

Chads, foists, and blackpills
A Foucauldian discourse analysis of interactions on the website incels.is

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Plagiarism declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work and that any information derived from the published and unpublished work of others has been properly acknowledged in the text and in the reference list.



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Abstract

The present research focuses on understanding the language and interactions between incel members on the website incels.is. In broad strokes, the research question is to ask; what is the nature and content of online, textual interactions in ‘incel’ communities and interactive spaces? Previous research has demonstrated this as a hateful group of men who express violence and, in some cases, enact violence. The present research adds to this effort by developing an analysis of ‘incel discourse’ which can be used to identify incel language in online spaces. Furthermore, this is important because understanding how one kind of masculinity is perpetuated within online spaces helps understand how Gender-based violence is perpetuated through this language. While the present research does not look at a novel concept, it does apply a new lens and focus through the use of a Foucauldian discourse analysis. The important thread of incel discourse starts in a strong belief in biological reductionism, which incels use to justify their subhuman status. Through this subhuman status, incel members develop a ‘coping’ discursive theme as well as extreme misogyny because they are angry that they feel as though they are subhuman. Within incel discourse, they demonstrate identity management strategies through their discussions of intelligence and rationality while policing their boundaries through a membership discursive theme. This adds to the current literature and aids the goal of eventually dismantling this harmful ideology that has and likely will continue to contribute to real world violence.

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Introduction

On May 23rd 2014, in California, Elliot Rodger killed six people and wounded 14 others. He followed this with his own suicide. This incident would later become known as the Isla Vista killings and has left a mark that still exists in online spaces today. Rodger has been referred to as the ‘patron saint’ of the incel community, because of the manifesto that accompanied his killing spree. This manifesto detailed Rodger’s extreme hatred of women and the perceived unfairness of his lack of success in establishing mature emotionally and physically intimate relationships with women. While Elliot Rodger has been criticised online by some incel members and cannot be considered the sole progenitor of the incel ideology, his story is often a starting point for discussions of incel subculture and communities because it was the first violent act that became explicitly connected to incels. The Isla Vista killings – and Elliot Rodger’s manifesto - created a precedent that is referenced by incel members to this day (O’Malley, Holt, & Holt, 2022). This precedent has grown into the ideology that this research thesis intends to study.

Incel subculture has developed as part of the manosphere, which encompasses, among others, several online communities or affiliations such as: men going their own way (MGTOW); pickup-artists (PUAs); and men’s rights activists (MRAs). The term ‘incel’ is an abbreviated portmanteau of the words ‘involuntary’ and ‘celibate’. The manosphere can be traced back to the 1970’s and the development of ideologically masculinist discourses (Han & Yin, 2023). Idyllically masculinist discourses, in this context, means discourses that encompass what masculinity is, how women have more advantages than men in society, and, among other things, how men deserve better treatment than what they have been getting. The conservative branch of this movement was able to develop legislation about marriage, custody of children, alimony, sexual consent and more, all the while maintaining connections to the alt-right (Anderson, 2014; Schmitz & Kazyak, 2016). As online spaces became more prevalent, these movements would also grow into these spaces. Some groups developed into MRAs and maintained their connection to the al-right. As time progressed, more groups would develop, such as pick-up artists (who claimed to be able to make men more sexually successful with women) (Han & Yin, 2023), MGTOW (who claimed that the only way to stop women from falsely accusing men of rape was to cut women out of men’s lives entirely) (Jones et al., 2020), and finally the incel group.

Incels are an online group of men who, according to Williams (2020), are diverse in skin tone. They appear as a contradictory group who both blame women for their lack of access to sex and who idealize the idea of an innocent virgin woman. In addition to this are many other contradictions, such as the belief that an attractive man with muscles and money is the epitome of masculinity, alongside the simultaneous despising of men who they believe fit this category (Williams, 2020). Furthermore, a core tenet of this group is the adherence to the ‘blackpill’ philosophy (O’Malley et al., 2022). The term ‘blackpill’ can be traced back to the popular film ‘*The Matrix*’, (Wachowski & Wachowski, 1999) in which the main character has to make a choice between taking a blue pill and remaining blissfully unaware of the horrors of reality, or a red pill and becoming aware of the truth. The ‘blackpill’ exists as an extension of the red pill ideology whose imagery was borrowed from ‘*The Matrix*’. According to the red pill ideology, as used by manosphere groups, the metaphorical taking of the red pill shows one that the world favours women and that men are taken advantage of, in part, because of feminism (Van Valkenburgh, 2018). Where the ‘blackpill’ differs from the red pill is that the people who adhere to the red pill perspective believe that they can improve the world through action, whereas those that believe in the blackpill think that no positive change can be achieved (Lindsay, 2022). (O’Malley et al., 2022). The ‘blackpill’ philosophy claims that one is born an incel and can ultimately do nothing (or almost nothing) to change one’s status as part of the bottom 5-10% of all people (Ging, 2017).

To claim that incels are sexist is a platitude, as several other writers have already come to this conclusion (e.g., Ging, 2017; Jaki et al., 2018; O’Malley et al., 2022). Each of these writers use different methods to explore the various aspects of the incel phenomenon. In a South African context, it would be interesting to see whether the ‘blackpill’ perspective, or variants of it, has seeped into South African online spaces by looking at the language used by men in such spaces. While such a focus would potentially be a fruitful and important endeavour, the South African context is not explicitly addressed in the research described in the current dissertation. However, it remains important to acknowledge the potential links between this research and the South African context. Firstly, the levels of GBV in the South African context are staggering (Meyiwa, Williamson, Maseti, & Ntabanyane, 2017). When this is considered together with the rising importance of online spaces, one should ask questions about how the social drivers of high levels of GBV might be reflected in the language use of those in South African online spaces? While it is unlikely that the language used in South African online spaces is the same as that found in incel spaces, due to the quite insular nature of incel

subculture, what could be investigated is whether there are indicators of incel language use and ideas to be found within South African online spaces? This might enable getting ahead of misogyny and hate speech that might already be seeping into South African online spaces. Future research might use the language markers found in the present research and apply them to South African online spaces.

The aim of this dissertation is to add its voice to the growing body of research exploring the incel phenomenon by looking at how incel interactions may replicate discourses, attitudes and practices that are supportive of particular ideologies related to gender expression and identities, and whether these discourses, attitudes and practices are supportive of gender-based violence (GBV). This research dissertation intends to build an understanding of how the potential for GBV is perpetuated in online spaces by focusing on the interactions in incel communities and how the incel rhetoric creates and supports discourses surrounding GBV. Consequently, the dissertation has been focused on an overarching research aim that explores the nature and content of online, textual interactions in ‘incel’ communities / interactive spaces. Specific emphasis will be on: unpacking the specific language resources and cultural assumptions that ‘incel’ communities draw upon in their construction of social reality; how members of ‘incel’ communities use these language resources to construct and maintain their own social identity positions; and exploring how this use of language and positioning to construct group identity positions may potentially reproduce values, beliefs and practices that are supportive of inequitable gender relations and gender-based violence.

The remainder of the dissertation is organised into several chapters, each of which is geared towards addressing a specific aspect of the research topic and/or process. This structure is set out below.

The literature review (Chapter 2) will provide an overview of the growing body of academic literature on incels, in order to situate the present study and show how it builds on the work already done. Particular attention will be paid to six papers, each of which uses a different approach in seeking to learn more about the incel phenomenon.

The theoretical framework chapter (Chapter 3), explores and evaluates three different social psychological theoretical perspectives that have potential to advance our understanding of the incel phenomenon: ‘social identity theory (SIT)’, social representation theory (SRT),’ and social constructionism. SIT understands that the self is created through their social group

membership, as well as intergroup relations and relevant group processes (Tajfel, 1982). SRT looks to understand how, with little to no first-hand knowledge, people make sense of their surroundings and how these processes lead to the development of shared ways of making sense of the world that can provide structure for social interactions. Finally, the social constructionist perspective is fundamentally suspicious of truth claims and makes the ontological assertion that social reality is created and recreated through a general agreement between people (Foucault, 1996; 2008). It is then argued that social constructionism will be a more suitable theoretical orientation to investigating the online incel subculture than orientations such as SIT and/or SRT (Potter & Edwards, 1999).

The methodology chapter (Chapter 4) of this dissertation outlines the research questions, research paradigm, the type of qualitative research and research design and provides a motivation for the present study's alignment with the social constructionist methodology of Discourse Analysis. Specific attention is paid to a discussion of the steps to be followed in performing a Foucauldian Discourse Analysis on the data collected from online incel community spaces.

The results chapter (Chapter 5) discusses the analysis of the collected data and presents the main findings of the study through a detailed and in-depth discussion of the discursive features of online, textual interactions in incel spaces. Results of this analysis are related back to previous research discussed in the literature review.

Finally, the conclusion (Chapter 6) summarises the results of the study, seeking to explain incel discourse concisely. It also unpacks the merits of adopting a discursive approach to the study of the incel phenomenon. This discussion is followed by a consideration of the relative limitations, contributions, and ethical considerations applicable to the study, as well as a short reflection on the thesis process.

It is the intention of this dissertation to better understand how the language of the incel communities supports and perpetuates gender-based violence and the surrounding concepts mentioned in this introduction. Through this, the research will unpack how incel members use their language to perpetuate GBV and patriarchal ideals within the world. As previously said, the South African context has been kept in mind throughout this research process, but actual investigation into South African online spaces is beyond the scope of this study.

1 Literature review

1.1 Introduction

While literature on ‘incel’ communities and manosphere spaces has increased over the last several years and has delivered fruitful insights, there is always more to discover. By outlining the landscape of the theoretical and research literature on the manosphere of online spaces, this chapter seeks to identify its own position and the potential contribution of the thesis to the field.

Before providing a discussion of online spaces as a manosphere focusing specifically on incel communities, the chapter will discuss the work of several authors who have made an argument concerning the internet and online spaces as gendered. This gendering of online space is also argued to be particularly masculine (and heteronormative and patriarchal) in nature, resulting in social interactions and practices that reproduce a traditional gender ideology. In addition, it is argued that the increasing prominence of online social and interactional spaces in everyday life has possibly also resulted in an increased risk to users of online platforms like social media and search engines of encountering internet community spaces and content that may be problematic, if not actively harmful.

The chapter will then describe and discuss the particular features of the gendered online space that produce the cumulative effect of taking a traditionally masculine subject for granted and which consequently cater to the interests of assumed users who identify as men. Related to this discussion, will be a description of how interactions within such spaces draw on particular modes that can be characterised as typically masculine, and which frequently rest upon specific gender ideologies and social constructions of manhood. This may often result in interactional spaces that are frequently heteronormative, homo- and transphobic, as well as misogynistic in orientation and content.

Following from this description of the manosphere, the chapter will provide a discussion of relevant research literature focused particularly on several online communities and interactional spaces that explicitly contribute to the creation of the manosphere through the content they circulate in relation to gender roles, social equality, heterosexuality and social relations between men and women. Specifically, the chapter will discuss in some detail, research literature pertaining to online communities such as Men’s Rights Activist (MRA) groups; Pick-Up Artist (PUA); Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW); and finally, communities and interactional spaces frequented by incels.

Next, the discussion will develop a more in-depth examination of the dominant social constructions of masculinities that such interactional spaces and communities rest upon. In this discussion the foundational work of theorists such as Connel (2013) and Demetriou (2001) will be drawn upon in order to understand the ways in which concepts like hegemonic masculinity and its relationships with other masculinities can be used to make sense of aspects of incel communities and the online spaces they participate in.

In addition to this discussion, the chapter will also outline the social psychological concept of the echo chamber and evaluate the usefulness of this concept in understanding the effects that the online social interaction platform's function can have on the social identity formation and management of individual users and online community members. This discussion may provide relevant insights into processes related to the formation of online communities, in-group identity formation, consolidation and differentiation, as well as providing the background against which the ideological polarisation that may lead to the development of increasingly extreme behaviours (both online and offline) takes place.

Lastly, the chapter will provide a more detailed description and discussion of incel communities / spaces in particular, since it is this category of online group / community that is the main focus of this thesis. Attention will be paid specifically to research on aspects such as how incel communities construct specific notions of masculinity; whether incel communities are diverse in terms of their membership; how members have described being an incel; as well as the type of language used in – and the prevalence of – specific content found in online incel community spaces.

1.2 Internet and online spaces as gendered spaces

There are several theorists that would argue that the internet and online spaces are generally designed to favour men (Kendall, 2000; Rosewarne, 2016; Spertus, 1991), as well as those who suggest that the internet is a multifaceted space that can favour understanding of everyone within the gender spectrum (Van Zoonen, 2002).

Exploring the first position, Perry and Greber (1990) explain: “If science reflects at least some of society's values, then technology developed from it must also embody these values” If the sentiments expressed by Perry and Greber (1990) are taken seriously, then technologies like the internet have had patriarchal ideals woven into their design (Walby, 1990) in much the same way that patriarchal systems undergird how society has been organised politically,

economically and socially for several centuries (if not longer). It can be further argued that the technology of the internet was born out of masculine military-industrial-academic spaces which would further support the position that the internet is designed to favourably understand men (Van Zoonen, 2002). Further evidence to support the argument that the internet is a primarily masculine space include the high levels of sexual harassment, right-wing political extremism, man-oriented pornographic content and other forms of general unpleasantness which point towards a man-oriented design (Van Zoonen, 2002).

Furthermore, studies on computer-mediated communication (henceforth CMC) have suggested that women will use short messages, apologetic language, justify and qualify their assertions, and express support towards their interlocutors while men will use insults and profanity, express opinions as facts, and be adversarial towards interlocutors (Hall, 1996; Herring, 1996; Herring, 1992; Herring, 1993; Savicki et al., 1996). Savicki et al. (1996) studied online discussion groups but found that most groups were dominated by male members and only one group had an equal distribution of male members and female members while others had a large population of individuals whose gender was unknown to the study. The male language forms identified were the use of statements as facts without personal ownership, challenging other group members, calling for explicit action, argumentative language, use of language that is coarse and abrasive, and explains indication of member status to whichever online space or community the interlocutors are a part of (Savicki et al., 1996). Using Multiple Regression, Savicki, et al. (1996) found that the usage of male language patterns was significantly more prevalent than female language patterns even in the group that had an equal distribution of male and female members. This study indicates that it would be more difficult for people who prefer less argumentative and coarse online interactions to communicate effectively in those spaces (Savicki et al., 1996). One must however think carefully when considering the applicability of this study to the present study because of two factors. The first is the age of all of these studies and how interactions in CMC spaces might have changed since 1996. The second, is the use of the terms male and female as opposed to men and women. This second issue is noted but the terms for men and women, while not identical to masculine and feminine, often share overlap with the terms men and women and are as such treated as interchangeable in the context provided by Savicki et al. (1996). It is more difficult to justify the relevance of the first issue to the present study but not impossible. Firstly, one might assume that women experience more harassment than men in CMC spaces in more contemporary times. However, Nadim & Fladmoe (2021) find that within the general public

men experience greater levels of patronizing, unpleasant or hateful comments than women. Nadim & Fladmoe (2021) define these comments as harassment but that men and women experience different forms of online harassment which indicate that CMC spaces are still more hostile towards women. Through the use of surveys, Nadim & Fladmoe (2021), find that men are more likely to express their opinions and as such are more likely to receive harassment from others. This is further support for the claims that interactions in CMC spaces are more likely to use, as Savicki et al. (1996) put it, more male language patterns which inhibit the ability for women to interact in these spaces. Furthermore, Nadim & Fladmoe (2021) identify that women are more likely to be silenced by other interlocutors in CMC spaces in the form of online harassment. Herein lies more evidence to suggest that although the results suggesting CMC spaces are more geared towards male members are old, this idea still holds relevance due to the types of online harassment that women experience in CMC spaces, according to more recent data (Nadim & Fladmoe, 2021).

On the other hand, it has also been argued that the interconnected nature of the internet favours a more feminine discourse which embodies a sense of experimentation and peaceful communication (Van Zoonen, 2002). Experimentation in this context entails allowing a user to obscure their physical identity and enact a different identity or identities online (Van Zoonen, 2002). By allowing users to engage in experimentation, traditional forms of gender designation are therefore undermined (Turkle, 1995). Although all these claims can be made in explaining the complex nature of a gendered internet, several points appear to stand out between both sides of the debate. Considering that mixed-gender online spaces appear to incorporate masculine forms of discourse, one might conclude that even if many women use the internet, they are still held at arm's-length due to the language that most internet spaces use (Van Zoonen, 2002). This is further evidenced in overtly masculine online spaces in which women might find it difficult to interact at all.

There is some literature that suggests that the internet is gendered in such a way that it favours men (Antonio & Tuffley, 2014; Cooper, 2006; Gurung, 2018; Kumar, 2015). Antonio & Tuffley (2014) identify that women in developing countries are far less likely to engage in online spaces due to traditional ideas confining women to domestic roles and other socio-economic issues. Cooper (2006) conducts a meta-analysis of 20 studies that investigate the gender divide in computer related activities, jobs and CMC spaces and shows that there exists a gender divide between men and women in learning how to use computers and learning with the aid of computer assisted software. This demonstrates that the internet as a whole is more

difficult for women to learn about and as such participate in (Cooper, 2006). Gurung (2018) notes that society has increased women's involvement in information communication and technology (ICT) without dealing with gender inequalities in offline spaces that have spread to online spaces. One of the ways that women are excluded from online spaces is by failing to effectively teach women about ICT, especially in developing countries (Gurung, 2018). This demonstrates a similar point to Cooper's (2006), but provides a more contemporary look at how women are kept out of online spaces due to a failure to teach them about ICT. Using ethnographic methods, Kumar's (2015) study in rural Indian villages found that the majority of people who owned mobile phones and laptops were men. This differential and gendered access to ICT was justified by the belief of men in those communities that women would never be able to understand the technology of mobile phones enough to use them (Kumar, 2015). This study by Kumar (2015) provides very real examples of men holding a flawed idea of women which limits the participation of women in these spaces. These four writers have identified that, specifically in developing contexts, women are kept out of online spaces due mostly to men's perceptions of women and their capabilities to learn and participate in CMC spaces.

Adding to the context described above, Barker and Jurasz (2019), are particularly useful as their paper adds more evidence for the misogynistic nature of the internet. They demonstrate that women are often shut down and excluded from participation in online spaces (Barker & Jurasz, 2019). Their paper demonstrates this with the analysis of several high-profile examples from several sources (but primarily from the United Kingdom). It highlights the violence that women experience online and how social media can be weaponized (Barker & Jurasz, 2019). This point is made by unpacking how online and offline political spaces are a minefield in which death threats are often used in an attempt to silence people (Barker & Jurasz, 2019). While many people experience these threats, Barker & Jurasz (2019) make the point that it is women who experience the worst of it. Barker & Jurasz (2019) reference a study by Dhrodia (2017) which noted that women in politics with intersecting identities such as, among others, religion, race, and sexuality, received more online harassment than their colleagues. Furthermore, the point is made that law enforcement and other authorities are often reluctant to act on these cases of online harassment, making the problem difficult to address without systemic change. The reason is to be found in the fact that authorities and law enforcement is primarily dominated by white men in the UK context, they argue (Barker & Jurasz, 2019). The difficulty in addressing the issues of violence against women in online spaces is further

exacerbated by the fact that the tech giants such as Facebook and X (formerly Twitter), in which many of these online threats take place, often act as if they are above the law and as such can avoid taking action (Barker & Jurasz, 2019). This can further be applied to incel communities and spaces in which violence against women is openly discussed. Barker, & Jurasz (2019) note that since online violence against women has very real consequences, one can also make the argument that online misogyny in incel spaces has offline consequences and the failure to address online harassment means that online misogyny will continue to thrive without opposition.

While Barker and Jurasz (2019) focused primarily on the general violence that occurs against women in the United Kingdom and the political context, the present research hopes to expand upon the violence perpetrated within the online context by incel communities.

The infamous #GamerGate scandal/incident stands out as an example of how cyberbullying and harassment of women is used to control and prevent women from full participation in online spaces. The control that woman experience in online spaces is also present in offline spaces because of patriarchal systems of control. The #GamerGate incident started when the ex-lover of independent game developer Zoe Quinn posted screenshots of conversations he had with her (Massanari, 2017). The post that accompanied these screenshots incorrectly implied that Quinn had slept with gaming journalists in order to get good reviews for a game she had developed (Massanari, 2017). Quinn quickly became a lightning-rod for death and rape threats because people believed that she represented the unethical journalism in the gaming industry, despite the fact that she is a game developer not journalist or reviewer (Massanari, 2017). The harassment of Quinn quickly spilled over to other women: women journalists, women game designers and men who attempted to defend these women (Massanari, 2017).

Reddit, which Massanari (2017) uses as an example of an online discussion platform in their analyses of #GamerGate, is a social media platform centred around what are called 'subreddits.' Each subreddit is created with a name and a concept in mind. These concepts range from very general such as r/MadeMeSmile where people make posts about anything that might be considered 'wholesome' to r/nutrition where food is discussed in detail. These create communities of people who subscribe to these subreddits and as a result are more likely to see posts there. What sets Reddit apart from sites such Instagram and X (formerly Twitter), is that on these platforms people follow individual accounts and see updates from the people who post on those accounts whereas Reddit has users following a community rather than individual

accounts. One can still follow individual accounts on Reddit and receive updates from the people who make posts, but the system is more geared towards following particular subreddits. Each of these subreddits are moderated by unpaid users who write out a set of rules that members of the subreddit must follow if they wish to participate. This structure fosters a sense of community among members who use the forum posts to discuss the relevant topic. While communities can be diverse, most users will opt for subreddits that match their ideologies and/or belief and values systems and as such can create tailored feeds that do not allow much possibility for dissenting voices. While this is often the most common form of interaction on Reddit, it must be noted that the site does have a front page on which popular subreddits are featured if individual posts gain enough attention. This front page is not as tailored to an individual user but rather presents popular posts based on interaction with that post.

