

CHAPTER II

AN OVERVIEW OF THE INCEL PHENOMENON AND INCEL TALK ON X

2.1. Involuntary Celibacy and The Incelosphere

2.1.1. The Manosphere and Involuntary Celibacy

As a small corner of the manosphere, it is imperative to understand that the ideology of incels did not emerge on its own, rather from the belief systems in already existing men's groups. Sugiura (2021) notes that the origins of the manosphere can be traced back to the Men's Rights Movement (MRM) from the 1970s, wherein the Men's Liberation Movement (MLM) was originally considered as a supporter of feminism and the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) by acknowledging the harm inflicted by both men and women from the reinforcement of sex roles. During the MLM, men reflected on issues pertaining to the emotional expressions of men, who carried the burden of stifling their emotions and bearing most of the financial responsibilities. The continued positioning of men's liberation from masculine pressures, along with the contradictory recognition of men benefiting from systemic privileges, likely festered into resentment of women's rights. As the MLM dissolved, the movement turned to anti-feminist and 'male rights' activism. Male Rights Activists (MRA) pivoted to concerns on shifting gender roles and the feminisation/emasculatation of men, most likely in response to the current pop cultural turn of the 1980s, which embraced challenging the status quo of masculinity (Sugiura, 2021b).

With widespread use of the internet and social media, MRAs have since migrated their activism to the manosphere, which refers to an assemblage of online communities concerned with men's issues and anti-feminism (Ribeiro et al., 2021). The manosphere comprises a network of different websites, chatrooms, and platforms all across the internet, often discussing personal experiences such as those of romantic and sexual rejections. As stated by Ging (2019), the first instance of the term 'manosphere' being used was in a 2009 Blogspot and was further popularised by pornography marketer and author of *The Manosphere: A Hope for Masculinity*. Along with MRAs, included in the manosphere are subcommunities such as Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW), Pick Up Artists (PUA), and Involuntary Celibates (Incels).

The emergence of the incelosphere can be traced back to a website made in the mid-1990s when Alana, a young Canadian woman in her mid-twenties, was struggling with her sexual inactivity. Alana later sought to create a space to share her frustrations with others through a mailing list, which she named Alana's Involuntary Celibacy Project. At the time, Involuntary celibacy was abbreviated as 'invcels', which was later changed to 'incel.' In Alana's view, an incel referred to any individual who had never been in a relationship or had never had sex (Taylor, 2018). Her definition and purpose at the time were to create a space that welcomed all people struggling with loneliness, regardless of gender. Alana drifted away from the community over time as she garnered romantic success over the years. 20 years after the inception of Alana's Involuntary Celibacy Project, she was made aware of what

her small project had evolved into when she noticed a story concerning the 2014 incel-driven mass murders in Isla Vista, California.

Communities such as Pick Up Artistry (PUA), which established its own online forum before the creation of Alana's Involuntary Celibacy Project, overlapped with the experiences of male incels in their sexual and romantic struggles. PUAs are defined as a community of men who focus on techniques to seduce and pick up women. Central to the PUA belief is women as mere bodies and objects that can be tricked into sex and shallow individuals driven by appearance and money (Sugiura, 2021b). The beliefs of PUA most likely influenced the misogynistic ideas often found on incel forums, such as the idea of the Sexual Market Value (SMV) and the 80/20 theory—which asserts that 80 per cent of women are only interested in the top 20 per cent of men. Megan et al. (2021) noted that while forums such as 4chan are popular spaces for PUAs and Incels, the first PUA forum, alt.seduction.fast, can be traced back to 1994. Following this, PUAHate.com emerged in 2009 as a space for incels to vent about their failures in producing results from PUA seduction methods, leading to its members to focus on the importance of physical appearance (Pelzer et al., 2021).

Among the members of PUAHate was Elliot Rodger, the twenty-two-year-old perpetrator of the 2014 Isla Vista mass killings that took the lives of six people. As a frequent user of PUAHate, Rodger encouraged incel violence against women, writing that 'one day incels will realise their true strength and numbers, and will overthrow this oppressive feminist system' (Glasstetter, 2014). Before committing the attacks, Rodger released a 141-page biographical manifesto titled *My Twisted World: The*

Story of Elliot Rodger, detailing his life and frustrations with his sexual inactivity. In it, he recounted his experience on PUAHate, stating: ‘Reading the posts on that website only confirmed many of the theories I had about how wicked and degenerate women really are’ (Rodger, 2014, p. 118). Despite never describing himself as an incel, Rodger has become martyred as an idol among the incel community. Within incel forums, members may refer to the violent act of committing a mass murder inspired by Rodger as ‘Going ER’. The infatuation with Rodger does not exist merely online but has continued to manifest in recent attacks. In April 2018, then twenty-five-year-old Alek Minassian purposefully drove a speeding rental van through Toronto, resulting in the murder of ten people and the injury of sixteen people. In a Facebook post uploaded before the attacks, he wrote: “The Incel Rebellion has already begun! We will overthrow all the Chads and Stacys! All hail the Supreme Gentleman Elliot Rodger!” (Bates, 2020).

