

## **1.8.3. Data collection tools**

Data collection in this study was carried out using documentation and observation techniques of the Incel Talk community. According to Kozinets (2019), data collection in netnography can include three procedural steps: investigation, immersion, and interaction. These steps may be used separately or all together. Because of the passive nature of this research, the interaction step will not be utilised.

All netnographic research requires the ‘immersion’ phase, in which the researcher observes, reflects, and records data from the community. Similar to ethnographic field notes, the immersion stage includes the use of an immersion journal to note the researcher's personal observations. Within the immersion stage, the

researcher will immerse themselves by joining the Incel Talk community and consuming their content.

The investigation stage refers to the search and collection of information and digital traces (Kozinets & Gretzel, 2024). During the investigative stage, Kozinets (2019) states that there are five operations present. The first operation is to **simplify**. During this operation, the researcher will translate certain elements from the research question into a set of keywords. For this research, keywords may include “JBW”, “whitecel”, “ethnicel”, and other race-related keywords. The second operation is to **search**. During this stage, the researcher will enter and search the keywords into the search function of the community, be it in the form of hashtags or terms. The third operation is to **scout**. Within this stage, the researcher will consume the posts from the search results and filter and narrow down the posts based on their relevancy. The fourth is to **select**, where the researcher must collect the posts according to the relevance of the research topic. The final operation is to **save**, where the researcher will save the data selected to be studied and analysed.

#### **1.8.4. Research subject**

The subject of this research will be the Incel Talk community on X. By focusing on this community as an object of research, the researcher can collect specific and relevant data which will then be analysed to identify trends and patterns related to racialised masculinity in the incelosphere.

### **1.8.5. Data Analysis Technique**

The immersion and investigation data from Incel Talk will be organised and coded by the researcher. More specifically, data analysis will follow the sequence below, according to Kozinets (2019):

1. Collating, which involves preparing the data for coding. In this stage, data collected from Incel Talk will go through the process of filtering to decide what data will be included in the coding operations. Based on the format of the data, it will then be formatted accordingly. The data will then be filed and organised to ensure ease of reading and coding.
2. Coding, which involves detecting repeating patterns and attaching labels to the dataset. During this process, the researcher will utilise a hybrid method of coding, which involves both the deductive and inductive processes. Inductive coding will be used to uncover new themes emerging throughout the process of data collection, while deductive coding will be used to identify themes based on the theoretical frameworks of this research.
3. Combining, which involves merging the initial codes into themes or more abstract patterns in the data. The pattern codes will be used to present the research findings and answer the research questions.

After the data analysis process, data interpretation will be done to make sense of the analysed data. Interpretation will be carried out using the hermeneutic approach. In line with the critical constructivist paradigm, analysis will also involve critiquing the cultural logic and norms within Incel Talk in addition to describing

them. As such, this research will uncover how particular speech codes reinforce or challenge the racial and masculine hierarchy within the incel community.

#### **1.8.6. Goodness Criteria**

In qualitative studies, validation is executed to confirm the accuracy of findings using strategies that reflect the perspectives of both the researcher and the participant (Creswell & Poth, 2017). As such, several strategies will be applied when studying the culture of the Incel Talk community members. Persistent observation in the field will be carried out to acquaint the researcher with the community's cultural context and its members. In this sense, aspects such as the time spent in the field, thick description, and the proximity of the researcher to the members of the community will add to the validity of this study.