Massanari (2017) finds that Reddit uses many non-human actants (bots, scripts, algorithms, and policies) to run the website. The unintended consequence of this use means that content is often skewed in favour of reactionary posts that reinforce biases rather than challenge them (Maly, 2021). Massanari (2017) further argues that the design of Reddit does little to discourage harassment in its spaces. This means that women might find it challenging to engage in these spaces when the space itself does little to discourage harassment. In a different qualitative study in which 1.6 million tweets from 340 thousand unique users were analysed, it was found that #GamerGate participants were both more active and less likely to be suspended than the average X (formerly Twitter at the time of research) user due to X's struggle in identifying and combating online harassment (Chatzakou et al., 2017).

Due in part to both Reddit and X's struggle to identify and combat harassment, specifically against women, we can see that the use of such language prevents women from using online spaces. What must be understood is that the impunity that attends these online forms of harassment (such as death and rape threats) spurs users on to continue and escalate such behaviours – with real offline effects for the recipients (Chatzakou et al., 2017; Massanari, 2017). This is particularly relevant to the research undertaken for this thesis because understanding how the online misogyny of incels (and other online communities in the manosphere) is able to spill over into offline spaces is an important facet of the perpetuation of the ideologies that support real-world gender-based violence.

If it is accepted that for several reasons, the Covid 19 pandemic included, many social interactions have been moving online and that the internet favours interactions between men,

then two things follow. The first is that women will be disproportionately affected by the movement of social interactions into the online space, and second, that toxic masculine spaces are more able to thrive when social interactions are pushed into the online space. According to Barker and Jurasz (2019), Kumar (2015), Antonio & Tuffley (2014), Cooper, (2006), and Gurung (2018), women are disproportionately kept out of online spaces through harassment, traditional patriarchal values, socioeconomic inequality, access to income, dependence on men, and access to education. This means that because of the ongoing movement into online spaces in the modern era, women are increasingly likely to experience hostility online that can have offline effects (Barker & Jurasz, 2019). In particular, the meta-analysis done by Cooper, (2006), demonstrates the gender divide by showing that women are at disadvantages when learning about CMC spaces and computer usage in general. It will take women on average longer to integrate and benefit from online spaces, which in turn means that men, coming first, will have determined the norms that women are then confronted with, creating the spaces that are designed to benefit men rather than a more gender inclusive space.

If the above line of argument is sound, then communities such as incels are more likely to thrive. As more people are spending more time online, they are more likely to interact with spaces that might share ideologies with the incel community and as a result could result in more people being exposed to the harmful and reactionary ideologies of the incel communities. The consequences of a higher exposure to online spaces and, by extension, the incel communities are twofold. Firstly, it means that women and LGBTQIA+ communities are at risk of experiencing an increased level of hate speech, harassment and cyber-bullying. Evidence for this point comes from Dhrodia (2017) who uses surveys to show that women with intersecting identities such as religion, sexuality, and race are more likely to receive harassment online. Further evidence is provided by Nadim & Fladmoe (2021) who find that although men might experience more online harassment than women in online spaces, it is women who are primarily silenced in these spaces through hostility and a culture that makes it more difficult for women to engage in online spaces. Secondly, the sentiments expressed by reactionary hate groups like the incels might find traction in broader social groups of men who might also be feeling disenfranchised by the change from a patriarchal society to a more equitable society. As such, if the above evidence can be taken as true, then online spaces are built, in general, to favour men.

1.3 The Internet as a ‘manosphere’

Internet communication technology has undoubtedly created possibilities for increased social contact between individuals and groups from disparate social locations, leading to a range of new social phenomena in computer-mediated interactional spaces. While such interactive spaces are not inherently bad, many online spaces are arguably spaces of extreme misogyny (Barker & Jurasz, 2019). The preceding discussion has already highlighted several authors that have identified internet and online spaces as gendered spaces, specifically geared towards the interests, interactional styles, discursive strategies and content preferences of traditionally identifying men. As a result, several specific kinds of online interactional spaces have developed and proliferated in the past few years that, when taken together in terms of both their apparent popularity amongst users and/or followers, as well as the nature of their content, constitute the online ‘manosphere’ that researchers and theorists have identified (Ging, 2017; Van Valkenburgh, 2018). These online spaces/communities and the content they produce and circulate on various online platforms, including social media sites as well as internet chat fora include (amongst others):

- ‘Men’s Rights Activist’ (MRA) communities;
- ‘Pick-up artists’ (PUA) and their followers;
- ‘Men Going Their Own Way’ (MGTOW) communities; and
- ‘Incel’ communities / groups.

(Ging, 2017; Van Valkenburgh, 2018)

Before embarking on a more detailed discussion of each of these aforementioned online communities, the interactional spaces they inhabit, their typical online behaviours and the ideological positions regarding gender roles that they espouse, it is necessary to unpack the notion of the internet as ‘manosphere’ that is the enabling background against which these online communities take shape. Several authors have written about the notion of the ‘manosphere’, but this chapter will focus on specifically on the work of Van Valkenburgh (2018); Han and Yin (2023); Ribeiro et al. (2021), Jones et al. (2020), and Farrell et al. (2019). These authors have all provided important insights that are useful in developing an understanding of the multifaceted spaces that make up the manosphere.

Van Valkenburgh (2018) describes the manosphere as a conglomerate of several alt-right groups such as MRA, PUA, MGTOW and incels. Similarly, Ribeiro et al. (2021) specifically examine how the manosphere evolved by tracking the movements of users from MRA and

PUA to MGTOW and incels. Their longitudinal study analyses 28.8m posts from multiple forums and subreddits (Ribeiro et al., 2021). While all of the groups mentioned are considered misogynistic, there has been a move from the older MRA and PUA communities, described as less misogynistic, to newer and more extreme MGTOW and incel communities (Ribeiro et al., 2021). They trace a timeline from 2006 where PUA's and MRA's rise in popularity until 2011 when MGTOW and a subreddit called TheRedPill would rise in popularity (Ribeiro et al., 2021). TheRedPill (TRP) community seems to be a transitory group that spans most of the abovementioned groups in general discussions on issues relating to men with a strong focus on misogyny. TRP would remain popular until 2016, when the subreddit r/incels started to become more active (Ribeiro et al., 2021).

According to Van Valkenburgh (2018) many of the online groups that form part of the manosphere share several similarities, with an important one being the importance of the 'red pill vs blue pill' debate. Several authors (Ging, 2017; Jaki et al., 2018; O'Malley et al., 2022) have identified the connection to the Hollywood film *The Matrix* in which the protagonist is faced with a choice between continuing to live the ordinary life he has known, ignorant of the truth of how his perceptions of reality are being manipulated in order to keep him docile and subjugated (i.e. 'the blue pill'), or to wake up to the truth and face the horrors of a reality where he has to recognise his enslavement and exploitation in an inhumane system not of human making and beyond human control (i.e. 'the red pill') (Wachowski & Wachowski, 1999).

Online social groups and communities that constitute the manosphere make frequent reference to this allegory as a way of imbuing their specific political opinions and gender-role ideologies with supposed truth/facticity ('the red pill' also functions as code for an unpopular/fringe perspective on the way things are that those in power do not want you to know about). Van Valkenburgh (2018) outlines how in order to participate in online discussions in spaces frequented by members of these online communities, one needs to have read several sources that constitute swallowing the 'red pill' – in other words, one has to engage with specific arguments, published and circulated in particular online communities in order to come to realise 'how things actually are' (Van Valkenburgh, 2018).

As TRP seemed to wane in terms of activity, other online groups and discussion fora, such as MGTOW continued to remain popular (Ribeiro et al., 2021). They highlight large degrees of membership overlap between many of these groups, identifying that individuals seemed to have belonged to multiple groups at once. Ribeiro et al. (2021) further note that in the early stages,

incel group members were less inclined to overlap with other members of the manosphere, but that this apparent distinctiveness has since shifted and more recently there appears to be a high degree of member overlap between MGTOW and incel groups / communities. One of the key findings of their paper is that members of these groups appear to have migrated into groups that espouse more extreme and overt misogyny and this is reflected in the language analysed (Ribeiro et al., 2021).

To further understand these groups we turn to Han and Yin (2023) who provide a detailed map of the manosphere and describe each group.

1.3.1 Men's rights activists

Manosphere spaces in general can be traced back to the 1970s in the United States of America where ideologically masculinist discourses sprouted (Han & Yin, 2023). At this time three groups emerged, these being: MLM (Men Liberation Movement), MRA (Men Rights' Association), and MRM (Men Rights' Movement) (Han & Yin, 2023). From these three groups it was only MLM which had a liberal masculine identity, the other two represented a conservative response to feminism (Messner, 1998). However, MLM soon disappeared with the MRA taking the lead in campaigning (Han & Yin, 2023), seeking to change public opinion and develop legislation about marriage, custody of children, alimony, sexual consent and more, all the while maintaining connections to the alt-right (Anderson, 2014; Schmitz & Kazyak, 2016).

However, with the advent of the internet, new groups started appearing online that left behind the intent for political change and legislation in favour of the lived experiences of men and their interactions with women (Han & Yin, 2023; Ribeiro et al., 2021). This would further evolve and turn back to ideas of politics and intent for social change but in a reactionary manner that is very hostile to concepts of feminism and equity (Han & Yin, 2023). It is from these early online spaces where men's rights activists – MRA - begin to rise to prominence.

MRA in online spaces started gaining traction in 2008 on Reddit where men began discussing how they have been unfairly treated by society at large (Ribeiro et al., 2021). From these groups stems discourse surrounding divorce cases in which custody of children usually ends up with women and high male suicide rates. While discussions surrounding these topics are not inherently harmful, they are usually fuelled by the belief that it is feminism and a more gender-equitable society that unfairly disadvantages men (Ribeiro et al., 2021). The claim is that

society and masculinity are in crisis because of the forced feminisation of institutions and men (Han & Yin, 2023). In this way, they harken back to a ‘before’ time in which men were in control and women were subservient. Language is often misogynistic and anti-feminist, but usually tamer than newer manosphere groups (e.g. MGTOW and incels) (Ribeiro et al., 2021). What one sees here is a reactionary legacy from old misogynistic groups in response to feminist advances. The age of this group gives legitimacy to the more recent communities who refer to MRA’s as having laid the foundation for those who came after through developing an antifeminist rhetoric that blames women for the supposed damage done to the social order by changes towards gender equality. Furthermore, it sowed the seeds that grew into a kind of natural determinism and belief that older forms of masculinity were better for society.

1.3.2 Pick-up Artists

Pick-up Artists – PUA - portray women as ‘game’ that must be scored (Han & Yin, 2023). This objectification is peddled by so called ‘gurus’ who explain that all parts of a man which are ‘soft’, ‘supporting’ and ‘caring’ (described as a ‘beta’ male) are a detriment to the ‘method’ of manipulating women to have sex (Han & Yin, 2023). It is in these spaces where one begins to see the connection to a warped form of naturalism in which men must aspire to be ‘alpha’ males and take control of women (who, according to this rhetoric, secretly want this) (Han & Yin, 2023; Van Valkenburgh, 2018). This idea of being an ‘alpha’ male is translated into what is described as the sexual marketplace in which each person’s sexual value can be calculated (Han & Yin, 2023). Beyond this economic language, the term of ‘alpha male’ can be traced back to a book that outlined that among wolves there was an alpha male wolf who controlled the pack, whose position all male wolves would fight for (Mech, 1981). This idea of alpha wolves being decided by fights was found by Mech and Boitani (2019) to be false and only applicable to captive wolves that were forced together from different backgrounds. In actuality, wolves have a hierarchy based on family with the father and mother of the pack as the pair that make the decisions (Mech & Boitani, 2019). This mixture of economic language and pseudo-scientific jargon gives credibility to these ‘gurus’ who sell packages that promise to unlock the secret mechanisms that decide if a woman will or will not have sex with you (Han & Yin, 2023). It is in this language where PUAs gain power as their explanations for how people meet and have sex is rooted in the idea that we are all animals and as such our behaviour - specifically sexual behaviour - can be studied and decoded with rules or principles derived from a behaviourism-like perspective on human nature. However, this study of people usually removes the contexts and describes how people develop relationships as animalistic.

1.3.3 Men Going Their Own Way

Men Going Their Own Way – MGTOW - believe that society is gynocentric and designed to benefit women through the systematic oppression of men (Jones, Trott, & Wright, 2020; Lin, 2017). A recurring theme, which is highlighted by MGTOW, is that men are the true victims of society and as a result men must cut themselves off from women and what they perceive as gynocentric institutions and spaces (Han & Yin, 2023). Jones et al. (2020) highlight that while MGTOW discourse does not overtly attack women, like other groups mentioned in the present chapter, it does enact ‘passive harassment’ which, due to being passive, has no direct target and can affect a wide range of victims. Part of the key action that Jones, et al. (2020) undertake is linking MGTOW to toxic masculinity which is defined by Haider (2016) as the relational position of masculinity to femininity taken to the extreme. In this view, femininity is seen as subordinate to masculinity (Jones et al., 2020). Jones et al. (2020) used a multi-phase content and thematic analysis of 1688 tweets with a specific focus on hyperactive users (called ‘key users’) who often defined the discourse of MGTOW. Of the harassing tweets identified in their study, 54% were done by three key members while the other 46% were made by 138 other users (Jones et al., 2020). Jones et al. (2020) found that 96% of the tweets were passively harassing with the remaining 4% being targeted harassment. Jones et al. (2020) argue that this passive harassment socialises men and normalises misogynistic sentiments. Jones et al. (2020) find that MGTOW members feel a need to perform their ‘going their own way-ness’ in order to be accepted within the group. This means that they express, among others, sexism, misogyny, anti-feminism and homophobia (Jones et al., 2020). It is through posts of homophobia and emasculating discussions that MGTOW define what masculinity is, even though they profess a move away from such notions (Jones et al., 2020)

1.3.4 Incels

The final and most recent group to be discussed here will also be the group that is investigated in most depth. Incels present themselves as individuals who exist within a complicated net of contradictions. They blame women for their low social status and inability to have sex while also requiring women for their supposed salvation (Williams, 2020). They seem to believe in a masculinity of bravado, sexual success, financial success, and traditional family values but have themselves failed to live up to these expectations (Williams, 2020).

Furthermore, incels take the idea of a ‘red pill’ and translate it into the notion of the ‘black pill’ (often written as ‘blackpill’). While the ‘red pill’ constitutes an awareness of oppression

experienced by men, it still maintains that through political and social action, change in one's circumstances can be achieved. By contrast, incels believe in swallowing the 'black pill', which expresses the position that nothing about men's current social oppression by a gynocentric society can be changed and that one is biologically predetermined to succeed or fail (Lindsay, 2022). Swallowing the 'black pill' constitutes the acceptance that the world favours women and there is nothing one can do to change one's social position in a hierarchy. Lindsay (2022) goes on to speak about how the 'black pill' is often used to justify offline violence (called stochastic terrorism) and violent discussions. Part of the way in which this is achieved is by rooting the ideology of the 'black pill' in evolutionary psychology and biological positivism which helps justify stochastic terrorism (Lindsay, 2022). Stochastic terrorism is defined as an act of terrorism that is committed by members of a group or followers of an individual who demonise the person or group the act of terrorism is committed against (Lindsay, 2022). In this way, some incel members are able to further justify extreme acts of violence because of both the hatred of women instilled in them and the reasoning behind the 'black pill' received from other incel members (Lindsay, 2022).

An incel member will, furthermore, believe that people are categorised into three groups (Lindsay, 2022). The first are a small percentage of attractive men (known as 'Chads') and women (known as 'Stacys') who are at the top of the social hierarchy (Lindsay, 2022). Chads are at the top because they were biologically predetermined to be there, however, the Stacys, who are the most attractive women, are at the top of this social hierarchy primarily because of their ability to have sex with Chads which is not seen as an active achievement but rather a passive success (Lindsay, 2022). Here one can see some of the contradictory descriptions of Stacys that some incels use. Some incels will describe a Stacy as both passively achieving their goals through no effort of their own but simultaneously as being exploitative of men (Lindsay, 2022). The second group would be the largest percentage of people who are considered the 'normies,' so-called 'beta' men or the general public (Lindsay, 2022). Within this middle category, there exist two other groups of people. These two are the 'cucks' and the 'Beckys' (Ging, 2019; Lopes, 2023). The term 'cuck' is the abbreviated term of 'cuckolding' in which one member of a sexual relationship watches the other member of their relationship have sex with someone outside of their relationship (Lehmiller et al., 2018). Within incel contexts, it is often used to describe, in a derogatory way, the class of men who are not chads but still attractive enough to have sex with women (Ging, 2017). These men are described as a 'cuck' because the assumption is that the women are exploiting the men who they are in a relationship

with and having sex with a Chad whenever the opportunity presents itself (Glance et al., 2021). Beckys, on the other hand, are less attractive than Stacys, have gone to a liberal university and are feminist women (Lopes, 2023). In this situation, the Becky will, according to some incels, rebuke their exploitative and misandrist nature when interacting with others but secretly want to be a Stacy and resent Stacys because they, the Becky, is not as attractive as the Stacy (Lopes, 2023). The final group is also a small percentage and consists of (self-reported) genetically inferior men (and only men) – the incels (Lindsay, 2022). These ideas feed into the belief of hypergamy which states that women are searching for high status men (men who are attractive and wealthy) to achieve high status themselves and their potential offspring (Lindsay, 2022). While all women, according to incels, only want Chads most have to settle for a beta man who can provide financial security for them (Lindsay, 2022). What Lindsay (2022) further identifies, is that women will, despite being in a relationship with a beta man always be on the lookout for available Chads and will leave their established relationship if an opportunity presents itself. Beyond this point, Lindsay (2022) highlights the ingroup and outgroup relationships of the incels. Incel members will describe themselves as genetic trash but also capable of providing unconditional love, while also not being driven solely by sexual desire as opposed to Chads who are (Lindsay, 2022). Part of the importance of Lindsay's (2022) analysis is that it highlights how normalised misogynistic violence and thinking become in these spaces. Any attempt at challenging the ideology is policed and controlled by members as a breach of ideologically accepted boundaries (Lindsay, 2022). For the purpose of this thesis, the paper by Lindsay (2022) provides useful information into the identity of an incel member and what it means to be participate in the discourse. It further identifies the link between violent rhetoric and violent action in incel communities.

1.3.5 The increasing misogyny of online communities in the manosphere

What one can take away is that this has been a steadily growing issue in which misogyny has not waned over time but rather intensified (Ribeiro et al., 2021). This leads one to believe that the increase in popularity of these groups makes it easier to express extreme toxic rhetoric in spaces outside of these groups. When comparing this to the incels, one can see that the community has been becoming more misogynistic over time and that one might estimate that these groups have not hit their upper limit but will rather become more toxic as time goes on, through continued offline misogyny, among others, unless interventions are developed (Ribeiro et al., 2021).

Farrell et al. (2019) draw on feminist analysis to identify a rhetorical shift from men's rights topics towards misogynistic, hateful and violent discourse within manosphere spaces. They cite Code (1991; 2002) as the foundation for their analysis. This perspective on feminist analysis looks at misogyny temporally (both historically and contemporarily) to understand how misogyny adapts to culture and its changes (Farrell et al., 2019). In this context, misogyny is defined as acts against women that degrade, reduce and objectify them while also excluding, committing physical and sexual violence, and holding hostile attitudes against them because of their identity as women (Code, 2002). This definition is important because it allows one to look at the structural nature of misogyny and how it persists despite attempts to root it out (Manne, 2017; Yoon, 2018). In more practical terms, this feminist analysis is conducted with computational approaches by observing communities on Reddit across a length of time from inception to capture the evolution of these spaces (Farrell et al., 2019).

This kind of analysis identifies that misogyny is rising within manosphere spaces. Part of these findings is that misogyny is often found alongside violent rhetoric (Farrell et al., 2019). Once again, a point can be made that this rhetoric, which is both violent and misogynistic, is likely to spill over into other online spaces and into offline spaces as well. The rate at which this happens seems to be rather slow, but both Ribeiro et al. (2021) and Farrell et al. (2019) have identified a shift to more extreme expressions of misogyny. As such, one begins to see the outline of incel group membership. MRA rhetoric believes that men experience discrimination in everyday life, from custody rights and equity programs to increasing suicide rates (Van Valkenburgh, 2018). PUAs believe that women are 'game' to be scored and focus on ways to manipulate women to have sex with them (Van Valkenburgh, 2018). What both of these views have in common is that much of the discourse is around what a man must do to achieve his goals or his experiences in life. What the above two research papers have identified, is that there is a shift from MRA's and PUA's towards groups like MGTOW and incels with an increase in toxicity that takes the form of harassment, normalisation of sexism, and possible outbreaks of offline violence against women.