As PUAHate was shut down shortly after Rodger’s attack, its incel members joined other forums. Pelzer et al. (2021) reported that as of 2021, the largest incel forums include Incels.is, Lookis.net, and Looksmax.org. Despite mostly congregating on private forums, incels have also created their own communities within other imageboard websites such as 4Chan and 8Chan and more mainstream platforms including Reddit and Tumblr (Ging, 2019). Recent studies have also noted how newer platforms such as TikTok have made misogynistic incel content easily accessible (O’Connor, 2021). As manosphere and incel content continue to become more widespread on the internet and mainstream social media platforms such as Instagram,

X, YouTube, and Tiktok, there are concerns of young men being exposed to algorithmically-driven misogynistic content that provides a pathway into the world of incels. It is hard to establish the exact number of members in the incelosphere. However, it is estimated that over 100,000 men identify as incels and participate in these online spaces (Sugiura, 2021b).

As growing concern for incels are rising, the community is garnering more mainstream attention in the media and pop culture. One prominent example is the release of the Netflix limited series titled *Adolescence*. Released in 2025, the series centres on the events following the accusation of a 13-year-old boy's involvement in the murder of a young girl. The hate crime presented in the show takes inspiration from the manosphere and incel culture, most notably the linguistic practices and ideologies present within these spaces (Brace, 2025). The show also highlights concerns surrounding the impact of extremist online views on young people, who are becoming more susceptible to digesting the misogynistic ideas and themes shared in these spaces.

2.1.2. Masculinity within the Incelosphere

Incels can be defined as a virtual community, representing a social group formed online through interactions among individuals, while also being rooted in their daily physical realities (Sugiura, 2021b). As the internet provides a space for incels to interact with likeminded members, discourses on masculinity and misogyny continue to prosper. A shared sentiment present within the virtual incel community is

that the rise of feminism have led to the de-emphasis of men's issues. This notion is often remarked on with hostility towards women, or what Banet-Weiser & and Miltner (2016) referred to as 'networked misogyny.'

The notion that men have been devalued in society has led to a 'victimhood' mentality among men in the incel community. Within the manosphere, men are perceived to be the real victims in a world where women are favoured more. In investigating how hegemonic masculinity interacts with victimhood, Ging (2019) contends 'aggrieved manhood' as a new expression within social media in response to the perceived disturbance of male privilege. Male hegemony and heterosexual gender relations become the uniting preoccupation among contradictory forms of masculinity within the manosphere and incelosphere, as the goal is the defeat of women and feminism.

Past studies on masculinity within the incelosphere, such as Menzie's (2022) paper on incel's construction of femininity and hegemonic masculinity, have used R.W. Connell's (2005) hegemonic masculinity as a theoretical framework to understand not only the hierarchies among genders, but also among fellow men. Within the incel community, there is a particular hierarchy of masculinity present, with men grouped as 'alpha males' or 'Chads' (physically attractive, confident, and oftentimes white men) at the top and 'omega' males at the lowest of the hierarchy. Chad, as the hegemonic masculine standard, is the epitome of the traditionally favoured masculine traits of achievement, confidence, strength, and at times violence (Sugiura, 2021b). In contrast, omega males are characterised as having the opposite

traits—weak, feminine, and socially inept. This falls in line with what Connell & Messerschmidt (2005) remarked as gender being relational, with the social definitions of masculinity being in contradiction to femininity.

2.1.3. Race in the Incelosphere

Incels are largely misconceived in the media as predominantly white men. According to a 2020 poll on the incel.co website, 45 per cent of incels are reportedly non-white, including identifying as a diverse range of ethnicities such as Black, Asian, Latino, Middle Eastern, or ‘other/not sure’ (Sugiura, 2021). The same poll revealed that though a great number of incels are based in North America and Europe, others report to be from a variety of different continents aside from Antarctica. These numbers show that the incelosphere is more diverse and international than depicted.