1.4 Hegemonic masculinities

Part of what makes incel communities such an interesting phenomenon is the way in which they construct their masculinity as being situated at the bottom of a social status hierarchy. Connell (2013) has theorised that in the past a hegemonic masculinity would place itself at the foreground and oppress from a position of being the most powerful. Hegemony in this usage implies "a social ascendancy achieved in a play of social forces that extend beyond contests of

brute power into the organisation of private life and cultural processes” (Connell, 2013, p. 184). Hegemonic masculinity thus entails a socially desired form of masculine gender identity which, while still able to use brute force, attains universal usage through structural implementation (Connell, 2013). It is further argued that for a hegemonic masculinity to remain hegemonic, it has had to adapt to the changing political climate (Demetriou, 2001). As overt forms of masculine control have been increasingly criticised in recent times, hegemonic masculinities which relied on this control have come under threat of being dismantled (Demetriou, 2001). Patriarchy has still maintained relative control over much of western thought and social/political organisation and, as such, hegemonic masculinities are still firmly in place (Walby, 1990). Demetriou (2001), theorises that this is because hegemonic masculinities have adapted to become subtler in the ways they enforce their social dominance and control. He however still states that hegemonic masculinities will present themselves as powerful (Demetriou, 2001).

Connell (2013) argues that ‘hegemonic masculinities’ can be defined by two categories of control. The first is known as ‘domination over’ which in this case would be domination over women (Connell, 2013). The second is known as ‘leading of allies’ (Connell, 2013; Demetriou, 2001). As previously mentioned, according to Demetriou (2001), hegemonic masculinities will still attempt to appear as dominant forms of masculinity. In the struggle to create a hegemonic masculinity, subordinate masculinities (who are considered the ‘allies’) will be led by the hegemonic masculinity until homogeneity amongst forms of masculine gender identity has been attained (Demetriou, 2001). In some of Connell and Messerschmidt’s (2005) previous formulations, hegemonic masculinity was a pattern of practice that was used to continually dominate women. An important feature of this hegemonic masculinity formulation was the idea that the men enacting this masculinity made up a small population but that the norms perpetuated by this small population were normative, meaning that other men and women would hold these norms as true (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). In this way, those men who did not enact these masculine forms of control but still benefitted from their presence can be described as complicit masculinities (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) made the important point that hegemonic masculinities, while able to be supported by force, were not defined by violence but rather that these masculinity norms were supported culturally, through institutions, and through persuasion. In this way, one can see how although some incel members do not agree with the hegemonic masculine norms, they still believe in them as hegemonic and thus conceive of themselves as having failed in

masculinity. However, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) noted that these hegemonic masculinities can change over time with newer masculinities displacing older versions. This stands in contrast to how some incels appear to use the 'black pill' to imply that their social position, and by extension the hegemonic masculinity that creates this social position, is immutable.

What emerges from this perspective on hegemonic masculinities is that, on the one hand, traditional forms of masculine gender identity based on strict patriarchal control have increasingly been eroded in recent years due to several social, political, technological and economic processes (Murrie, 1998). This has arguably destabilised traditional patriarchal social status hierarchies, forcing men to renegotiate their place in the social order (Murrie, 1998). On the other hand, new emerging hegemonic masculinities have gained traction, leaving old categories of identity and status having to adapt to shifting social norms (Demetriou, 2001). Incels may appear to be representative of a section of contemporary men trying to re-negotiate this tension as they appear as both wanting to be the oppressors and the oppressed (Demetriou, 2001). It is this form of victimhood which implies a hybrid masculinity which does not fit within the structure put forward by Connell but rather chooses which aspect of masculinity to weave together for a specific goal (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014; Demetriou, 2001).

Nagle's (2015) discussion further supports this by identifying the various attempts by incel members at defying the perceived 'jock' culture that supposedly oppresses them. It is in these discussions that one can begin to see the renegotiation of masculinity and their place in the social order (Nagle, 2016). Some members of incel communities seem to place themselves at the bottom of a hierarchy of masculinities partly because they believe that is where they belong, but also because they seek the power that aggrieved entitlement provides. In this way, incels have responded to the shifts that constructions of masculinities have had to make in response to a more equitable society. The changes of constructions of masculinity are achieved by seeking the control and power those hegemonic masculinities used to have. Furthermore, Williams (2020) argues that incels have effectively constructed their own version of hegemonic masculinity which they have failed to achieve. This masculinity is, however, mired in contradiction as the community, as a whole, struggles to come to a consensus on what it is that they have failed at (Williams, 2020). Traits of this constructed masculinity include, being physically athletic, conventionally attractive, above 6ft in height, not balding, sexually successful, variously intelligent or unintelligent (depending on understandings of intelligence), being of a certain ethnicity (again, depending on how ethnic membership is constructed as

desirable / not desirable to women), being economically successful, mentally healthy, and having a 6-inch or longer penis. Through the use of all of these traits incels are able to create a hierarchy whereby they can rank an individual based on how many of these traits a man fulfils. For the incel, however, they have failed enough of these traits that they cannot be considered a man and, in their minds, are therefore sub-human. However, incels still seek to dominate women and compete for status with other men which can be explained through Connell's (2013) concept of hegemonic masculinities as a constant need to dominate over other masculinities (Williams, 2020). What does not quite fit with Connell's (2013) concept of a hegemonic masculinity is the intent to place themselves at the bottom of the hierarchy. As mentioned previously, incels find their masculinity marked by a common goal of creating aggrieved entitlement which in turn gives them power and the label of a hybrid masculinity. If the incel community can be described as a 'hybrid masculinity' then understanding how this opposes a more equitable society within the digital age is worth researching.

1.5 Echo chambers

Barker and Jurasz (2019) further discuss the existence of echo chambers in the online space for which Nguyen (2018), provides a specifically tailored theory. According to this approach, one of the indicators of a group being stuck in an echo chamber is a lack of diverse political beliefs which Jaki et al. (2018) suggests is the case for the incel community. Nguyen (2018) goes on to define an echo chamber as a space in which an epistemic community creates "significant disparity in trust between members and non-members" (Nguyen, 2018, p. 6). There are three criteria for determining if a group is in an echo chamber. These are: if the group is an epistemic community; if the group magnifies internal voices; and if the group insulates from external voices (Nguyen, 2018). When applied to incels, one can see that some incel spaces appear to identify as an epistemic community in their unique language that helps set them apart from other communities (Nguyen, 2018). Furthermore, one can see that the group both magnifies internal voices and insulates from external voices through their use of the 'black pill.' By constructing their worlds as immutable, incels are able to completely disregard outside voices that advocate for a different world view by claiming that, because of biology, nothing can be changed. The 'black pill' also means that internal voices tend to agree with this warped biological deterministic view because of how linked some incel experiences are. This means that when all experiences are deterministic, any internal voice agreeing with this will be amplified because of how it confirms the narrative.

The literature on echo chambers also differentiates between a filter bubble and an echo chamber and makes the claim that echo chambers are usually a result of homophily – the tendency to surround ourselves with similar ideas and people - while filter bubbles are a result of algorithmic effects that direct similar content to an individual based on their past interactions in the online space (Terren & Borge-Bravo, 2021). Filter bubbles in this case are defined as “a unique universe of information for each of us,” which further has three characteristics: entering the bubble was not a choice, the bubble cannot be seen, and that there is only one person per bubble (Pariser, 2011). However, despite this difference between the two concepts, they both achieve similar goals in keeping an individual from thinking about or engaging with opposing viewpoints (Terren & Borge-Bravo, 2021). As such, Terren and Borge-Bravo (2021) use these terms semi-interchangeably in their review of the surrounding literature. Therefore, the present research will also use them semi-interchangeably. A separate research paper further discusses whether it is people who create echo chambers or algorithms (Zimmer et al., 2019). Zimmer et al. (2019) used a case study and qualitative and quantitative content analysis to discover that individuals are usually responsible for the creation of echo chambers but that it is algorithms that perpetuate these spaces.

Part of what makes an echo chamber so dangerous is that it is difficult to break an individual out of one, due to the disagreement reinforcement mechanism (Nguyen, 2018). This means that disagreeing with a person in an echo chamber will only reinforce their beliefs. This has been illustrated in studies where past experiences of dissenting opinions have been used to reinforce previously held beliefs (Taber & Lodge, 2006). A community that uses disagreement reinforcement mechanisms is also likely to surround itself with assenting opinions that escalate previously held beliefs (Karlsen et al., 2017; Sustein, 2009). In terms of the features of echo chambers, the incel community appear to be guilty of both. This would imply that their reportedly violent ideologies would eventually escalate their ideological beliefs to the point of violent outbursts. De-escalating the propensity towards violent outbreaks amongst incels (Gismondi, 2018; Lamoureux, 2018; McDonnel-Parry, 2018; Sidnar & Ellis, 2014; Zaveri et al., 2018) becomes both a difficult puzzle and a necessity.

While Nguyen (2018) does not directly write about incel or manosphere spaces, his contributions are still acknowledged as useful in understanding incel spaces. Bringing in what was discovered by Terren and Borge-Bravo (2021) and Zimmer et al. (2019), one can assume that it is individuals who enter into and create these incel echo chambers but that it will be website algorithms that keep incels in the echo chambers.

1.6 Incel communities

Ging (2017), Jaki et al. (2018), O'Malley et al. (2022), Glace et al. (2021), Daly & Reed (2022), and Williams (2020) all contribute important writing towards understanding the incel phenomenon. These six papers are seminal in their discussion and analysis of incel communities as they discuss an important and fundamental description of the incel communities as well as expanding the understanding of these spaces in their own ways. Incel groups have been described by numerous sources in overwhelmingly negative ways, due, in part, to the numerous violent acts for which the incel community have claimed responsibility; such as the Isla Vista killings in which 6 people died and 14 others were wounded in 2014 when Elliot Rodger (22 years old) killed his roommates, posted a 141 page manifesto detailing his life, attempted to shoot up a sorority house, and then drove around shooting at people indiscriminately before finally committing suicide (Ging, 2017; Lamoureux, 2018; Van Valkenburgh, 2018).

1.6.1 The hybrid construction of masculinity in incel communities / spaces

Ging (2017) is useful for her use of discourse analysis of the incel communities. While discourse analysis and Foucauldian discourse analysis (FDA) are not identical, Ging creates a useful guideline which this paper follows. She does however apply the idea of a hybrid masculinity more broadly to the manosphere spaces but her findings are still important in understanding the incel community. Ging (2017) uses discourse analysis to understand specific text posts produced by the antifeminist communities. Ging (2017) correctly points out that Anderson's (2008; 2010) and McCormack's (2012) discussions of a generally positive advancement in masculinities are far too optimistic. Ging (2017) and others; (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014; De Boise, 2015; O'Neill, 2015) suggests that these newer masculinities are simply tools for a new and liberal masculinity to dodge responsibility for systematic change by employing superficial change. However, the incel community is not what one would consider a historic masculinity but rather one that seeks to be oppressed. A core feature of Ging's (2017) study is the application of the concept of hybrid masculinity (as developed by Bridges & Pascoe (2014)) to the manosphere spaces. Bridges & Pascoe (2014) define 'hybrid masculinities' as "the selective incorporation of elements of identity typically associated with various marginalized and subordinated masculinities and – at times – femininities into privileged men's

gender performances and identities.” What this quote means, is that in order to adapt to the shifting power dynamics and gender equality, men started changing aspects of their masculinity to continue maintain power despite these changes (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014).

Ging (2017) goes on to discuss the nature of anti-feminist masculinities as ones which self-label as oppressed. While not specific to the incel community, one can see how incels use this to create a righteous rhetoric that crusades against the masculinities that are perceived to be in power (Ging, 2017). Kimmel and Kalish (2010) The discussion is deepened by adding of the concept of ‘aggrieved entitlement’, described as a state that young men experience when they feel as if the world has been unfairly cruel to them and that they deserve recompense. One sees the connection to the incel community fairly quickly in that the incel community also sees themselves as deeply aggrieved by Stacys and Chads (Bratich & Banet-Weiser, 2019; Gotell & Dutton, 2016).

What Ging (2017) finds is that antifeminist men (including incels) have developed a hybrid masculinity which both distances itself from hegemonic masculinities and still enforces hegemonic masculine boundaries. Furthermore, for it to be a hybrid masculinity it must have a form of aggrieved entitlement as mentioned by Kimmel and Kalish (2010) which translates into a self-proclaimed oppressed identity. Following Ging’s (2017) line of thought, one sees incel members create an identity that is anchored in already existing hegemonic masculine identities. The identity is slowly translated into a masculinity that fits the trait of an incel member but that is objectified through a lens of aggrieved entitlement by removing the original context of an older form of hegemonic masculinity, to what it means to be an oppressed man.

While Ging (2017) uses discourse analysis (as this research does), its focus is on “how antifeminist men are positioning themselves through the manosphere’s discursive practices” – indicating a broader focus than the incel communities as it looks at all masculinities in the manosphere. It is included in the section on incels because of the importance of the idea of hybrid masculinities and how it can be applied to incel identities. In adding to this discussion, this research paper seeks to conduct a Foucauldian discourse analysis and focus specifically on the violence perpetrated against women’s bodies by incels.

Glance et al. (2021) provide a useful thematic analysis that helps to confirm the apt fit of the concept of hybrid masculinity that Ging (2017) claims can be applied to manosphere spaces. In this way, one can see that the men of the incel communities distance themselves from hegemonic ideals by describing their masculinity as one that is sexually and economically

unsuccessful, by borrowing the language of the oppressed to lend credibility to their cause through discussion of themselves as a marginalised group, and finally by reinforcing boundaries through the constant discussion of how the only way to have sex with a woman is to be physically and economically attractive (Glance et al., 2021). They identify that incels fit the three criteria for being described as a hybrid masculinity (Glance et al., 2021). Firstly, incels engage in discursive distancing by highlighting parts of hegemonic masculinity that they do not agree with while rejecting feminist ideas of masculinity and as such maintaining an identity of powerful masculinity (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014). What Glance et al. (2021) discover is that incels often use concepts of race to construct a hyper masculine, usually black, person who represents part of the reason why they are in the positions that they are in. Secondly, incels also engage in strategic borrowing whereby incels begin to use the language of the oppressed to provide power and legitimacy to their cause (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014; Glance et al., 2021). As mentioned previously, they engage in aggrieved entitlement whereby incels use an oppressed identity to gain access to power and justification for their language and actions. According to Glance et al. (2021), incels often do both discursive distancing and strategic borrowing at the same time. Incels claim that their physical traits make them targets for discrimination (Glance et al., 2021).

Thirdly, and finally, incels engage in fortifying boundaries. This is done by maintaining the value of hegemonic masculinities and shunning those who fail to meet the requirements as set forth by these hegemonic masculinities (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014). By shunning both themselves and their fellow incels, they create a discourse whereby the idea of being attractive is something that they have failed at, and must, therefore, feel shame for (Glance et al., 2021). The research conducted by Glance et al. (2021), further highlights several inductive themes that are useful to understand the identity of an incel member. Much of this research identified how hostile the themes discussed by incels are towards women. From discussing how the value of a woman only lies in her sexual market value to describing sexually promiscuous women as ‘roast beef’ (Glance et al., 2021). This comparison claims that a woman with multiple sexual partners will have labia that look like roast beef (Glance et al., 2021). One of the key findings of this research, is that the violence expressed by incel members reaffirm and support hegemonic masculinities that in turn support and normalise GBV.

What Glance et al. (2021) begin to establish is the image of incels who use a hybrid construction of masculinity to understand their world which is underpinned by extreme levels of misogyny. While useful for comparison, the research conducted by Glance et al. (2021) uses different tools

of analysis to understand the incel rhetoric. The present research furthermore seeks to understand incel rhetoric through the interactions between the members as opposed to using individual posts as Glace et al. (2021) have done in their research. Furthermore, with the use of Foucauldian discourse analysis the present research seeks to understand the power dynamics at play within the interactions between the incel members.

1.6.2 The diversity of incel groups / communities

Similarly, to Ging (2017), Williams (2020) also uses discourse analysis but diverges by using critical discourse analysis to reach its conclusions that the incel communities are not homogenous but are instead complicated and diverse in identity and ideology. This study further identifies four central themes that are defined by contradiction which are: views on women; masculinity and violence; masculinities and mental health; and self-esteem (Williams, 2020). Williams (2020) creates a nuanced and intricate image of the incel community that highlights the contradictions that define the online space in three findings. First is the understanding that incel spaces are contradictory, second is that incels are a result of misogyny in modern western society and finally that incel communities are part of a larger problem of how men interact with masculinities. Furthermore, Williams (2020) uses critical discourse analysis which, while not identical, is similar in several ways to Foucauldian discourse analysis. As such, this paper provides both interesting content to compare to in the discussion and helpful guidelines for the analysis.

Williams (2020) develops an understanding of three principal findings from the incel community on incels.co. The first identifies that the incel community is divided and contains contradictory views on what it means to be an incel. Williams (2020) notes some identity markers that seem to be shared between incels such as heterosexuality, being cisgender, and that genetics determine sexual success (Williams, 2020). What is, however, further found, is that the demographics of incels are varied. This information comes from a bi-annual survey posted internally on the website incels.co and suggests that members have diverse geographic origins (Williams, 2020). Williams (2020) found evidence to suggest that members come from U.S.A, Canada, Germany, Poland, Brazil, India, and Australia, among others. This difference in cultures and origins can, as one might imagine, be a contributing factor in diverse and contradictory way in which incels express themselves and what it means to be an incel. These different ways of describing what an incel is can also be seen in the difference in race. Williams (2020) points to Jaki et al. (2018) who identifies that incels appears to be of many different

racism. Herein lies some of the differences between understandings of what it means to be an incel. Some members will claim that they are an incel because they are not white which leads to the acronym JBW (just be white) which is the belief that white men are unlikely to be incels because being white makes life easier (Williams, 2020). This creates contention between members who seem to always attempt to be 'more incel' than other members. In another way, incels seem to have very different descriptions of women (Williams, 2020). Some use very rigid language that describes women as the root of all evil whereas others seem to suggest that they don't hate women at all but rather hate the men who monopolise the attention of women (Williams, 2020). In this way, the identity of what it means to be an incel is contentious.

There are more examples demonstrating the contradictory manner in which incels define themselves, but these will not all be discussed here for reasons of space. The intention of the present research is to compare results from different sets of data with the results found by Williams (2020) and deepen the understanding of how complicated and contradictory the incel community is. An aspect of the hypothesis of the present research is that the interactions between the incel members are conflictual, bolstering the claim by Williams (2020), that incel rhetoric is not homogenous but rather paradoxical. The second principal finding of the research conducted by Williams (2020), is that incel misogyny is not a deviation from the norm but rather a direct result of the misogyny in western discourse. Williams (2020) makes a connection to the seventies which has been mentioned in a previous section of this chapter where men were challenging the rigid sex roles imposed by society at the time. At this time, there was a split whereby second wave feminists started shifting the lens from sex roles to the actions of men, such as rape and domestic violence. (Kimmel, 2017, p. 104). Up to this point the discussion did not include talk of power and privilege within social spaces.

The split left the side that continued to ignore discussions of power and privilege to develop into MRA groups with a focus on extreme hatred of feminism and gender equality (Messner, 1997, p. 45). Williams (2020) identifies a link between the development of MRA movements and the development of incel groups through the shared ideologies of these groups which leads to the finding that incels are a result of ongoing misogyny in western discourse. As the present research seeks to understand how the interactions between incel members creates and perpetuates gender-based violence, the research conducted by Williams (2020) acts as a useful point of comparison and source of information to draw from due, in part, to the finding that misogyny is still a major problem in modern society.

The third and final finding highlights the complicated relationship that incels have with hegemonic masculinities (Williams, 2020). Recalling the men's liberation and the depoliticising of gender issues in the 1960s, Williams (2020) notes that since those early years the power of privilege has rarely been included in discussions about masculinities. This implies that the effect of misogyny on the emancipation of women has never been sufficiently counteracted, leading to the birth of the extreme misogyny the incel community uses in its own discussions. Williams (2020) notes the challenges faced by incels who idolise and fail at adhering to the narrow expectations of hegemonic masculinities. In this way, incels still see themselves as non-men or even as children. In the bi-annual survey that Williams (2020) cites, 91.8% of 548 respondents believe to have missed developmental milestones such as kissing as a teenager, high school sweethearts and more. Beyond this, incels will often refer to themselves as 'subhuman' which implies a sense of not achieving personhood which in the case of an incel is not achieving manhood (Williams, 2020). Williams (2020) further identifies the effect this has on mental health and the complicated relationship incels have to their own mental health. This dynamic provides an interesting springboard for comparison between Williams (2020) findings and the interactions between incels of the present research. The interest lies in finding out how the language incels use between each other might foster complicated and paradoxical ideas of masculinity, mental health and misogyny.

1.6.3 The incel experience

The next paper of interest made use of semi-structured interviews that allowed for incels to talk at length about what they thought was important (Daly & Reed, 2022). One of their key findings is that incels often express their anger because of a feeling that they have failed the standards set forth by hegemonic masculinities (Daly & Reed, 2022).

These interviews were analysed using thematic analysis, intending to understand the lived experiences of incel members (Daly & Reed, 2022). Five themes were identified in the interviews, these being:

- Masculinity challenges (a feeling of failing in sexual, interpersonal or intimate relationships, implying a failed manhood.)
- Subhuman status and social rejection (perceived negative treatment due to, among others, failed masculinity challenges)
- The 'black pill' (in their understanding, the belief that society discriminates against people who are not conventionally attractive)

- Shit-posting and the discourse of masculinity (use of generally unacceptable rhetoric on social media platforms – such as violence, misogyny, racism and sexism)
- Perceived effects of incel-dom (negative emotions due to incel-dom and other personal experiences)

This research by Daly & Reed (2022) highlighted that incel members often described themselves as not ‘man enough’ to even attempt to have romantic and sexual relationships with women. This inadequacy is defined by a lack of physical attractiveness, mental health issues, and/or what they perceived as shortcomings in their personalities (Daly & Reed, 2022). Daly & Reed (2022) identify strong ideas of what it means to be a man, which see sex as a normal part of existence for men. Daly & Reed (2022) also reported that one interviewee thought marriage and monogamy have changed so that women would consider only about 5 men of a total of 50 as worthy enough to have sex with. What one sees, is that through their language, incels attempt to identify aspects of masculinity which they have failed in and a society that is oppressing them because of their gender, neurodivergence and physical attributes through attractive, neurotypical and social movements that have shifted social capital away from incels (Daly & Reed, 2022).

The ‘black pill’ is identified by Daly & Reed (2022) as an ideology that describes society as ‘lookist’ where men, like incels, are discriminated against based on their physical appearance. Daly & Reed (2022) have identified that much of this pseudoscientific ideology is supported by experience and empirical evidence shared amongst incels and within their semi-structured interviews. This concept of the ‘black pill’ is pulled, as mentioned in previous sections, from the movie *The Matrix* (Wachowski & Wachowski, 1999). While the concept of ‘swallowing the ‘black pill’ is not the physical act of swallowing a pill, it is the consuming and understanding of the idea that sexual interactions are completely based on biological determinism (Daly & Reed, 2022). What is curious about this seemingly depressing outlook, is that some individuals who ascribe to it speak about how it liberates them and brings them happiness (Daly & Reed, 2022). Incels, then, appear as a group who use language associated with the ‘black pill’ to gain some control over their lives and as such reach some form of happiness that they describe as being so far out of reach.

As mentioned in brief, the concept of ‘shitposting’ is the use of generally unacceptable language (violence, misogyny, racism, and sexism) on social media platforms (Daly & Reed, 2022). It is through this language that incels are able to construct a localised dominant form of

masculinity. Through the use of this generally unacceptable language, incels are able to circumvent a more general dominant masculinity and develop a hierarchy of masculinities within their communities (Daly & Reed, 2022). But instead of expressing this as directly 'anti-feminist' it is often used to create outrage and frustration from non-incel actants in online spaces (Daly & Reed, 2022). This becomes an important part of their identity, incels seem to seek out frustrating other people online in order to express their anger outwardly. In this way, Daly & Reed (2022) cite Connell & Messerschmidt (2005) by identifying that this language used by incels is not a specific type of man but rather a constant creation and re-creation of identity through discursive practices. While this can be identified as a part of incel language and identity, it also appears as a result of social media algorithms (Daly & Reed, 2022). Interviewees had identified that it is the most shocking posts that gain the most attention because of their controversial nature (Daly & Reed, 2022). As a result, some incel members with more measured responses receive less attention than those with more extreme responses.

The perceived effects of incelhood (sadness, depression, anger) may be a contributing factor to their incel status but many incels seem to attribute these effects as being a result of their incelhood (Daly & Reed, 2022). Part of what Daly & Reed (2022) try and do with the perceived effects of incelhood is understand whether the effects or the incelhood comes first in their experiences. They found that it is mixed and some of the interviewees seem to believe that incelhood reinforces negative experiences which in turn reinforces incelhood (Daly & Reed, 2022). Daly & Reed (2022) cite Check et al. (1985) who speak about how lonely men will avoid interacting with others which in turn leads to rejection and more loneliness. Beyond this, the identity and masculinity of an incel member is not complete without negative emotions and as such, their language mirrors this (Daly & Reed, 2022).

Like many other research papers mentioned in this literature review, Daly & Reed (2022) find a social hierarchy that the incel members construct. They find that incels feel as though they have failed at masculinity and as such, place themselves at the bottom of the social hierarchy (Daly & Reed, 2022). Daly & Reed (2022) also find that through shit-posting, incels reinforce themes of hegemonic masculinities which mirror what Glace et al. (2021) would call reinforcing boundaries. The picture that Daly & Reed (2022) paint is of a person whose failure to achieve goals set out by hegemonic masculinities has led them to anger and depression. This anger is usually demonstrated in shit-posting where the infamous misogyny, racism, sexism and other general unpleasantness is expressed (Daly & Reed, 2022). Again, one sees that failure to achieve hegemonic masculinity is the core issue that incels experience and combat in various

ways. A few will seek to move to other places in the world where western norms of attractiveness are not as prevalent while others will undergo body modifications in order to fit better into western norms of attractiveness (Daly & Reed, 2022). However, those options are incredibly expensive and so most will choose to shit-post online and create a sense of community between other men who feel similarly to themselves, leading to echo chambers where violence against women and socially successful men is pushed (Daly & Reed, 2022). The key importance of this research is in its interviews and attempt to understand the lived experiences of incel members. The present research will differ by using text produced by incels, as many other studies have, to understand the discourse that takes place in these spaces with the added difference of focusing on the interactions between individual comments on common threads to see how incels create and perpetuate GBV.

1.6.4 Incel language and concerns

O'Malley et al. (2022) help define several topics and terms discussed in the incel space, using qualitative analysis of incel rhetoric. Using their definitions, the present can freely discuss topics mentioned in the incel community such as, among others, male oppression, a sexual marketplace and women as naturally evil (O'Malley et al., 2022). As such, in the analysis conducted by the present research, O'Malley et al. (2022) will be referenced when such terms are discussed.

O'Malley et al. (2022) offer a sizable qualitative research paper that identifies and discusses several concepts, including:

- The sexual marketplace – the idea that every person can have a specific value that dictates their success within the sexual marketplace;
- Women being treated as naturally evil;
- Discussion on the legitimacy of masculinity – Here incel member discuss their expressions of masculinity, which often involves the attraction to underage girls, as normal and that the supposed change towards a more modern masculinity as incorrect.
- Male oppression;
- The legitimization of violence and revenge, with several violent acts being described. This is a particularly important aspect to understand within the incel community as this seems to set people into violent motion.

(O'Malley et al., 2022)

Through inductive qualitative analysis of over 8000 posts from two different incel forums, the above five normative orders were developed (O'Malley et al., 2022). Through the sexual marketplace, incels create two features that they see as immutable. The first is an overstatement of the role of biology in social spaces. Many incels seem to believe that everything that we do is governed by basic instinct to find a mate and procreate (O'Malley et al., 2022). This means that because incels describe themselves at the bottom of an incel created social hierarchy, they claim that no woman would want to have sex with them because there are better biological options in other men (O'Malley et al., 2022). The other feature is that women have been given too much social power in society through concepts such as feminism becoming more mainstream (O'Malley et al., 2022). Some incels see the past as idyllic because women had less ability to choose who they slept with. (Williams, 2020). In some incel minds, this meant that women would be unable to act on their instinct and instead settle with a man, such as them, who was not as attractive (O'Malley et al., 2022; Williams, 2020). Therefore, the sexual marketplace creates a language rooted in pseudo-scientific terms that help familiarize soon-to-be-incels with authoritative and universal language. This anchors possible members by appealing to their sense of logic. This information is then decontextualised from its original scientific background into the 'black pill' ideology and as such takes on a new form.

This reduction of woman to their supposed basic animal instincts is also used to explain why so many incels have felt bullied and have had negative experiences with women (Williams, 2020). This commitment to the idea of biology is how some members see women as naturally evil (O'Malley et al., 2022). Some incels construct women as being less evolved than men and/or as children whose instinct drives them to naturally seek out high status men and actively discard low status men such as incels (O'Malley et al., 2022). The construction of women as naturally evil demonstrates how some incels are able to decontextualise the idea of biology and women from more reasonable context into the more hostile construction of women as naturally evil within an incels world view.

In order to discuss the legitimacy of masculinity, some incels appear to further take pre-existing notions of attraction to women and connect them to the already established idea of their world view as naturalised fact (O'Malley et al., 2022). As O'Malley et al. (2022) note, incels continuously use the idea that their worldview is a naturalised fact as opposed to a social construction to legitimise unhealthy masculine identity features such as attraction to underage girls. Incels within the study by O'Malley et al. (2022) explain that pubescent girls are in their biological prime and as such men are naturally coded to be attracted to them. Some incels

extend this idea by using further outside information such as pseudo-history claims that thirteen- to fourteen-year-old girls often used to get married and start families to better introduce new incel members to these ideas and to eventually accept them (O'Malley et al., 2022). These new members can then see the connection to what they might believe is logical ideas of history and biology to the more insidious concepts of the incel communities. After this process, through the use of the unique language of the incel communities, this relatable information is severed from its original context by simplifying it and the use of their experiences of members to make the legitimacy of their masculine claims more real.

Some incels will further construct themselves as oppressed based on their gender (O'Malley et al., 2022). O'Malley et al. (2022) point out that this line of thinking is related to the 'red pill' ideology which makes claims that men are unfairly treated in society. An example of this supposed oppression is the accusation that family courts favour women in divorce proceedings (Nagle, 2017). This is another example of how 'red pill' believers can be converted into incel members. The similarities between the 'red pill' communities and incel communities are many and as such these similarities can be used to slowly convert people to the more extreme views of incels by linking new concepts to their already existing knowledge (Ribeiro et al., 2021).

O'Malley et al. (2022) note that the above four orders of language and discussion among incels culminate and fuel the idea that violence is glorious especially against women. It is noted that some members of the incel communities did not look favourably on violence but the point is that there were enough examples that called for violence against women to demonstrate that it is a significant part of their language (O'Malley et al., 2022). Some incel members would refer back to Elliot Rodger from the Isla Vista Killings by abbreviating his name to ER in the context of 'going ER', with the poster explaining that because of their negative life experiences and knowledge of the hypergamous world they would commit crimes similar to Elliot Rodger (O'Malley et al., 2022). O'Malley et al. (2022) would also point to the incels discussing the deaths of women as 'LifeFuel' where these events would give an incel hope and joy. This all fed into a culture that believes that women are deserving of violence and as such their deaths are to be celebrated (O'Malley et al., 2022). What one can see in their language is that incels are able to take tragic events from outside of their knowledge spaces and decontextualise them and apply their own context to the events to make the knowledge more 'incel' than outsider. By doing this, some incels can think positively about otherwise horrific events of death because women are not fully evolved people and women are deserving of violence (O'Malley et al., 2022).

While this material is particularly useful in understanding the incel phenomenon, the present research seeks to add to this understanding by applying a Foucauldian discourse analysis with the aim of attaining deeper understanding of these spaces.

1.6.5 Content of incel discussion forums

Shifting the focus away from a qualitative approach, Jaki et al. (2018) use machine learning to collect and sort vast swathes of data from the now shut down incels.me forum. Their paper uses a quantitative approach to provide many important definitions and themes with a reported 95% accuracy (Jaki et al., 2018). While the present paper does not use a quantitative approach, the insights from Jaki et al. (2018) are important in understanding the broader picture of incel communities and their language, providing an in-depth look at the language topography of the incel community. While the insights from Jaki et al. (2018) are fundamental, the present paper seeks to expand on their work by using the qualitative lens to look more closely at individual text posts. Their paper seeks to understand how prevalent, among others, misogyny, homophobia, and racism are among incel members by comparing the frequencies of certain predetermined words to that of reportedly unbiased Wikipedia articles and randomly selected tweets (Jaki et al., 2018). Using machine learning, Jaki et al. (2018) were able to identify that 30% of responses are misogynistic, 15% are homophobic and 3% are racist on the incels.me forum. Part of what sets this data apart from other studies, is that Jaki et al. (2018) were able to identify that while most of the members are heterosexual, they have a unique relationship with other races. It seems generally accepted by the community that people of colour are less likely to be sexually and romantically successful (Jaki et al., 2018). They create the acronym JBW (just be white) to help explain this phenomenon (Jaki et al., 2018).

Again, one can see that language is being used by these communities to relate possible members to the ideas of incel communities using outside experiences of an inability to find a partner due to your race. The incel communities do not draw the conclusion that these experiences might be a result of an overrepresentation of white media, but rather accept it as naturalised fact as described by social representation theory (Abric, 1996; Moscovici, 1988; Moscovici, 2001). With the prevalence of white models in media Robinette (2019) notes that, specifically in America, black women are often put at disadvantages because of the perception of whiteness being more beautiful than blackness. It is noted that white people have a large control over beauty narratives, and this means that women are often left out of business opportunities because of the perception of white hair styles being seen as more professional than black

hairstyles (Robinette, 2019). Extending beyond the American context, Mady et al. (2023) note that within Ghana, Egypt, and India the white control over beauty standards is shifting, but at a slow rate. This evidence implies that there are still many women, and one might assume men as well, who subconsciously believe that being white is being more beautiful. As mentioned above, this example of JBW can be understood through the lens of social representation theory. One can see that knowledge about beauty standards and effectiveness of achieving sex being related to skin colour because of how pervasive white beauty standards are. What incel rhetoric does, is remove the idea of beauty standards being a problem of systemic racism, instead connecting it to existing ideas of whiteness being better than people of colour as a naturalised fact, thus changing the context. In doing so, some incel members are able to generate new knowledge with their language as incel knowledge as opposed to knowledge of systemic racism.

The paper by Jaki et al. (2018) is seminal in its description of incel communities and also makes the useful point that both quantitative and qualitative data analysis is useful in understanding the incel community (Jaki et al., 2018). The research further provides evidence that incels decontextualise information and make it their own. Jaki et al. (2018) note that while quantitative analysis is useful for understanding large amounts of data, it is always possible that errors are made by the machine. In this way, a closer more focused look at smaller quantities of data can provide a more robust understanding of the phenomenon.

1.7 Conclusion

This paper is able to develop its planned approach thanks only to the work done before it on incel communities and their context. In an effort to understand the literature on incel communities, this chapter has sought to unpack how the internet is gendered in favour of men, the communities that make up the manosphere and then, with the foundational knowledge developed, understand the language that makes up the incel language identity. The evidence that the internet is gendered in favour of men can be seen in many aspects, from the language used by men and women in online spaces (Nadim & Fladmoe, 2021), how women are not taught to use computers and therefore internet spaces (Gurung, 2018; Kumar, 2015), and an inability for law enforcement and authorities to deal with online harassment (Barker & Jurasz, 2019). Further evidence for this gender divide between men and women on the internet comes in how websites such as X (formerly Twitter) and Reddit act too slowly, if at all, against users

who use hateful language (Massanari, 2017). These research papers demonstrate that a very real gender divide exists between men and women on the internet and with internet spaces becoming more populated, so too will the hateful rhetorics impact on women.

With the information that the internet is a gendered space, one can begin to look into the communities that have developed with the support of a gendered internet. As Men's rights activists (MRAs), Pick up artists (PUAs), Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW), and incels have grown to inhabit a space in the internet known as the manosphere, understanding these communities is important in understanding the incel communities. This section of the chapter sought to understand these groups and develop a roadmap into understanding the language that the incel communities use. The oldest and first group, the MRAs, built the misogynistic foundation for incel communities with an attempt to deal with men's issues in the 1970s (Ribeiro et al., 2021). Their language was used to create and push legislation that, at first, intended to support men but eventually became misogynistic in nature (Ribeiro et al., 2021). PUAs would often use animalistic language to describe sex and relationships (Ribeiro et al., 2021). Incel communities would adopt this language and use it to create a deterministic description of sex and relationships that further reduced people to naturalistic terms and behaviours (Ribeiro et al., 2021). Next in this chapter, MGTOW were discussed and can be described as the siblings of incel communities as their language identities share a lot of DNA. Like incels, MGTOW would use their language to perpetuate the belief that society is gynocentric (Jones et al., 2020). Jones et al. (2020) note that the major harm of MGTOW language, is in the way that it normalises misogyny amongst people who see these posts. While not identical to incel communities, the finding that passive harassment breeds more misogyny can be applied to the incels by understanding that their own misogynistic language increases misogyny in incel and non-incel spaces. Evaluating these three groups gives a general overview of what the language identities of incel communities are. One can see how online misogyny can be traced back to MRA communities in the 1970s (Ribeiro et al., 2021), how PUA communities created the naturalistic language that would evolve into a form of biological determinism amongst incels that they call the 'black pill' (Ribeiro et al., 2021), and how the misogynistic language used by MGTOW and incels are harmful by normalising misogyny both in and out of these communities (Jones et al., 2020).

This chapter then moves towards a more in-depth discussion of incel communities where it is noted that hierarchy is an important and recurring theme in the literature on incels. Part of what makes the incel communities so interesting, is how they construct their masculinity. Lindsay

(2022) notes that their biological determinism language creates a hierarchy that places incels at the bottom. The construction of being at the bottom of the hierarchy provides incels with a sense of aggrieved entitlement that provides some incel members with the language of the oppressed and the power associated with this (Kalish & Kimmel, 2010). Another feature of the language is that incel members have a very strong trust with in-group members and a distrust with out-group members which creates, what Nguyen (2018) would call, an echo chamber. This puts a disagreement reinforcement mechanism in place that makes it very difficult to break members out (Nguyen, 2018). In terms of the incel language, this creates an idea that the outside world is out to get them and that they can only believe what other incels say.

While Ging (2019) does not directly speak about incels, they make the point that antifeminist men construct a hybrid masculinity which Glace et al. (2021) apply directly to incel communities. This again brings in conversation about hierarchies and the power that oppressed language provides incels (Glace et al., 2021). Next, Williams (2020) makes the point that incel language is often contradictory and argumentative. Daly and Reed (2022) again mention the social hierarchy but this time point to how incels use this construction to claim that they have failed at masculinity and as such failed at being human. O'Malley et al. (2022) use their observations to see five normative orders of language within incel discussion. The first four revolve around dehumanising women and setting up a sense of aggrieved entitlement (O'Malley et al., 2022). The fifth order is the expression of anger and hate which excuses acts of violence against women and even advocates for it (O'Malley et al., 2022). Finally, Jaki et al. (2018) provide useful statistics into what the language of incel communities is like. These statistics point to a varied racial group that is primarily misogynistic (Jaki et al., 2018). These results reinforce what was said by Williams (2020) about how the incel communities are not homogenous. In the end, this literature paints a picture of incel language that is complicated and heavily focused on their construction of masculinity within a hierarchy.

In the following chapter, various relevant theoretical frameworks will be discussed, to understand how the data gathered can be understood. This will delve into social constructionism, Social Identity Theory, and Social Representation Theory. The chapter will demonstrate why a Foucauldian discourse analysis is better suited to answering the research questions than both SIT and SRT. The description of these three theoretical lenses will further underline the importance of language in understanding incel communities, as is the aim of this research project.

2 Theoretical framework

2.1 Introduction

The theoretical framework that underpins the present research is social constructionism. Two other theories were considered for understanding online incel spaces and interactions, being Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Social Representations Theory (SRT). Both of these perspectives provide useful insights that are kept in mind when analysing incel spaces and interactions. Importantly, within the present research, the intention of the analysis is to gain insight into group identity formation and maintenance, how these groups and/or communities create a shared sense of social reality through their language, how this language goes on to construct certain subject positions, and how the language reproduces social practices and ideologically laden value systems. As such, the intention of this chapter is to understand how SIT, SRT and social constructionism accomplish these tasks. On the basis of these considerations, the discussion deals with the theory of discourse which in turn lays the basis for the use of Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA). FDA emerges as the best analytical approach because of the way it overcomes the limitations of SIT and SRT. FDA is couched in a social constructionist framework that helps understand the basis of theory of discourse in the present research.

Social Identity Theory (SIT) is used to best understand how an individual's sense of identity is created by their social group membership, intergroup relations and relevant group processes (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). If one were to use this theoretical perspective, one might begin to understand an incel identity as containing multiple layers that are defined by membership of various social groupings (Hogg et al., 1995). What this theory struggles with is understanding how the knowledge and language used in these spaces are created (Huddy, 2001). In a sense, it looks to understand the effect of the already existing intergroup relations and relevant group's processes on an individual and group but struggles to understand how those processes came into being in the first place.

Social Representation Theory (SRT) looks to understand how groups try to make sense of their surroundings through the use of language (Moscovici, 1988; Moscovici, 2001). This is done using two processes: anchoring and objectification which will be explored in depth later in this chapter. In more broad terms however, this theory will look to understand how an individual makes sense of their surroundings through the language used and is interested specifically in meaning and power generation between individuals, groups and their surrounding contexts.

As such, the method by which new information is incorporated into the social identity of an incel member can be understood and explained.

Finally, the theory of discourse helps address the shortfalls of SIT and SRT for the present research. Considering that a social constructionist lens is, in its most basic form, sceptical of truth claims, language is again found at the centre of this tool and theory. This social constructionist approach informs the use of discourse theory that also seeks to understand the world through language. Social representation and social identity theory are remembered when conducting the analysis but, it is discourse theory that is best used to understand the aspects of the incel phenomenon as SIT and SRT have shortfalls that make them less viable for the present research question. In order to better understand each part of this analysis process, each theory is broken down in the following paragraphs for a better understanding of what they do well for the analysis and what shortfalls SIT and SRT have that discourse theory amends within the context of the present research.