Racism and white supremacy continue to run rampant in the incel community despite its racial diversity. Within incel forums, a premise that is often talked about are those concerning racial hierarchy in the dating scene. Incels often note that whiteness is the ideal and considered as genetically superior, and that non-whiteness, as an inherited physical trait, is the main boundary for ethnic incels. Discussions of white men having an easier time in the dating scene are often referred to as the Just Be White (JBW) theory. In validating the JBW theory and their struggles as ‘ethnicels’ (ethnic incels), they often point to instances of white men traveling to non-predominantly white countries to date non-white women. Misinterpretations of research articles on possible factors in opposite-sex attraction are also used to validate

their anxieties in dating (Sparks et al., 2022). Though studies surrounding personal appearance and wealth are most cited, studies on racial preference may also be used as a point of discussion among incels.

2.2. X/Twitter Communities as a Discursive Space

To understand the practices of incels online, it is essential to understand them as ‘networked publics’, which boyd (2010) defined as publics that networked technologies have restructured. Building on this definition, networked publics are shaped by networked technologies and represent an imagined collective arising from the convergence of individuals, technology, and practices. As such, networked publics provide a space for individuals to gather online for different purposes. Furthermore, boyd (2010) contends that networked technologies have introduced new affordances that may shape how users interact and behave: persistence (the automatic recording and archiving of online content), replicability (content produced in networked publics can be duplicated), scalability (the potential of tremendous visibility of content), and searchability (the accessibility of content in networked publics from searching). These affordances may shed light on how and why users utilise social media in certain ways.

X, formerly known as Twitter, has become one of the most-used social media platforms with an estimated 586 million active users in 2025 (Statista, 2025). The website allows users to share short text posts (Tweets), images, and videos. Users may also interact with posts by liking, replying, retweeting (reposting or sharing

another user's tweet), and Quote Tweeting (retweeting with additional commentary). Other features within the platform include Twitter Spaces (live audio conversations), Direct Messaging, Grok (generative artificial intelligence chatbot), and Twitter Communities. First launched in 2022, Twitter Communities allowed users to create a space to discuss and share content on specific topics or shared interests with fellow group members. Though most communities on X can be accessed publicly without membership, users must become members to upload posts in the community. Within every X community, some users are given the role of moderators who oversee and track the activities of the community, ensuring that its members are adhering to its rules.

Incel Talk was created on the 6th of October 2022 by X user @IncelsCo. Like other communities on the platform, members within Incel Talk unite under a common interest. This includes having a space to share their frustrations and experiences with incelism freely and provide support for other community members. The community currently houses around 10,800 members and is one of the most popular incel communities on the platform. Similar to pre-existing incel forums outside of X, members of Incel Talk often upload text posts, images, and videos related with incel ideology, advice on self-improvement, or their personal experiences and frustrations in the dating scene. Members may also Quote-Tweet posts from outside of the community, allowing members to discuss amongst themselves.

Membership in the community is dependent on following the guidelines outlined by the moderators. According to the 'About' section of Incel Talk, the rules members must follow include:

1. **Be kind and respectful.** Be kind and respectful to others. This isn't a place to insult, demean, or make fun of others.
2. **Keep Tweets on topic.** Keep tweets on topic. Any off-topic tweets may be removed.
3. **Don't Incite to Violence.** Don't incite to violence or make threats of any kind, even jokingly.
4. **No Illegal Activity.** Don't discuss any illegal activity of any kind.
5. **No Selfies.** Do not post selfies or ask for ratings. Your posts will be removed.
6. **No Doxxing.** Do not post your personal information or the personal information of others for any reason. If in doubt, don't post.

It is worth mentioning how members of Incel Talk often ignore these guidelines. Like many other incels on other platforms, women are seldom discussed in a positive or non-discriminatory manner. When referring to women, members of Incel Talk often refer to them as 'foids', a dehumanising slur implying that women are not fully human, but rather humanoids. Members are also seen to direct racial, ableist, and homophobic slurs at one another. Another contradiction to the first rule of being respectful is the frequent discussions surrounding members' physical appearances. As incels believe that physical attractiveness is an important factor of increasing one's Sexual Market Value (SMV) and attracting women, members on

Incel Talk frequently discuss ‘looksmaxxing’ techniques to improve their appearances or asking fellow members for advice. Most of the time, this comes at the cost of insulting the physical traits of their fellow community members. Furthermore, physical violence, especially towards women, is pervasive within this community. This is often shared by users who are ‘blackpilled’, or those who believe that their problems cannot be fixed through internal solutions, but rather through external changes to society. Blackpill individuals on Incel Talk are often discussing violent solutions to their incelhood, including committing suicide or inflicting harm on others. Nevertheless, it is up to the moderators to decide whether the content should be posted in the community. If members are found to be infringing on these rules, they will be banned from the community by the moderators.