2.2 Social Identity Theory

When seeking to understand the development of shared group identities, reference must be made to Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). SIT focuses on the “dynamic mediation of the socially-constructed self between individual behaviour and social structure” (Hogg et al., 1995, p. 1). SIT understands a person’s self-concept as containing multiple layers of identity defined by membership of various social groupings (Hogg et al., 1995). Further unpacking the terms, the self-concept is seen as a collection of self-images which can come in many different forms (Abrams & Hogg, 1990). This means that an individual’s sense of identity is made up of a myriad of different parts. These include things like their group associations, their personal needs and wants, and their genetics. It is important to note that, using the definitions of SIT, an individual’s sense of their own personal identity is inseparable from their group identities (Abrams & Hogg, 1990). Part of what sets SIT apart from other perspectives is the focus on intergroup relations and group processes, instead of a focus only on the individual within those processes (Hogg et al., 1995).

Before continuing the discussion of SIT, one must understand why the individual might connect themselves to the group and the relationships between an individual and the group within the SIT framework. As has been mentioned, the individual is inseparable from their membership to various social groupings which means that this section is not attempting to

prove the connection between the group and the individual but rather to understand the relationship between these two elements of the self-concept (Abrams & Hogg, 1990).

As has previously been mentioned, SIT sees the self-concept as a mixture of multiple layers of identity defined by the multiple social groupings of that identity. In its base form, SIT allows one to understand the identity of an individual within a group because group identity is developed by categorising the different parts of the world and its experiences within the context of a specific group (Abrams & Hogg, 1990). By categorising experiences, individuals are able to better define what parts of the group identity are important and what parts the group compares itself to (Abrams & Hogg, 1990). It is important to note that only differences that are deemed to be important for the group are compared with outgroups (Abrams & Hogg, 1990).

It is through these different aspects that one can begin to define what social identity is. Firstly, one sees how an individual's self-concept is created by their connection to group memberships (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). Secondly, an individual will seek a positive social identity and attempt to attain or maintain this through comparing relevant and distinct outgroups to the ingroups an individual is a part of (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). SIT also argues that when a comparison between ingroups and outgroups is unfavourable, ingroup members will either shift to a different group (if they are able to) or engage in social creativity which redefines their ingroup's position in relation to relevant and distinct outgroups (Tajfel & Turner, 2004).

As has been mentioned, SIT progresses from three basic assumptions: people attempt to maintain or enhance their self-esteem; group membership can have either positive or negative value connotations; and the value connotation of a group identity is determined by comparing value-laden attributes or characteristics (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). Each of these three assumptions are importantly analysed with language, as language itself is how positive and/or negative value connotations are conveyed to the other (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). Language also allows the comparison between value-laden connotations and is the basis of a language feedback loop which is required for individuals to understand and attempt to enhance and maintain their self-esteem (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). However, as will be mentioned, this language feedback loop is seen by SIT as transparent and that the meanings of the words are directly related to the words themselves (Hogg et al., 1995).

The SIT process can be described in three phases. The first is understanding how individuals might seek similar people to themselves which is supported by groupthink and group polarisation. The second phase contains intergroup comparisons by asking groups how their

ingroups and outgroups differentiate. This allows groups to develop reference groups that decide whether the group has a positive or negative self-image. The final phase unpacks the different kinds of identity management strategies that encapsulate social creativity.

Another useful theory that applies to the first phase of SIT is polarisation. Fraser et al. (1971) describes how, through experiments, they were able to see that discussion amongst ingroup members would usually result in greater polarization of the beliefs of the groups in question. A group might continue accelerating the extremeness of the language used within a group.

The first phase of identifying group members through similarities can also be seen in groupthink processes. Janis (2008), states that a core feature of groupthink is that in order to continue improving morale within a group, disagreeing voices and/or critical thinking is ignored (Janis, 2008). Groupthink helps develop a group's identity as opposing views are shut out and internal voices are magnified as people are able to find others who share their views and similarly shut out opposing views (Janis, 2008).

In the second phase, as has been mentioned, groups attempt to develop intergroup comparisons. This helps set groups apart from other groups and in so doing create a cohesive group identity. Nguyen (2018), has described an echo chamber as a group without diverse political belief and significant distrust between ingroup members and non-members. A group might become an echo chamber in order to develop stronger intergroup comparisons. In a way, the echo chamber process helps define what a group might be. It is important to note that not all groups will become an echo chamber when developing intergroup comparisons (Nguyen, 2018). However, as some incel spaces have been reported as lacking diverse political belief (Jaki et al., 2018), it must be considered for the analysis in order to confirm or reject the label of echo chamber for some incel spaces. Other tactics employed by groups in this phase include selecting their reference groups. This is an important part of understanding how these groups will maintain or enhance their self-esteem but this is also tied to the extent of the permeability of the hierarchy, the legitimacy of the hierarchy, and the perceived position on the hierarchy (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). This, however, is further linked to the next phase that encompasses what groups do with the information created by the first two phases.

The third phase involves social creativity as the basis for its strategy. This strategy is fairly loose in definition as the low social status group can do several things to improve their self-esteem. These things include finding new strategies of intergroup comparison, reevaluating the

value applied to existing value-laden comparisons, and/or using a different reference group that the in-group perceives as having lower status than them (Abrams & Hogg, 1990).

However, one begins to see some of the limitations of SIT in that this perspective on individual and social identity formation does not explain why some individual and group identifiers are important within the group (Hogg et al., 1995; Huddy, 2001), or indeed how these group identifiers have come to attain their significance as salient markers of identity in the first place (Hogg et al., 1995; Huddy, 2001). SIT is effective at understanding the interactions between identities within a group, but struggles when it attempts to understand how individuals within groups manage their identities (Hogg et al., 1995). Part of the process of managing social identity within an SIT perspective, is understanding how individuals locate themselves and their in-groups within perceived intergroup hierarchies of social status (Hogg et al., 1995). While Social Identity Theory is useful in understanding how individuals respond to threats to positive group self-esteem, it cannot account for which identity markers become salient or why they become salient (Huddy, 2001). SIT treats these intergroup status hierarchies as more or less objective cognitive categories. This becomes the point of conflict with the present research as it looks to understand how the hierarchies within parts of the incel communities come to be constructed and how these constructions influence the interactions between some incel members (Hogg et al., 1995; Potter & Edwards, 1999). In other words, SIT considers the hierarchies to be legitimate and to exist but falls short when the origin or legitimacy of these hierarchies are investigated to see how they were created and if this origin is based on real or imagined oppression (Hogg et al., 1995; Potter & Edwards, 1999). This is problematic when one intends to use SIT for analysis purposes as it fails to take the above criticisms into account when discussing the hierarchies and how the members interact within them by not acknowledging how history might have an effect on the creation of these hierarchies and how the language within the hierarchies, which is affected by outgroup members, context, and ingroup members, continue to change and shape the hierarchies that SIT seeks to understand (Hogg et al., 1995). Furthermore, the descriptors of the hierarchies created by SIT such as permeability, stability, and legitimacy, to understand the social identity management strategies employed by groups and individuals, is not investigated in a way that helps understand how these elements in group hierarchies came to exist in the first place and how they can change according to context (Hogg et al., 1995). In a way, it looks at the hierarchy as a separate entity to the world instead of as an ever-changing ecosystem of language. This means that hierarchies,

when analysed with SIT, are removed from surrounding contexts and treated as though they can be understood without considering the origins of such hierarchies.

For the present research, understanding the nuance of how certain constructions within the identity management strategies used by incel groups have developed over time supports understanding of how some incel members interact.

It is important to note that one should not condemn SIT for being unable to identify how group identifiers come into being or why they are salient for the group as this was not what the theory set out to do (Hogg et al., 1995). However, it is still important to acknowledge these limitations in order to understand what the present study needs, which will be dealt with later in this section.

The second major limitation that of SIT is that it uses cognitivism within its framework (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). Cognitivism states that what one can see and experience is true and that one's ability to convey this experience is also true (Potter & Edwards, 1999). Potter and Edwards make their critique of cognitivism in relation to social representation theory (which is dealt with later in this chapter) but can still be applied to SIT, as SIT relies on the value laden characteristics that a group ascribes to itself and others as being true and not a construction developed by the group, its context, and surrounding groups (Potter & Edwards, 1999). The present study uses social constructionism as the base of understanding how incel rhetoric is created. As SIT appears to focus its lens using a cognitivist approach, it is ill-suited to understand the relationships of utterances between some incels as the present study seeks to understand how the different linguistic constructions are created.

Through SIT, an analysis of some incel spaces might yield results that unpack the positionality of the social group within hierarchies and how the group might maintain or enhance their self-esteem. However, because SIT seeks to understand identity formation strategies by understanding the threats to positive self-esteem within groups through the responses of the group to these threats, it does not consider that language might be a tool for conveying insidious meanings. This means that SIT is ill-suited for understanding an incel's constructions of social reality, how they use language to position themselves and others, or how their language use reproduces inequitable gender relations and gender-based violence.

2.3 Social Representation Theory

Social Representation Theory (SRT) focuses on explaining how people make sense of their surrounding contexts with little to no first-hand knowledge or experience of a subject or

phenomenon through the use of two processes: anchoring and objectification (Moscovici, 1988; Moscovici, 2001). SRT then appears as a useful tool in trying to understand terms such as ‘incel’ and how young men begin to anchor the term in their identity and then objectify it in order to take its origin for granted.

Anchoring is defined as a process in which new information is related and connected to familiar categories (Abric, 1996; Moscovici, 2001). In this process, people might use existing frames of reference to develop an understanding of a new phenomenon in their social context that develops a shared social representation (Moscovici, 1988).

Objectification is defined as the separation and decontextualising of new ideas from their original discourse (Abric, 1996). Using objectification, information is sorted through and simplified by decontextualising it from the abstract space of theory and translating it into reality (Abric, 1996).

It is through these two processes that new, shared ways of making sense of the social world become integrated into the general language used to describe the world and eventually become ‘taken-for-granted’ as given by the people who use them. New and existing information is anchored to their reality by relating it to already established concepts. In tandem with this process, the new and existing information is removed from the abstract by the use of examples that are adjusted to fit the abstract concept being objectified. In this way anchoring relates abstract concepts to already existing abstract concepts and objectification removes the abstract nature of the concept by applying it to real world experiences (Abric, 1996). As such, social representations are no longer seen by observers of the phenomenon as a product of their original context and group but rather as a way of making sense of the world that has always been true (Abric, 1996).

SRT allows analysis of language use amongst incel groups and communities to look into how information and positions of power are moved from theory to fact. However, the focus of SRT is on the movement between the space of theory and fact and not on the already existing layers of identity and power (Potter & Edwards, 1999). SRT is concerned with understanding how new and existing concepts are described as naturalised fact within the incel community, or in other terms, it is concerned with understanding which identity markers become salient and how they become salient. In these two claims, ‘new identity markers’ are described as new and existing concepts which this theory provides tools of analysis for how new identity markers become salient identity markers.

However, social constructionist authors like Potter and Edwards (1999) have raised important critiques of SRT. The limitations discussed by Potter and Edwards (1999) can be translated so as to be applicable to a social constructionist perspective. The limitations mentioned by Potter and Edwards (1999) that are pertinent to the present research are action, representation, cognition, and construction. Potter and Edwards (1999) highlight several major differences between SRT and Discursive Psychology. As such, this section needs to take the differences set forth by Potter and Edwards (1999) and understand how they apply to a social constructionist perspective.

Social constructionism considers as action the things that a person can do with their words (Burr, 2015). On the other hand, SRT does not consider action when trying to understand how people make sense of their worlds by connecting existing frameworks to new concepts (Potter & Edwards, 1999). SRT sees language not as a means to action but as the source of answers to specific, usually research based, questions (Potter & Edwards, 1999). In this way, what individuals do with their language is not important to SRT, rather, language is only important in trying to understand the objective representations behind the language (Potter & Edwards, 1999). In other words, SRT understands how new terms are naturalised into discourse but not what the consequences of that naturalisation is (Potter & Edwards, 1999). This clashes with what the present research seeks to accomplish as what the language accomplishes and how it is used to create the actions of some and constrain the actions of others is pivotal to understanding parts of the incel identity.

Representations, which are created through the processes of anchoring and objectification, are an important part of SRT as people rely on representations to make sense of the world (Potter & Edwards, 1999). The collective use of these representations is then, according to SRT, how people are able to communicate with one another. As individuals share the meaning of a particular representation, they are able to use the representation in conversation rather than trying to explain the meaning behind each word (Potter & Edwards, 1999). Conversely, social constructionism does not consider the world to be ordered according to representations. For a social constructionist perspective, each time language is used, the individuals create and recreate their worldviews or rely on a matrix that influences interactions (Burr, 2015). As such, holding the idea that a representation exists outside of this space goes against what the present research wants to accomplish as the intention is to understand how an incel's identity is created through their worldview. In broader terms, social constructionism avoids a representational view of language in favour of a constitutive view in which language is constantly changing

(Burr, 2015), while SRT sees representations as already established between people before language can be exchanged (Potter & Edwards, 1999).

Similarly, to SIT, SRT also relies heavily on cognition (Potter & Edwards, 1999). As has been mentioned in the section on SIT, a cognitive approach will consider the people within an interlocution to have an accurate perception of their world (Potter & Edwards, 1999). Using this cognitive approach, the representations analysed with SRT are structures that organise true information and help understand how new information is integrated in an individual's, already existing, structure of information (Potter & Edwards, 1999). Social constructionism is less concerned with finding information that is true and instead seeks to understand what someone attempts to achieve with their language (Burr, 2015). By focusing primarily on cognition, SRT, while still considering how world views are expanded upon through anchoring and objectification, does not consider what a person's aim with their language might be (Potter & Edwards, 1999). This means that SRT does not consider how power and ideology might influence what a person wants to do with their language.

As the present research uses Foucauldian discourse analysis to understand the text posts, it requires a close look at how power is being used in language. As mentioned, Potter and Edwards (1999), mention this in the context of Discursive Psychology. Their claim would be that SRT does not attempt to understand how power affects what a person says and what they want to achieve with what they are saying. Expanding on this, Potter and Edwards (1999) further discuss how SRT does not emphasize how language is a performance that achieves a goal. Potter and Edwards (1999) emphasise that individuals will change and adapt their language depending on context. This allows for a person's speech to be dynamic and change depending on what they need from their speech. While this is discussed in the context of Discursive psychology, it can be extended to a social constructionist perspective. A social constructionist perspective will also see language as performative in a similar way to how discursive psychology defines it (Burr, 2015). This is another reason why the scope of SRT has limitations that don't align with the intention of the present research to understand incel discourse.

Building on the critique of cognitivism levied against SIT, is a critique of how SRT constructs the world. As has been mentioned, the construction of a person's world is created through their perception (i.e. cognitivism) (Potter & Edwards, 1999), whereas in social constructionism it is created in their language (Burr, 2015). Conversely, SRT constructs the world as existing before

language and sees language as what informs the representations of the world (Potter & Edwards, 1999).

These limitations described by Potter and Edwards (1999), create a convincing argument for why SRT is ill suited to the aims of the present research as these limitations, while compared to discursive psychology, can be adapted so as to understand them within the context of social constructionism and as such do not achieve the goal of understanding the way in which some incel spaces are constructed through their language.

2.4 Social Constructionism

The social constructionist perspective entails a set of ontological and epistemological assumptions which emphasise a critical look at knowledge which is taken for granted and asserts, ontologically, that reality is created and recreated through a general agreement between people (Foucault, 1996, 2008). This asserts that language is the primary way in which knowledge, and by extension power, are created. Herein lies the importance of social constructionism in this study. As the focus is on short utterances by ‘incel’ members, understanding how their language perpetuates and creates their reality is achieved with social constructionism (henceforth SC). Part of the reason why SC is being used in the present research is because of how it addressed the limitations that both SIT and SRT have with the present research.

Both Vivien Burr (2015), and Ian Hacking (1999) offer important insights into social constructionism that are used to understand this theoretical perspective on social reality and phenomena. Burr (2015), asserts that SC adopts a critical stance towards taken-for-granted ways of understanding the world and individuals within that world. Expanding on this critical look at knowledge is the notion that in order to look at things critically, one must look at the knowledge holistically (Burr, 2015). This means that in order to understand the manner in which a particular phenomenon has been socially constructed, one must understand its historical and cultural background. An aspect of the idea that SC is critical of taken-for-granted knowledge is that SC is anti-essentialist (Burr, 2015). This means that SC believes nothing to have true information about itself (Burr, 2015). Using the given terms, no social ideas and objects have an objective and independent ‘essence’ that can be discovered through observation. This implies that social ideas and objects can only be developed and discussed in interactions between people (Burr, 2015). Expanding on the anti-essentialist stance is that SC questions reality (Burr, 2015). It does this by looking critically at taken for granted information

that is often assumed to be true in an a priori sense and asserts that there is no information which people have access to that is a natural fact of the world (Burr, 2015). As has been mentioned earlier in this chapter, both SRT and SIT are cognitivist in orientation which an SC perspective might disagree with (Potter & Edwards, 1999; Tajfel & Turner, 2004). As has been discussed, the cognitive orientation of SRT and SIT means that knowledge can be derived from one's perception of reality (Potter & Edwards, 1999). This difference between SC and SRT/SIT means that understanding some incel spaces depends on how one looks at their text posts. Using SRT and SIT one would look at the text posts as accurately depicting what they claim to be talking about. This becomes problematic as it doesn't consider what some incels are attempting to do with their speech, it doesn't consider how a misogynistic social setting might change how individuals act within that social setting. As such, SC is able to emphasize how knowledge is created between individuals instead of trying to see who has what knowledge (Burr, 2015).

By understanding more of Burr's (2015) contribution to understanding social constructionism, one is able to define two different forms of SC. This helps with defining what kind of SC the present research will be doing in order to achieve its goal. Burr (2015), uses the terms macro constructionism and micro constructionism, but also indicates that micro constructionist views on social constructionism are equivalent to discursive psychology (DP) while macro views on social constructionism are equivalent to Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA). Both micro and macro social constructionism hold a view of language as not representational of reality, but differ in ways that affect how they would be used in the present research (Burr, 2015). However, this is where micro and macro social constructionism begin to depart from each other. At the crux of their differences is, whether or not there exists an objective reality which has an influence on language. By breaking down the difference between both micro and macro social constructionism as one of an objective reality one can see how both view agency in different ways.

Micro social constructionism sees SC as taking place between everyday interactions of people (Burr, 2015). This means that multiple versions of reality are created in the uncountable number of interactions between people around the world (Burr, 2015). As an example, two people will talk about sex as being sinful while two other people might think of sex as liberating. As SC is not interested in what is true or not, micro perspective on social constructionism allows one to see how many different perspectives can all be valid depending on their own context (Burr, 2015). This perspective is relativist in nature (Burr, 2015). In this way, micro social constructionism does not believe there to be an external objective reality but that everything is

constructed in interactions between people. This means that people have an agency that allows people to control how their language makes their world (Burr, 2015) In contrast to this, a macro constructionism approach seeks to understand the ability of language to create reality as tied with social structures, materials, institutional practices, and social relations (Burr, 2015). Instead of allowing all social constructions to be equally valid, macro constructionism specifies that interactions between people must be understood through its context, which means that one's world view is intrinsically related to what one wants to achieve in one's speech (Burr, 2015).

Beyond establishing that social institutions can impact how language is used, macro views on social constructionism also imply that an external reality can also impact on how language is used between people (Burr, 2015). In other words, it is a one-way street which allows an objective reality to impact on language but not language to impact on reality (Burr, 2015). However, what language can impact is the ideas about those objects (Hacking, 1999). What this distinction further highlights, is a debate between relativism and realism within discourse analysis (Burr, 2015).

Willig (2008), points out that there is a contention between discourse analysts, with one camp claiming that each social interaction creates and recreates the world, whereas others believe that there are some aspects of the world that impact how people are able to use their language. Therefore, the relativist camp believes in a form of individual agency that allows individuals to accomplish anything with their speech (Burr, 2015; Willig, 2008). In contrast to this, a strict realist position does not work within a SC framework as such a position sees language as being an accurate representation of reality which goes against the anti-essentialist nature of SC (Burr, 2015). However, not all social constructionist researchers want to accept that each individual discourse is capable of carrying out individual agency (Burr, 2015; Willig, 2008). In this situation, the second camp presents a position that believes there to be a reality outside of language that cannot be accessed through language but has the ability to control what an individual can do with their language (Burr, 2015; Willig, 2008). By removing a radical view on agency within individuals this position also allows for socially constructed ideologies and systems of power to exist and constrain how individuals act and speak (Burr, 2015). This position places less emphasis on individual agency and instead focuses on how individuals are able to move through the constraints placed on their language by external, sometimes socially constructed, sources (Burr, 2015). The present research finds itself in the second camp and does not take the position that incels are able to construct their reality through their own agency

but instead views some incel spaces as being made up by a matrix of, among other things, several systems of power, institutions, and historical effects which changes the experience of some incels members and how they are able to interact within the online space.

By understanding that SC is critical of taken-for-granted information, one is able to see its basis for function. Furthermore, Hacking (1999) provides another look at how one understands what can be considered socially constructed. Hacking (1999) uses 'X' to indicate a place you could put an idea or object to find out if it is socially constructed. Hacking (1999), talks about three lines of the argument. The first states that X (which in this case could be anything that is socially constructed) is not natural or inevitable, but is rather a product of how we construct it in discourse. It should then be possible to imagine a world without X as it is currently understood / assumed to be (Hacking, 1999). The second line of argument states that the effects of how we construct X may be problematic, while the third line of argument states that if the construction of X has negative consequences, then 'we' (which in this case refers to all people) may well be better off without X as it is currently constructed, or that we would be better off if the construction of X was changed (Hacking, 1999).

A core feature of Hacking's (1999) analysis of SC is a distinction between what he calls objects and ideas. Hacking (1999) creates three categories for words in a SC analysis, of which ideas and objects are two of them.

Starting with the concept of an 'object' Hacking (1999), asserts that not all objects have a social construction. This fits into the realist framework mentioned above which describes how there exist some things that continue to exist unchanged despite what ideas may surround them. It is important to note, at this stage, that Hacking (1999), declares that it is folly to claim that everything is socially constructed. One might consider a brick. There is nothing in the language or discourse that surrounds a brick that will change the nature of the brick. In this way, an object is simply something that exists in the world (Hacking, 1999). It should be noted that some objects can, in some cases, begin to reflect on the ways in which they are constructed in the language that is used to supposedly describe them. (Hacking, 1999). These kinds of objects are called subjects; objects that can be self-referential (Willig, 2008). They are able to self-reflect on their experiences and as such, change their behaviour and/or the features of their identity based on the surrounding context, including the ways in which they are constructed in discourse (Hacking, 1999).

The second concept in Hacking's (1999) framework is 'ideas.' Broadly, ideas refer to the ways in which objects are described in discourse (Hacking, 1999). Ideas are thus contextually constructed (Hacking, 1999). This means that ideas change depending on their constructed context. In a more basic sense, an idea is whatever is being spoken about that can receive differing meaningful constructions (Hacking, 1999). Meaningful in this context refers to whatever best interacts with a research question (Hacking, 1999). Moreover, an idea is created by what other constructions, other objects, and the subjects within those constructions talk about (Hacking, 1999).

Understanding these arguments leads one also to begin to define the grades of commitment to social constructions (Hacking, 1999). Hacking (1999), argues for five grades of commitment in social constructionist analyses of social phenomena: historical; ironic; reformist and unmasking; rebellious; and finally, revolutionary. In the first grade - 'historical' - a person conducting an SC analysis will, by looking at the manner in which a concept has been socially constructed, come to understand that the way in which the concept is currently understood and/or spoken about is not solely reflective of the objective nature of that concept, but instead has a social history (Hacking, 1999). In understanding this, one sees that the ways in which a social object is spoken about are not linked to the essential nature of the object, but rather to the development of ideas about that object over time (Hacking, 1999). The second grade - 'ironic' - is oriented towards exposing how ideas are historically and socially constructed and how the construction of these ideas might have been different depending on their socio-historical context (Hacking, 1999). This means that the social construction of a given social object or idea may change (Hacking, 1999). This 'ironic' grade further asserts that constructions may have developed differently given a different set of social, political and historical circumstances. In other words, current constructions of an object or idea are not natural, but are the result of particular circumstance, or historical coincidence (Hacking, 1999).

The third grade of commitment is marked by two categories. The first is 'reformist', which argues that the manner in which an object or idea is socially constructed may have negative consequences for the categories of person to whom such constructions may apply - thereby revealing the consequences of power relations in discourse (Hacking, 1999). By identifying these constructions at this grade of commitment, one can begin to argue for changing the social construction of these objects or ideas by resisting or offering alternatives to these identified taken-for-granted power dynamics (Hacking, 1999). The second category in the third grade of commitment is 'unmasking', which seeks to expose the functions that the social construction

of an object or idea serves and, as such, to attempt to expose and undermine both the function of said construction as well as the power relations upon which the construction relies (Hacking, 1999). This grade of commitment allows one to analyse the power relations attached to social constructions in more depth as, by ‘unmasking’ what power structures are connected to a particular construction, one can begin to identify who benefits from the social construction and what the social consequences of such a construction are (Hacking, 1999). However, the unmasking stage does little to challenge the power structures that benefit from the construction (Hacking, 1999).

The next grade of commitment is ‘rebellious’ which builds on the previous grades (Hacking, 1999). The rebellious grade aims to challenge the power dynamics that are connected to a construction (Hacking, 1999). At this grade of commitment, one can examine how a social object or idea is constructed, who benefits from that construction, and why that construction developed the way that it did (Hacking, 1999). The rebellious grade goes beyond simply identifying what power dynamics might exist and attempts to rebel against these power dynamics in an attempt to change the construction (Hacking, 1999). This attempt at change only takes place by resisting the power enacted by a social construction but does not present an alternative construction (Hacking, 1999). The final grade of commitment is called ‘revolutionary’ (Hacking, 1999). At this grade of commitment, there is an attempt to actively change the existing social constructions of an object or idea by suggesting alternative ways of thinking, speaking and acting in relation to the object or idea in a bid to alter the existing practices and power relations linked to its construction. This grade of commitment goes beyond rebelling against existing power relations and suggests an alternative construction to replace a current construction (Hacking, 1999). The present research reaches the ‘unmasking’ stage by seeking to undermine the taken-for-granted information used amongst some incels by removing its naturalised status and asserting its socially constructed nature.

Methodologically, SC looks to understand how things are spoken about, how different things have different ways of being looked at to understand how something is constructed, the consequences of those constructions, and the social practices that grow out of these constructions (Willig, 2008). In other words, in order to understand a piece of text, one must be able to look at everything in its matrix (Hacking, 1999).

2.4 Discourse theory

Now that social constructionism has been unpacked which helps one understand how to develop the methodology, the actual substance of analysis can be unpacked. This section explains that discourse is the analytic material and how to define it, using Parker's (2002) definition. However, Parker (2002) first provides a definition developed by Potter and Wetherell (1987). This definition states that discourse is "all forms of spoken interaction, formal and informal, and written texts of all kinds" (Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 7). While accurate, Parker (2002) correctly identifies that the broadness of this definition does little to aid in differentiating between what is discourse and what is not and as such develops seven criteria that define what a discourse is. These seven criteria are that discourse is a coherent system of meaning, that discourse is realised in text, that discourse reflects on its own way of speaking, that discourse is about objects, that discourse contains subjects, and that discourse is historically located (Parker, 2002). Beyond these seven criteria, Parker (2002) lays out 3 more auxiliary criteria that provide more depth to the understanding of what discourse is. These three are that discourses support institutions, that discourses reproduce power relations, and that discourses have ideological effects (Parker, 2002; Parker, 2014). What follows, is a brief explanation of what each of these criteria mean which should provide one with a strong enough understanding of what discourse is to gather it as a form of data for analysis.

The first criterion, that discourse is a coherent system of meaning means that in order for discourse to exist, it must be understood by looking at it in context and understanding all of the different external discourses that support and explain a discourse being analysed (Parker, 2002). As such a discourse must be understood, in part, through external discourses (Parker, 1997; Parker, 2002). The second criterion, which states that discourse is realised in texts, means that wherever there are texts, one can find discourse (Parker, 2002; Parker, 2014). In this context, texts are any tissue of meaning that can be interpreted in various ways (Parker, 1997; Parker, 2002). This means that a text can be anything from a facial expression to a jumping plumber, among a myriad of other possible examples (Parker, 2002). The third criterion states that discourse reflects on its own way of speaking (Hook & Parker, 2002; Parker, 2002). This means that the language within a discourse will attempt to grapple with the meaning of its own discourse and, as such, also be self-referential in its language (Hook & Parker, 2002; Parker, 2002). The fourth criterion states that a discourse refers to other discourses (Parker, 2002; Parker, 2014). The first criterion mentioned that in order for something to be a discourse, it would need to have other discourses attempt to describe itself

(Parker, 2002). The fourth criterion adds the inverse to the definition by stating that in order for something to be considered a discourse, it would need to refer to other discourses (Parker, 2002; Parker, 2014). As such, combining both the first and fourth criteria one can see that a discourse must be referred to by other discourses and itself refer to other discourses (Parker, 2002). The fifth criterion is that a discourse is about objects (Parker, 2002). The difference between subjects and objects has already been explained in the section about social constructionism (Burr, 2015; Hacking, 1999), but is extended here in a slightly different way. Parker (2002) writes about how when identifying a discourse, there will be two forms of objectification happening. The first is that the discourse will represent and describe the meaning of various objects within a text and as such create a reality that surrounds the objects (Parker, 2002). This reality contains the ability to exert power like any other reality (Parker, 2002). This is not to say that reality is only found within discourse, but that discourse can, through its language, build on the most basic of interactions with reality, like sitting on a bench, and suggest that it cannot be any more basic, but that the objects described within a discourse might be more complicated (Parker, 2002). In this way, a discourse will create objects through its language that then create a form of reality that exists within that discourse (Parker, 2002). The second form of objectification described by Parker (2002) is that a dialogue that exists within discourses will, by referring to itself, construct itself as an object that can be referred to within the discourse (Parker, 2002). This means that, according to the first form of objectification, the discourse will, through its language, create a reality that is made up of objects within the discourse and then construct itself as an object that can be used within its existing reality (Parker, 2002). The sixth criterion describes how a discourse will also have subjects (Parker, 1997; Parker, 2002; Parker, 2013; Parker, 2014). A subject in this context means an object within the discourse that is able to speak, read, and/or hear the discourse where objects exist (Parker, 2002). While this speaks about subjects described within a discourse that speak about the discourse, it also refers to the person engaging with the discourse as a reader (Parker, 2002). This means that in order for something to be a discourse, it needs a subject that can engage the discourse and a description of a subject within the discourse (Parker, 2002). The seventh criterion states that a discourse will be historically located (Parker, 1997; Parker, 2002; Parker, 2013; Parker, 2014). In slightly different words, this means that a discourse is never static (Parker, 2002; Parker, 2013; Parker, 2014). As time changes, so too will a discourse which then means that an analysis of a discourse is only a short snapshot of what a discourse was when it was captured (Parker, 2002; Parker, 2013; Parker, 2014). Within the present research, the discourse gathered will

only indicate what it was at the time, but one can still make inferences about what an incel experience might be like (Parker, 2002; Parker, 2013).

As mentioned before, Parker (2002) expands these seven criteria with three more auxiliary criteria. The first of these three is that discourses support institutions (Parker, 2002; Parker, 2014). A discourse can reproduce the content required for an institution to function (Parker, 2002; Parker, 2014). As an example, engaging with an academic article helps develop the validity of the academic institution when the article is being read as an accurate representation of what it is speaking about. The second criterion is that discourse will reproduce power relations (Parker, 2002; Parker, 2013). If it can be accepted that a discourse can dictate what another person can or cannot do, like if a doctor tells you to take some pills and you follow their advice, one can see how power can exist within discourse and as such can reproduce power relations (Parker, 2002; Parker, 2013). Continuing to use the example of a doctor prescribing pills, this discourse reinforces the power that a western medical discourse has over many societies (Parker, 2002). Parker (2002) further specifies that power does not equal discourse as if it did, then the broadness of discourse would equate to a broadness of power which, effectively, says that if power, like discourse, is everywhere, then there is not much point to define it as distinct from anything else and this prevents one from pointing to discourses that have power and people who use discourse to resist power. The final criterion states that a discourse will have ideological effects (Parker, 2002; Parker, 2014). In this context, ideology is defined as a ‘description of relationships and effects’ (Parker, 2002: 156). Parker (2002) specifies that discourse does not equal ideology as, like in the case of power, if ideology were equal to discourse and discourse is everywhere, one would have to claim that ideology is everywhere. This treats ideology as a unit to be measured as opposed to a ‘description of relationships and effects’ (Parker, 2002: 156). Furthermore, by treating ideology as a unit with defined edges, one can begin to make the claim that some discourses will be ideological and that some discourses are about truth of reality (Parker, 2002; Parker, 2014). Discourse, instead, using the definition that ideology is a descriptor of relationships, means that discourse can affect the description of relationships or effects through language (Parker, 2002). In an example, a misogynistic ideology where men are preferred over women for high-ranking business positions, can be affected through a discourse that discusses why women are oppressed making the misogynistic ideology seem less valid. In this way, the ideology, as a descriptor, can be affected but the discourse does not equal the ideology (Parker, 2002). Furthermore, by treating an ideology as a descriptor, as

opposed to something more solid, it can be understood as something that is constantly changing with time and as such, analysis of such descriptors are looking at how things were at the time of data capture and not how they always are (Parker, 2002; Parker, 2013; Parker, 2014).

2.5 Conclusion

Through the use of social constructionism as a ‘meta-theory,’ one might better understand how discourse and language help create and support themes of gender-based violence and misogynistic gender roles within the ‘incel’ community. As SRT asserts that ways of making sense of the world become decontextualized amongst a community of users, one must be aware of how this taken-for-grantedness operates as discourse. A social constructionist lens focuses on the analysis of this discourse to understand how its ‘taken-for-granted’ status is created and used to further a particular worldview using the macro views on social constructionism as detailed by Burr (2015). Furthermore, social constructionism provides a useful framework that understands how the language of the layers of identity interact to create and recreate reality (Burr, 2015). Considering the cognitive nature of both SIT and SRT, social constructionism becomes the theory of choice for the present research as it allows for an approach that considers the processes by which people construct social concepts and also how these concepts are used to further an aim.

3 Methodology and Research Design

3.1 Research paradigm

Due to the explicit focus on language use in the research questions, a qualitative method using a social constructionist lens is the most effective approach to this investigation. The social constructionist perspective entails a set of ontological and epistemological assumptions which emphasise a critical look at knowledge which is taken for granted and asserts, ontologically, that reality is created and recreated through a general agreement between people (Foucault, 1996; Foucault, 2008). Through the use of this ‘meta-theory’, one might better understand how discourse and language help create and support themes of gender-based violence and misogynistic gender roles within the incel community. Considering that the incel community interacts almost exclusively via textual interchanges in online spaces (Jaki et al., 2018), a deep understanding of their language use and how it is employed in the processes of identity construction and maintenance would be best accomplished using a qualitative approach.

Therefore, the interest of the present research is the discourse produced by incel members. Discourse, as understood by this research, is described as ‘all forms of spoken interaction, formal and informal, and written texts of all kinds’ (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 7). This definition is particularly broad, but indicates that discourse can be identified within texts (Parker, 1997).

Consequently, unpacking the incel phenomenon requires examining text generated by incels to discern patterns in their language use that may be generalised. This design is specifically catered to a social constructionist lens in which analysis of data will be epistemologically suspicious of claims to truth or the objective nature of reality that occur in the texts that are subjected to analysis (Parker, 1998). Instead, analytic interest is focused on how truth claims are constructed, positioned, justified and deployed strategically in interaction to achieve a particular purpose, reinforce a particular version of reality, or to reproduce a particular set of social arrangements, power relations and ideological positions (Foucault et al., 1972).

Applied to the incel context, this means engaging with the incel perspective as a means to understand how the discursive constructions drawn on by incel communities in the construction of their worldview enable particular subjectivities and reproduce specific social value systems, practices, ideologies and power relations, many of which are arguably harmful.

3.2 Aims and Research questions

The primary aim of this research is to examine the nature and content of online interactions in incel communities to evaluate if and how these interactions may replicate discourses, attitudes and practices that are supportive of ideologies related to gender expression and identities that are supportive of gender-based violence (GBV). To realise this objective, it was necessary to undertake an analysis aimed at identifying the features and characteristics of incel discourse. As such, the following research question was posed:

- What is the nature and content of online, textual interactions in incel communities and interactive spaces?

To effectively address this research question, several relevant focus areas for the analysis of texts sourced from online community spaces frequented by members of incel communities were identified. These included:

- What ways of speaking, language resources and cultural assumptions do the incel community use in their construction of social reality, their sense of selfhood, and the construction of discursive “Others”?
- In what ways might this use of language in the construction of a collective identity potentially reproduce values, beliefs and practices that are supportive of inequitable gender relations and gender-based violence?

3.3 Type of qualitative research

As the focus of this thesis is on understanding the nature of incel discourse through engaging with the language use and interactions of the members of these communities, the type of research conducted is textual in nature. This type of qualitative research is justified because of the explicit focus on the language used by incel members to describe their perspectives and positions through text posts in online interactive spaces. It is important to note that although the data is text posted by some incel members, the intention is to understand how the identity and perspective of incel members is constructed as opposed to understanding the individual perspective of some incel members. Through understanding the cultural artefacts surrounding some incel members, one can begin to see the context that creates an incel group identity. This is an important distinction to make as while the present paper is interested in the subjectivity of some incel members, it seeks to understand this subjectivity not from the perspective of an incel member, but rather from the surrounding information and cultural artefacts that can define

the group identity of some incel members. Furthermore, part of the reason for this is to avoid taking the words said by some incel members as cognitive and instead understand the processes and uses that their language is (Potter & Edwards, 1999). It is this discursive approach that allows for an understanding of the subjectivities of an incel member through the context of the spaces some incels use for discussion. It is from these text posts that their discourse and constructions of social reality may be analysed.

3.4 Sources of incel text

Since the incel phenomenon occurs, or is performed, almost exclusively in online chat forums, blog posts and news stories, it is important to collect information from these interactive spaces. To address the stated research questions, an online data collection procedure using relevant websites' search functions was employed to identify incel text posts from publicly accessible message forums, blogs, and online interactional spaces. The specific website chosen for data collection was [incels.is](#). Material selected for inclusion into the data corpus was purposively collected using a defined set of inclusion criteria. Overall, material included in the data corpus needed to be discursively interesting enough to generate a complex understanding of the incel phenomenon and relevant to the research topic (Parker, 2005). Additionally, criteria for identifying and selecting material for inclusion in the analysis included the following:

- a) posts had to self-identify as coming from a member of the incel community;
- b) posts needed to make use of terminology/jargon associated with the incel community;
- c) posts needed to articulate arguments/positions associated with the incel community;
- d) posts needed to be identifiable as occurring as part of an interaction or exchange with others who were clearly members of the incel community; and
- e) posts needed to originate on the selected interaction forum between 2022 and 2023.

These criteria formed the guidelines for selecting material for analysis, while allowing for additional relevant material to be included. Finally, textual material was gathered until saturation was reached. Saturation in this usage is defined as when text has enough resources to be replicated and when further coding is no longer feasible (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

3.5 Procedures for collecting and analysing information

The information being gathered came from only [incels.is](#), a website that is dedicated to discussions between incel community members. While incel discourse can be found elsewhere (e.g. 4chan, 8kun, Reddit, and X – formerly Twitter), these other sites present problems for information gathering since the content of incel discourse is likely to contain a fair degree of overlap with the content of discourse occurring in other online spaces such as MRA, PUA, and MGTOW spaces and communities - spaces that have become known as alt-right. This means that, with the exception of [Reddit](#) and [incels.is](#), discourse that is similar to and which may even mimic some of the language of incel spaces is difficult to disentangle from other alt-right online spaces. As a result, accessing online text posts that meet all of the abovementioned inclusion criteria became restricted to sites that explicitly self-identified as incel community spaces. A positive consequence of this, however, was that this restriction meant that there would be a higher likelihood of text from the chosen data corpus being an authentic representation of the content of incel discourse and interaction. The present research is interested in the language produced specifically by incel members. This means that while incel members may have allegiances to the other online spaces and communities amongst the alt-right, they identify specifically with the incel label. This is where [incels.is](#) and [Reddit](#) stand out as these interaction platforms are or contain spaces that specifically cater to incel community members.

These spaces are specifically designed for and by incel members. [Incels.is](#) appeared after the banning of several subreddits that were self-identified as incel spaces. However, towards the end of 2023, another subreddit by the name of [r/truevirgin](#) was created for and by incel members. The reason [incel.is](#) was used and not [r/truevirgin](#) is because of the time the present research was conducted. At the point that [r/truevirgin](#) was created, the data for analysis was already collected from [incels.is](#). Furthermore, the intention of the present research is to understand how incel language creates and perpetuates GBV in both online and offline spaces. As the [r/truevirgin](#) subreddit is beholden to [Reddit's](#) terms and conditions, much of the language used in posts, while still problematic, is far tamer in comparison to content found on [incels.is](#) as on this site it is far less likely to be subject to the moderating influence of social desirability considerations.

In terms of inclusion criteria for the specific text threads, choices made were based on the length of the threads, the content of the threads, and the frequency with which individuals in the threads responded. Each thread chosen for inclusion in the data corpus was between 20 and

80 comments long. The content was determined to be of relevance to the research material, meaning that the threads would be about hate of women and/or hate of society and/or hate of themselves and/or hate of other members and/or support of other members and/or support of themselves. Finally, since one of the aims of the research was to examine online interactions between multiple members, threads where discussion between incel members was sparse were excluded from the data corpus. These threads without interactions between incel members often had individuals offering their point of view without any engagement with the author of the thread or other members.

Part of what made this study remain ethical is that the interactions between the people being observed were anonymous and the text posts taking place were on publicly accessible forums. They remained anonymous through their use of profile pictures that do not show facial pictures and usernames that are not offline names. The information gathered was being sourced from websites that did not have restricted access. This means that one did not need an account with the website in order to visit the website and see the posts. However, one can assume that the individuals whose conversation is being observed do not necessarily want their conversations studied. Hudson and Bruckman (2004) conducted a study in which chat rooms were informed that they were going to be studied. This would almost always result in a banning from the chatroom and being unable to further study them (Hudson & Bruckman, 2004). While not identical to the present research, one might assume that if the incel members knew that they were being studied, even with their anonymity preserved, they would not want to be studied. One must consider this when gathering information from online spaces even though they are publicly accessible. Individuals using these spaces may not feel as if what they are saying in these spaces is for public consumption or access. Therefore, while not entirely solving the problem, any information gathered was further anonymised by removing usernames, removing any identifying features within individual text posts such as name and locations pertaining to their home. They may still not want to be studied but with the prevalence of violence against women understanding how online spaces contribute to this violence is vital and overrides the want of incel members to remain out of the study.

3.5.1 Methods of analysing data

A form of discourse analysis will be used to unpack the collected material. Specifically, this research will make use of Foucauldian discourse analysis (FDA) (Willig, 2008) in this task.

Broadly speaking, Foucauldian discourse analysis (FDA) asks what power dynamics exist to affect the subjects of the discourse (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008). What makes FDA effective for the analysis of the incel phenomenon is the focus on the ways in which incel communities construct and articulate a collective social identity with very specific language use. The present research will conduct its FDA by following the steps set forth by Willig (2003; 2013). Before starting on Willig's (2003; 2013) FDA process, it is important to outline the similarities to Parker's (2002) criteria / method for conducting FDA. This comparison provides much needed support and validity for the FDA process.

Understanding discourse analysis (DA) is an important step in understanding why FDA is best suited towards understanding incel discourse. This is because understanding DA allows one to understand the nuance of FDA and in turn why it is being used in the present study. Firstly, what sets other forms of qualitative analysis apart from both FDA and DA is that "talk is a route to cognition" (Willig, 2003, p. 161). To summarize this quote, a researcher who asks questions to a research participant has no reason to think that the participant is lying and as such, one can assume that their utterances are an accurate representation of their mental state (Willig, 2003). This position is called cognitivism. DA and, by extension, FDA, are sceptical of this claim to truth and instead view interlocutors as participants of conversation that have a stake in what happens as a result of their conversation (Willig, 2003). As a result, DA is interested in understanding the context that surrounds the people producing the conversation and the conversation itself. Therefore, research is not interested in whether or not a participant is lying or being honest but rather is interested in how their understanding of questions shape their answers, how answers achieve a certain goal, and what power structures are in play (Willig, 2003). Potter and Wetherall (1987) reiterate this criticism of cognitivism that qualitative research need not concern itself with the truth of a person and rather attempt to understand the context of the individual. Where cognitivist-based approaches seek to understand reality, DA seeks to understand the goal of interlocutors.

Extending beyond what Willig (2003, 2013) has said about DA one must also attempt to understand an origin theory that DA can stand on. Part of this origin is the speech act theory which states that one's speech is a form of action in and of itself (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Within incel spaces, one might expect to use elements of speech act theory within FDA where one might seek to understand what some incel members seek to achieve with their discourse. It is important to understand that speech act theory is not being used for the current analysis but important to understand as a stepping stone in understanding FDA and not as competition

for use in the present study. There are however, some serious differences between DA (which is, in this case, the same as discursive psychology - DP) and FDA which helps one understand why FDA is used instead of DP in the present research. Vivien Burr (2015) creates useful labels that help identify the differences between DP and FDA titled micro and macro constructionism respectively.

Burr (2015) describes micro constructionism as taking place between the everyday interactions between people. As such, this position asserts that reality is made in each individual interaction which allows for multiple worlds to exist simultaneously (Burr, 2015). Macro constructionism, on the other hand, sees this ability to create reality as being tied to social structures, materials, social relations, and institutional practices (Burr, 2015). This means that in order to understand what someone might be doing with their language, one needs to look beyond what happens between individuals to how what they say is influenced by the broader social context (Burr, 2015). Due to the nature of micro constructionism (and by extension DP), it is relativist (Burr, 2015). This position gives validation to interactions that don't need it. In comparison, FDA would look at the surrounding social context to understand what an individual intends to do with their language. In the present research, the intention is to try and understand, among other things, what power dynamics are at play within incel discourse which relies on understanding the broader social context that might support or constrain what an individual can say.

Parker (2002) has developed seven criteria for the analysis of text and three auxiliary criteria beyond the original seven. It should be noted that not all of these criteria are comparable with the incel context. The first criterion is that discourse is a coherent system of meaning (Parker, 2002). In its base form, this means that discourse makes sense. This does not necessarily mean that it is grammatical or that the system used to explain the content of the discourse is a closed system. This can mean that the discourse itself helps explain its terms within itself. Furthermore, and most interestingly, is that discourse is, by necessity, part of broader contexts to help make it coherent.

The second criterion is that discourse is realized in texts (Parker, 2002). For Parker a text is defined as: "delimited tissues of meaning reproduced in any form that can be given an interpretive gloss" (2002, p. 147). This definition is necessarily broad and allows one to search for discourse in all things (Parker, 2002). When it comes to conducting a DA, one must first find a text worth studying and then translate it into language thus making the discourse within

a text visible (Parker, 2002). After becoming 'visible,' one should further focus the lens of study by choosing the discourse that is appropriate for a hypothetical research question.

The third criterion is that discourse will reflect its own terms back on itself (Parker, 2002). This states that a discourse will reference its concepts and objects within itself (Parker, 2002). One might assert that some discourse contains no reference to itself but that removes the reader of the discourse from the analysis process.

The fourth criterion is that discourse will necessarily refer to other discourses. This criterion has connections to above criteria but is necessary to mention as a reminder for understanding discourse. At its core, this criterion entails that any discourse is always part of a complex web of discourses that all rely on one another to make sense (Parker, 2002). It does, however, go beyond this point and explains that any contradictions within a discourse will need explaining with the help of other discourses (Parker, 2002).

The fifth criterion states that discourse is about objects (Parker, 2002). Parker (2002) makes it clear that discourse analysis involves at least some form of objectification of which there are two types. The first is that when a discourse uses a noun to describe an object, it is, through the discourse, giving reality to the object (Parker, 2002). However, Parker (2002) makes it clear that discourse does not create reality but rather creates a representation of reality. These 'representations' still have very real effects on the world but cannot be used to define the world. The second layer of objectification is the dialogue about an object (Parker, 2002). What this means, is that an object is further created by the different discourses and how they describe the object (Parker, 2002).

The sixth criterion is that discourse contains subjects (Parker, 2002). Parker discusses that an object has reality outside of discourse (as mentioned in the fifth criterion), but is also given reality by the discourse (Parker, 2002). While this statement was covered in the previous criterion, the sixth criterion extends the point by stating that a subject is something that gives reality to objects within the discourse through speaking, writing, hearing, and reading the discourse (Parker, 2002). It should be noted that all subjects are objects in discourse but only some objects are subjects.

The seventh and final main criterion set forth by Parker (2002) is that a discourse is historically located. Parker (2002) makes the point that a discourse cannot be removed from its context and its context includes its temporal location.

With these seven criteria, Parker (2002) has developed a way to understand discourse. However, Parker (2002) sets forth three more criteria that help one understand discourse which are called auxiliary criteria. These are that discourses support institutions, reproduce power relations, and have ideological effects (Parker, 2002). These three are more important to consider for the present research. While the above seven are useful for understanding discourse as a whole, it is the three following criteria that are used together with Willig's (2003, 2013), to understand discourse and how to approach it for analysis.

The first auxiliary criterion that discourses support institutions is important when trying to understand and analyse incel discourse because it helps one understand which institutions benefit from the discourse within some incel spaces. If the reports and research papers about incel discourse can be accepted, then the discourse within some incel spaces help reproduce a patriarchal institution. This then has the power to shift from the purely online spaces of most incel discourses into other spaces where it can have adverse effects on people.

The second auxiliary criterion states that discourse reproduces power relations (Parker, 2002). This is particularly interesting when applied to some incel discourses as incels often seem to place themselves at the bottom of social hierarchy thus creating a space where they perceive to have less power than others (Jaki et al., 2018). However, a cursory outside look at incel discourse might lead one to believe that incel rhetoric reproduces power over women, LGBTQIA+ and people of colour. This becomes part of the intent of the present research to try to add understanding to complicated social positions that some incel members appear to make for themselves and others.

The third and final auxiliary criterion is that discourse has ideological effects (Parker, 2002). Within some incel spaces this means attempting to understand what the ideology of some incel members becomes because of their discourse. Parker (2002), however, points to two pitfalls when considering the criterion. Firstly, one must not conflate ideology and discourse (Parker, 2002). Parker (2002) makes the claim that if ideology and discourse were to be the same then a person would be unable to express resistance against an ideology through discourse as the very act of using a certain ideologies' terms within discourse would mean supporting the ideology. The second trap is to assume that some discourses produce ideology and others produce truth (Parker, 2002). Very clearly, this assumes an *a priori* truth that can be reached through discourse and places some ideologies as a truth rather than an ideology (Parker, 2002). Parker (2002), at this point claims that these traps treat ideology as a thing when, as Parker

defines it, ideology is a description of relationships and effect. Within incel discourse, this might be employed to understand the ways in which some incel rhetoric treats ingroup members and outgroup members. As such, this criterion helps one understand how the discourse supports and perpetuates the ways in which some incel members treat ingroup and outgroup members.

To reiterate, the reason these three auxiliary criteria are used alongside Willig's (2003, 2013) method is because it enhances the understanding of discourse. By using these three criteria, one is able to, more explicitly, see how language users reproduce more than just positions in discourse to inhabit and from which to engage with the world. As will be seen in the following paragraphs, Willig (2003, 2013) emphasises the importance of subjectivity as the last step in doing FDA. This form of DA mentioned by Willig (2003), contains four stages titled: reading, coding, analysis, and writing. The first stage requires the researcher to read the text without attempting to analyse it (Willig, 2003). The intention here is to try and understand the experience of a reader and not a researcher. This is intended to give the researcher another tool for understanding the text (Willig, 2003). In the coding stage, the researcher selects sections of text for analysis and defines which parts of the text are of interest (Willig, 2003). While the list of discourses can be overwhelmingly long, the researcher must use the research question to guide the parts of the text to set aside for coding (Willig, 2003). The third stage is titled analysis and is where the constructive and functional aspects of the discourse are unpacked (Willig, 2003). In doing so, the different, and sometimes conflicting, aspects of the text are unpacked to understand the usefulness of the text for the subjects and the different ways in which the text can be read depending on the viewer and interlocutor (Willig, 2003). The final stage, writing, acknowledges the researcher's role in understanding the text and seeks to outline the conflicting narratives that might occur within the text (Willig, 2003). In other terms, the analysis is the deconstruction of the text while the writing is a reconstruction of the text and as such, cannot be overlooked (Willig, 2003).

FDA takes the stance that one must be suspicious of truth claims and instead seek to understand the way in which language is used but differs in other, very important, ways.

Furthermore, a core feature of discursive psychology as described by Willig (2003) is that an individual is given lots of agency within discourse. It places an interlocutor as active within a discourse and able to choose which utterances they want to inject into a discourse (Willig, 2003). As an example, a person might be able to respond to an insult in a number of ways and

this is an active choice made by the person being insulted. In other words, people are able to play a form of language game where they are able to decide what takes place with their language. While this form of Discursive Psychology can be applied to the present research, it would likely misunderstand the systems that surround an individual incel member and what it means for an incel to speak out against equity. This is, in part, why FDA is being used for the present research as it sees the agency of an individual within discourse as different from the Discursive Psychology described by Willig (2003).

Whereas Discursive Psychology sees an individual as having agency over their contributions to a discourse, FDA sees an individual as having their actions controlled by the context and social systems in place around a discourse (Willig, 2003). This is not to say that FDA removes agency entirely from an individual within discourse just that the focus of that agency has changed. Whereas with Discursive Psychology, an individual can decide to be misogynistic in the discourse, FDA seeks to understand what an individual can resist against. Continuing with an example based in incel discourse, some incel members can choose what they resist which in the case of misogyny is a resistance to equity. FDA would also see a misogynistic contribution to discourse as being partly a product of the social and language forces that create the incel space (Willig, 2003). This shift is subtle but important as FDA allows the present research to attempt to understand the power within discourse that controls and ascribes actions for some incel members. In different words, the subjectivity of an individual is informed by their social position, and the power that affects this position is best understood through an FDA approach.

Doing FDA requires 6 steps titled: discursive constructions, discourses, action orientation, positionings, practice, and subjectivity (Willig, 2003; Willig, 2013). What follows is an unpacking of each step and why it is useful for the analysis of the incel discourse. In describing FDA, the steps will be linked to the criterion set forth by Parker (2002) to provide the FDA steps with greater theoretical backbone and a more nuanced approach to the text being analysed.

The first step, discursive constructions, intends to understand how the discursive objects are constructed (Willig, 2003; Willig, 2013). In this context, ‘discursive objects’ are defined as a form of label to describe what objects contribute to the meaning of the text and is guided by what the research question seeks to unpack (Willig, 2003; Willig, 2013). As an example, a research question might be interested in understanding how women might be constructed as

oppressed within a text. In this case, the discursive objects might be oppression, misogyny, and/or anger. In understanding the incel spaces the first step is always trying to understand the various discussion points created by incel spaces around which the discourse revolves. In this way, this step is important if one wishes to understand what the discourse aims at. This step can be very clearly linked to Parker's (2002) fifth criterion which is that discourses are about objects.

The second step, 'discourses' allows the researcher to understand what different discourses are used to construct the different discursive objects (Willig, 2003; Willig, 2013). Using the above example, this stage seeks to understand the different ways in which oppression might be constructed. For incel discourse, it is necessary to understand how the different discursive constructions are themselves constructed through the different discourse that surround them. This step can be connected to many of the criteria set forth by Parker (2003). Firstly, the first criterion that discourse is a coherent system of meaning is considered as in order for a text to be coherent, it must be composed of different discourses or linked to different discourses. This step allows one to differentiate the different discourses that help make the text coherent. Furthermore, the second criterion that discourse is realized in texts (Parker, 2002), is also useful to consider when unpacking the different discourses within this step as the broadness of the definition of a text provided by Parker (2002), allows for the understanding of the sometimes-complex use of pictures, text within pictures and phrases often used by some incel spaces. Thirdly, this step, in which different discourses are delineated within the incel texts allows one to, as Parker (2002) notes in criterion 4, to begin comparing the different discourses within a text.

In step three, Action Orientation seeks to understand what a particular construction in the text might achieve for the subject of the text (Willig, 2003; Willig, 2013). The function of a construction in this stage also seeks to understand it within the text and broader context (Willig, 2003; Willig, 2013). Action orientation, seeks to understand what the different discourses achieve. Within the incel context, this step seeks to understand what some incel members aim to achieve in their discourses. This begins the path to understanding the subjective experience of an incel member by trying to understand the goals of an incel member. This step is not different from DA but is important in understanding a comprehensive look at incel discourse. As mentioned above, this step helps understand the knowledge surrounding a discourse and has a marked effect on what can be said within the discourse (Willig, 2003). Furthermore, one must consider the fifth and sixth criteria set forth by Parker (2002) that discourses are about

objects and that they contain subjects to provide nuance to this step. As this step seeks to understand what subjects within a text want to achieve, the understanding provided by Parker (2002) that objects within a discourse create a representation of reality allows one to consider what action this representation is oriented towards by the subjects within the text. Secondly, the point made by Parker (2002) that the reader is also a subject within the discourse forces one to also consider how one's own biases might create action that does not fairly consider the intended action of the subjects within a text.

In the Positioning step, one seeks to understand the different subject positions which identifies both objects and subjects (Willig, 2003; Willig, 2013). It should be noted that all subjects are objects but only some objects are subjects (Hacking, 1999). This means that subjects are just objects that are able to manipulate and develop their own aims (Hacking, 1999). Positioning includes understanding how these subjects and objects create their temporal and spatial context and what these creations mean for broader contexts (Parker, 2002). In this way, subjects are actors within a discourse that have contextual rights and duties to uphold and use their position to achieve their aims (Davies & Harré, 1999). It is important to note, that in FDA, the subjects are not ascribed roles within a text but rather, the intention is to understand how discourses within a text allow the subjects to succeed (Willig, 2003; Willig, 2013). This aspect is one way in which FDA sits apart from DA described above. DA will attempt to apply specific roles to subjects to see if the subjects manage to tick off the requirements for its role, whereas FDA attempts to understand what discourses are created by the actions and/or words of the subjects. A reason why this stage is so important for the understanding of some incel spaces is because incel's appear to have a complicated construction of placing themselves at the bottom of a social hierarchy while still maintaining positions of power (Daly & Reed, 2022). This means that the step that unpacks how subjects position themselves is necessary to understand the complex way in which some incel members appear to have constructed themselves. By understanding the positions within a discourse, one is able to understand how a member of incel discourse has their ability to act, outside the norm, constrained (Willig, 2003). Similarly to the third step, action orientation, the fourth and fifth criteria of Parker (2002) should be considered in order to nuance the analysis of incel discourse. One must consider one's own position when attempting to analyse the discourse as well as the social representations created by the different constructions of objects within a text. Beyond this, the third criterion also requires the researcher to consider their own position in relation to the discourse when conducting analysis as this is a way that the discourse reflects on itself (Parker, 2002).

The fifth step, Practice, is intended to understand how systematically the discursive constructions and the subject positions open up or close down opportunities for action (Willig, 2003; Willig, 2013). In this way, discourse can and does have very real-world implications. This stage is particularly important as it helps understand why some incel members have gone on violent killing sprees and/or have committed suicide. It goes beyond the immediate actions of incel members and extends to the control it places on other groups. The misogyny found in these spaces will not remain in these incel spaces and instead finds its way into other spaces where the discussions developed are deployed into other spaces controlling what others can and cannot do (Filipovic, 2007). By considering the first criterion set forth by Parker (2002) that discourse is a coherent system of meaning, one can nuance the fifth step in FDA by understanding that a discourse is not just coherent in meaning but also has a coherent system of cause and effect for people within and effected by a discourse.

The final step, Subjectivity, is what sets FDA apart from the described Discursive Psychology in a very important way. In this stage the analyst seeks to understand the perspectives of the subjects within a text (Willig, 2003; Willig, 2013). Discursive Psychology, as described, seeks to understand how an individual uses discourse to achieve their aims which also views experience as a form of tool for a subject (Willig, 2003). In contrast, FDA attempts to understand the experience from the perspective of the subject (Willig, 2003). This is, by necessity, speculative and attempts to understand the experience of a subject not as a tool of the subject, but as a means to understanding the subject themselves (Willig, 2013). This is an important delineation as it attempts to understand the subject through the discourse instead of the discourse through the subject. In other words, FDA seeks to understand what power systems the interviewee stands against with their discourse while Discursive Psychology believes that the interviewee has the agency to decide whether or not they are oppressed using their discourse (Willig, 2003). This goal is aided by the three auxiliary criteria described by Parker (2002). This, in some ways, is how the present research stands apart from other Discursive Psychology focused research. Whereas intention in other research was to understand the goals of incel members, the intention of the present research, which is exemplified in the final stage of FDA, is to understand how the perspective of an incel member is created through systems of power. This information is intended to bolster the understanding of why some incel members use their oftentimes misogynistic discourse in the ways that they do by understanding how incel community members draw upon some discourses and/or resist other discourses. In Parker's (2002), terms, the power, institutions, and ideologies that surround the discourse are an

important factor in understanding the subjectivities of those participating in the discourse as they inform what can and cannot be said.

As previously mentioned, Parker's (2002) three auxiliary criteria are used to finalise the analysis of the discourses gathered by enhancing the understanding of the subjectivity step in Willig's (2003, 2013) method. To reiterate, these criteria are that discourses support institutions, that discourses reproduce power relations and that discourses have ideological effects (Parker, 2002). Within the analysis, one can use these criteria to understand the institutions that benefit from these discourses, who achieves power and powerlessness and how these discourses reproduce and enforce ideologies through language (Parker, 2002). As mentioned, Willig's (2003, 2013) method involves an attempt at understanding the subjectivity of those who participate in the discourse. To best understand what can and cannot be said by the subjects of the discourse, the three auxiliary criteria indicate that this is informed by power, institutions and ideology which all need to be considered when conducting a FDA.

Through the use of these criteria, the idea of power takes centre stage which helps provide the link to Foucault. One might begin to understand which institutions are supported through the language of some incel members, which ideologies are linked to the incel discourse and how gender-based violence is perpetuated. It is through these already established guidelines from both Parker and Willig that text, and as such discourse, gathered from incel discussion forums will be analysed using FDA.

3.5.1 Validation criteria

As this is a qualitative research thesis, it necessitates a different approach to objectivity, reliability, and validity. Firstly, as the research paradigm rests in social constructionism, the concept of objectivity does not hold water. As the fundamental view of this research is to see how constructs are developed through the archival posts of incel members the present research cannot claim that the results generated hold an objective truth to them but rather provide insights into the power relations within some incel discourse. Secondly, validity in quantitative research often attempts to understand the results as being able to accurately measure the outcome of the research (Parker, 2004). As the present research seeks to understand how GBV is perpetuated and created through some of the discourse of incel language, there is not as much of a focus on measuring anything but rather on understanding how phenomena often appear with differing representations between some incel members. What this means is that one is unable to provide a direct comparison between the phenomena and the representation as

validity of a quantitative research thesis seeks to do. Thirdly, reliability seeks to establish a consistency among the objects of research but assumes that these objects will remain static over time (Parker, 2004). The present research seeks to embrace change and attempt to understand how some members of the incel community create and develop discourse that perpetuates and creates GBV. In this way, the present research avoids establishing reliability and instead seeks to understand the constructions created by some incel discourse.

Parker (2004) identifies three overarching guidelines for creating good qualitative research which include grounding the research in surrounding theory and text; attending to coherence of design in the arguments produced; and finally ensuring accessibility of the arguments (Parker, 2004). In order to properly ground the present research, one must ensure that the literature review is robust enough to identify existing levels of research around the topic so that the present research might be adequately compared to the surrounding research (Parker, 2004). This ensures that the present research can accurately reinforce or challenge trends within the surrounding literature as a web of knowledge makes comparison of results more reliable. In order to attain coherence, the present research needs to consistently lay out all the steps that it takes to reach its conclusions (Parker, 2004). This allows for readers to track the thought processes of the researcher for the present research and make their own conclusions as to whether the steps in the thought process make sense (Parker, 2004). In order to achieve this, the results chapter is written with this in mind to ensure that each thought step is accounted for and that incel discourse is not misrepresented. Thirdly, and finally, the present research seeks to ensure that the findings of this research are accessible to people outside of academia (Parker, 2004). It intends to achieve this by writing the results chapter in a way that is understandable without too much jargon. This is an important step as in the efforts to combat GBV, the results of the present research must be able to reach a wide audience to spread awareness and knowledge about GBV in online spaces and how these constructions support and develop institutions that perpetuate GBV.

In addition, further attempts will be made to establish the validity of this study. Lincoln & Guba (1985) provide useful criteria with which to evaluate qualitative research. These criteria are: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In brief, credibility is required by the present study to demonstrate that the results are a logical conclusion to the process of analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) credibility is paralleled by internal validity if one were to use quantitative terms. Transferability allows the present study to make its results comparable to other studies that

might be seeking similar information which can be compared to external validity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Confirmability is defined by the present study's ability to have the data logically lead onto the results of the present study which has objectivity as its quantitative counterpart (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Confirmability is intended to understand the link between data and results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Dependability is attained if the present study can be generally recreated by another researcher who follows similar steps as the present research and is comparable to reliability.

However, the terms that Lincoln and Guba (1985) use to connect the qualitative and quantitative approaches need to be kept separate as while the qualitative terms might draw inspiration from the quantitative terms, they are not the same.

It should be noted that not all of these criteria will be used to evaluate this study. Rather, only some will be chosen depending on their relevance and applicability to this research thesis. To achieve credible results, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest using prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, negative case analysis, member checks, and peer debriefing. The only criteria of use to the present research are prolonged engagement, and persistent observation. Prolonged engagement is defined as the lengthy engagement with the phenomena by the researcher so as to properly immerse themselves in the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This allows the researcher to be properly saturated by the data and allow the results to have less distortion from the truth of what happens in those online spaces (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Persistent observation is interlinked with prolonged engagement and is defined as the searching of salient elements of the data through rigorous means (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Alongside prolonged engagement, through the use of rigorous time and effort investments the researcher will comb through the source material searching for the data that is most applicable to the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Moving on from credibility, transferability is defined through its use of 'thick descriptions' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). By providing lots of detail when analysing the data, the present research is able to create this 'thick description' which allows readers to see the points being made and, as such, are then able to compare the results to outside information (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As the present research will be marked by outside examiners, it can also achieve dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This form of auditing of the research will analyse both the process of the research as well as the product results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Dependability in this context is defined by how it is done and why it is done. In making the present study dependable, it is able to ensure that the process of data collection and analysis is done in a way that ensures results are, to use quantitative terms, reliable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It achieves this by ensuring that the process of keeping track of the analysis process is sound and is achieved by ensuring that the process is not making large leaps in logic without the necessary steps to justify those leaps in logic (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Finally, confirmability is achieved by analysing the product of the analysis to ensure that the results logically follow the process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This is done by having an external peer analyse the process by which the results were attained. To do this, the researcher will keep track of the analysis process and then have this process analysed by a peer to ensure that the process makes sense (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In order to achieve this, good triangulation (as mentioned above) and note taking are required to ensure that the results of the data analysis can be confirmed to be useful (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The research will be evaluated against these criteria by a group of peers selected by a third party to ensure a greater sense of objectivity.

4 Results and discussion

4.1 Introduction

This chapter is concerned with presenting an analysis of the results. The chapter will begin by describing how the results were arrived at and then unpack the seven main discursive themes identified within the data analysed. Finally, the chapter will examine how these different discursive themes connect and interact to form what the present research has identified as the incel discourse within the data. This is not to say that other discursive themes do not also exist within incel discourse, but that these were the major themes found in the data for the present research.

As has been mentioned, this chapter will start with an explanation of how the data was analysed, paying attention to how the data was collected and the steps that were followed in analysis. This is intended to give the reader an understanding of how the results were arrived at so as to better understand the process. After this, a discussion of the findings and how they were developed will be presented. This will include a description of the six discursive themes in the data. These six discursive themes are, in order, Subhumanity, Coping, Intelligence and Rationality, Membership, Misogyny, and Biological Reductionism. All discursive themes are closely interlinked and interdependent allowing for some overlap in the discussions. These six discursive themes outline what the research presents as "Incel Discourse" which describes how the language used in online spaces frequented by incel community members works as well as how members of these communities speak and interact with each other and outsiders.

4.2 Collecting and Reading the Data

This section will describe the process by which the findings of the research were developed. As such, it will begin with a description of how the data was gathered. Then, the method by which the data was analysed will be briefly reiterated.

As described in the methodology chapter, the data was collected from the website incels.is. During the data collection, the researcher would purposely select threads posted on the website based on the criteria set out in the method section. To recap, the selection criteria are as follows:

- a) posts had to self-identify as coming from a member of the 'incel' community;
- b) posts needed to make use of terminology/jargon associated with the 'incel' community;
- c) posts needed to articulate arguments/positions associated with the 'incel' community;

d) posts needed to be identifiable as occurring as part of an interaction or exchange with others who were clearly members of the ‘incel’ community; and

e) posts needed to originate on the selected interaction forum between 2022 and 2023.

On the basis of these criteria, individual posts were chosen without considering the title of the thread they were part of. In the following selection, the researcher would look more closely at the post and decide if it reflected interaction, use of language and/or discursive constructions that helped answer the research questions. In order to ensure significant interaction was seen within the data, each thread needed to include more user interaction than comments that did not respond to other comments. Once the data had been collected, the researcher reviewed the material in an attempt to understand the general concepts referred to within the data. After this very broad reading was completed, the researcher re-read the data and highlighted all sections of relevance to the research questions for the study. Once these had been identified, the researcher began the process of identifying the discursive objects present in the data, as well as distinguishing which of the objects were also subjects. The data was then re-read a fourth time with a focus on understanding how ingroup membership status was determined and how this excluded others from the ingroup. This step allowed the researcher to identify how incel members constructed both their in-group memberships and the position of non-members within the data. The fifth re-reading of the data sought to understand the picture of the world that emerges from the construction of incel group members and non-members. Furthermore, this reading would also attempt to understand how this world found in the data was justified and established. In other words, it was an attempt at understanding the world-view of the incel members within the data. The sixth reading of the data involved examining what language resources and discourses were drawn on to create the above-mentioned worldview. At this stage the research attempted to understand the different discursive themes within the data that are relevant to the research questions. The final reading of the data involved understanding how the individual discursive themes identified interact with each other to create a pattern and value system.

4.3 Discursive Themes in the Data

As mentioned in the introduction for this chapter, this section will unpack the individual discursive themes identified in the sixth data readthrough. They are, in order, the Subhumanity discursive theme, the Coping discursive theme, the Intelligence and Rationality discursive

theme, the Membership discursive theme, the Misogyny discursive theme, and the Biological Reductionism discursive theme. Each discursive theme will be described in turn.

4.3.1 Subhumanity

This discursive theme is marked by the various expressions that members of the incel group use to self-identify as subhuman. An important part of this classification is that in this context, an incel is still constructed as human, just of lesser value than other humans. By contrast, as will be discussed in a later section, women are often not seen as human at all and as such, the status of subhuman still has more social esteem than is given to women. This makes the important point that only men are considered people and that incels position themselves at the bottom of a hierarchy of comparative social status positions that incels create. In order to further understand how incels see themselves as subhuman, the section unpacks how this placement as ‘subhuman’ creates a social status hierarchy with both ‘Chad’ and ‘normies’ situated above an ‘incel.’ Much of the discussion in this section is supported by what was found by Daly and Reed (2022), who also speak about the subhuman status of incels, and the sense that incels have that they failed to achieve or fully realise their masculinity.

Some of the important discursive constructions and their relative positions within their contexts are the notions of being ‘subhuman’ and the possibility of an ‘upgrade’ to this social status position. The construction of ‘subhuman’ exists as a discursive subject position that some incels use to describe themselves. This construction is positioned as something negative and something that all incels experience. Importantly, this social status position of ‘subhuman’ is still more valuable than women in a social hierarchy. To accompany this subject is the concept of an ‘upgrade.’ In context, this is something that incel members do not have access to and they are, as such, less valuable than other people. Furthermore, the concept of being ‘subhuman’ involves biological ideas that are shown in various extracts from the data presented below. This dependence on biology enables incels to believe that their status as incels is predetermined because they believe that genetics dictate a person’s life. Incels further express the belief that there is no way to improve one’s allocated position in life, or achieve an ‘upgrade.’ This overdependence on biology was also described by O’Malley et al. (2022). The idea that biology rules human decisions and behaviours is one that will be explored in relation to several other discursive themes. Through the use of both hierarchy and biology as core features of this discursive theme, one can see how some incels describe themselves as subhuman. They use

appeals to biology to make it seem as though they are lesser than other people and, through this, construct a hierarchy with clear boundaries.

The extracts below show how incels see themselves as less valuable than other people.

Extract 1: OP (Original poster): They have starved you for the entirety of your youth. While you were stuck inside LDARing (*LDARing is an acronym meaning to lay down and rot*), they were getting penetrated by Chad and making the most of their youthful lives. You missed out on years of your life, being inside playing video games, fapping, maybe going on lonely walks wishing you had a beautiful foid by your side. All it would take is one woman to come up to you and try to befriend you, but no. They are too cruel to make a subhuman's day just a little bit better. Instead they want to put you through physical and mental suffering because of your genes and other circumstances. ...

Extract 2: OP: ...She will probably have already given most of her youth to other men while giving you the leftovers. A person's life really only matters for the first 30 years. After that it's just waiting until you die if you're the average person. An incel had to spend his whole life rotting. If you missed out on highschool(*sic*)/ College puss then it's over. The best you can hope for is Chad's sloppy seconds. You will have nothing to look back at when you're old and wrinkly and the sooner you realize that the better.

Extract 1, 2, and some of the following extracts provide different ways incel members describe themselves as 'subhuman.' The first, and most obvious (extract 1), is an incel describing what they believe an incel to be. This is how this incel commenter describes himself. Through the use of the constructions in the above extracts incels are creating a human hierarchy and placing themselves at the bottom. As mentioned, this concept of being 'subhuman' has been described by Daly and Reed (2022). This subhuman status is an important part of an incel constructing themselves as different from non-members. This also makes incels into lesser humans. Part of this hierarchy is seen in extract 3:

Extract 3: OP: Brocels idk what to do mang (*sic*). It's friday (*sic*) and instead of going to fuck becky's roast beef flaps, I'm here browsing incels.is and cooming non-stop. I came to a scary realization that I'm in my prime, I'm in Uni, This (*sic*) is literally my peak biologically speaking yet I had to pay a foid to open her legs for me. ...

...

Commenter: Welcome to the other 2/3s of men.

The context for extract 3 is a commenter responding to the OP who is complaining that they are in their 'biological prime' and are not able to have sex with women despite being in their prime. In response to this, the commenter of extract 3 welcomes them to the 'other 2/3 of men' indicating a belief that being an incel means you are included in the 2/3rd of all men and because the OP was speaking about how bad it is being an incel, one can assert that being part of the 2/3rd of men involves a kind of negative social status. As such, this extract indicates the construction of a social status hierarchy in which incels believe that a minority of men have

better lives than the rest and, as such, the majority of men are of a lower social status because they are unable to have sex.

Furthermore, the idea of ‘rotting’ used in extract 1, indicates that incel members are less valuable than other people because they are rotting. This alludes to organic material that is dead and decomposing and indicates that an incel member is considered as valuable as rotting material. This connection is particularly pertinent to understanding the incel identity as seeing themselves as lesser humans as these constructions seem to indicate that they have little to no value.

Extract 4: OP: ... I came to another realization that if you are a truecel(90% of .is isn't) there is soo (*sic*) much we haven't done. Interacted with females(I went to an all boys schools so it was truly ovER (*sic*) before it even begun), socialized with foids etc. Even if I were able to get a foid friend or even a girlfriend, what would we do, I wouldn't know what to say or what to do. She would eventually break up with me because of my lack of experience(Don't believe that foids will love you cuz (*sic*) you're inexperienced jfl , it's a lie) ...

Commenter: We are always stagnant there is no upgrade from here.

The indication that, for an incel, there is no ‘upgrade’ in extract 4 makes their experience very rigid and implies that other people who are not incel members have an upgraded experience. To have ‘no upgrade’ is to be innately less able to succeed in life. As will be explained later, value is so often linked to the ability to have sex and when incels are unable to have sex, they will be unable to experience the value of life and as such have a less valuable contribution to the world, in their worldview. The use of constructions such as ‘rotting’, ‘subhuman’, ‘stagnant’, and ‘no upgrade’ indicate that incel members attempt to reinforce boundaries and borrow the language of the oppressed, without actually being oppressed (Glance et al., 2021). .

The association with the term ‘subhuman’ indicates some concept of biology and suggests that an incel is biologically less valuable than other ‘humans.’ This concept of ‘biology’ is an important part of incel identity as seen in the following paragraphs and extracts. Some of the information in these extracts will be unpacked in different ways in a separate section, however, they adequately demonstrate the overreliance on biology.

Extract 3: OP: Brocels idk what to do mang (*sic*). It's friday and instead of going to fuck becky's roast beef flaps, I'm here browsing incels.is and cooming non-stop. I came to a scary realization that I'm in my prime, I'm in Uni, This is literally my peak biologically speaking yet I had to pay a foid to open her legs for me

...

Commenter: Welcome to the other 2/3s of men.

Extract 5: Commenter: I don't blame bears for shitting in the woods, I certainly can't blame women for acting out their biological imperatives and tendencies. I hate them all nonetheless though.

Extract 3 also indicates that an incel believes themselves to be in their prime. In the context, the OP is complaining that they feel as though they are in their ‘prime’ and are not having sex with women. This concept of ‘prime’ helps create an idea that the individual will have a “prime of life,” in which they should be able to have sex with women. This idea makes life something that can only get worse after this prime. In this context extract 5 helps indicate that one can assume that they were making a link to biology in their mention of ‘prime.’ Extract 5, which mentions ‘biological imperatives and tendencies’ very specifically indicates biology as a driving force behind the decisions made by women. This over-reliance on biology was also observed by O’Malley et al. (2022) and these extracts help further confirm what O’Malley et al. (2022) describe.

Extract 6: Commenter 1: A simple high school biology class would teach you that women's orgasms do help in reproduction.

Commenter 2: It's feminist propaganda.

Commenter 1: No it's just science but whatever helps you sleep at night I guess.

Commenter 2: You're strongly indoctrinated! Time to take the anti-indoctrination pill.

Extract 6 is an argument between two members who are both claiming that they have a better grasp of biological science to ground their arguments. The reference to a ‘high school biology class’ in extract 6, indicates that it is important to understand the basics of biology if one wants to interact in these online spaces. All of this indicates that there is a strong belief that biology is the driving force behind action. This allows one to take the meaning of ‘prime’ as mentioned in extract 5, as having biological connections. By demonstrating their belief in biology, incel members also indicate a hierarchy that is based on biology and, therefore, indicates an incel member's subhumanity. If all aspects of life can be explained by biology, then their difficult lives must also have a biological reason, an idea further explored under the theme of biological determinism, below. By using biology to develop a reason for their bad lives, they can then claim that they are subhuman because biology is what has caused their bad lives.

Now that biology is seen as the driving force behind decisions and actions, one can also see how genetics plays a role in incel identity as something that dictates why they are ‘subhuman’ to ‘Chads’ and ‘normies’ who are regarded as having better social status than incels. If it can be accepted that incels believe biology is the driving force behind human behaviour and interaction, one can begin to see the importance of genetics in incel discourse.

Extract 7: OP: ...Because I live in a 3rd world country I thought maybe the blackpill didn't fully apply to me mang (*sic*) but buddy boyos was I wrong I can't even get foids that lived in poverty because even they think I'm disgusting. ...

...

Commenter: Welcome to life as genetic trash

Extract 7 involves an OP who is complaining that they think that women think that he is disgusting. The commenter responds by welcoming the OP to being 'genetic trash,' which is another way of welcoming the OP to being an incel member. The commenter is under the impression that genetics determine the entire life of an incel member and, as such, incels are able to claim that they are genetically inferior to other people and, therefore, 'subhuman.' The strong belief in biology and mention of genetics allows one to assume that genetics are seen as a deciding factor in an incel's life. This means that being an incel member is genetically predetermined. Furthermore, because of the mentions of 'no upgrade' (extract 4) and that an incel will 'spend his whole life rotting' (extract 1) one can further assume that an incel member is both born an incel and also cannot change their social position as genetically inferior. Another aspect of having all things be genetically predetermined allows some incel members to remove free will from themselves. By doing so, they are then also able to remove fault for why they feel subhuman. Instead of their dreary lives being because they have made poor choices, they can claim that they could not make any choices because they are biologically predetermined to fail.

Finally, part of establishing themselves as subhuman is creating a social hierarchy and putting themselves at the bottom of this hierarchy. For this sake, non-members are given names and described as better than incels because they have access to sex.

Extract 8: Commenter 1: I don't really blame them, but I'm never going to forget it. Honestly I don't want a used up whore, even if I did ascend, the experiences that I really want are unattainable to me. I shouldn't indulge in this line of thinking, it just makes me want to curl up and die.

Commenter 2: ... Why does it matter so much to take a girls virginity? Or be her first kiss and all that. You're sounding like a female all sensitive. Mean while (*sic*) chad gives no fucks and tears pussy up.

In this extract, one can see that Chad is someone who can have lots of sex from what commenter 2 says. While there is not a clear definition of Chad in the data, one can assume that the term holds similar meaning to what was described by Jaki et. al. (2018), as mentioned in the literature review. If one takes the term as defined by Jaki et. al. (2018), one can assume that Chads are the best of men because they are able to have the most sex with women. On the other hand, people who are neither Chad nor incels are called 'normies.' This is another term that is better explained by Jaki et. al. (2018), but mentioned in the following extract:

Extract 9: OP: ...While normies are banging their oneitis

This again shows that normies are able to have sex, which, for an incel, means that they are socially superior because they are able to fulfil their biological imperative of continuing their genetic line whereas an incel cannot do this. This point is punctuated by extract 1, 3, and 4.

Extract 1: OP (Original poster): They have starved you for the entirety of your youth. While you were stuck inside LDARing (*LDARing is an acronym meaning to lay down and rot*), they were getting penetrated by Chad and making the most of their youthful lives. You missed out on years of your life, being inside playing video games, fapping, maybe going on lonely walks wishing you had a beautiful fooid by your side. All it would take is one woman to come up to you and try to befriend you, but no. They are too cruel to make a subhuman's day just a little bit better. Instead they want to put you through physical and mental suffering because of your genes and other circumstances. ...

Extract 3: OP: Brocels idk what to do mang (*sic*). It's friday (*sic*) and instead of going to fuck becky's roast beef flaps, I'm here browsing incels.is and cooming non-stop. I came to a scary realization that I'm in my prime, I'm in Uni, This (*sic*) is literally my peak biologically speaking yet I had to pay a fooid to open her legs for me. ...

...

Commenter: Welcome to the other 2/3s of men.

Extract 4: OP: ... I came to another realization that if you are a truecel(90% of .is isn't) there is soo (*sic*) much we haven't done. Interacted with females(I went to an all boys schools so it was truly ovER (*sic*) before it even begun), socialized with fooids etc. Even if I were able to get a fooid friend or even a girlfriend, what would we do, I wouldn't know what to say or what to do. She would eventually break up with me because of my lack of experience(Don't believe that fooids will love you cuz (*sic*) you're inexperienced jfl , it's a lie) ...

Commenter: We are always stagnant there is no upgrade from here.

Extract 1 used the acronym LDAR which indicates that an incel life is that of rotting. When put into the context that an incel member asserts that they are unable to have sex, this experience of rotting is connected to a lack of sex. Extract 3 indicates that the OP is in their prime. If, at their prime, the incel member is unable to have sex, then the construction of a prime indicates that they will never have sex. Extract 4 indicates that incel members feel as though they are stagnant. Sex is also connected here to stagnation and indicates that life without sex is a stagnant life. By connecting rotting, stagnation and prime to a lack of sex, the argument made about the content of extract 9 is supported. If incels are less valuable than a 'normie' because they cannot have sex, then their lives, as described by extracts 1, 3, and 4 are biologically worse than a 'normie's'. Secondly, extract 9 does two more things which are connected to the term 'oneitis'. Firstly, there is an indication that a person needs to find the 'one' person who will fulfil their lives. Secondly, the use of the suffix 'itis' is likely connected to pathology. This, then, constructs finding the 'one' as a kind of disease. Incels may be subhuman and unable to get access to sex (not relationships), but at least they are not falling for the mainstream culture ideology of romance and relationships - oneitis - which to them is a position that masks the real truth that sex is a biological imperative. Another aspect of

constructing a normie having sex with their ‘oneitis’ is that it is again connected to biological functions. By asserting that a person is diseased because they only have sex with one person, one can then assert that, because of the connection to the biological, that men are supposed to have sex with multiple partners. This is then another aspect of incel discourse which believes that men are supposed to have multiple partners because having only one partner is a kind of disease. This is supported by some constructions of Chad.

Extract 8: Commenter 1: I don't really blame them, but I'm never going to forget it. Honestly I don't want a used up whore, even if I did ascend, the experiences that I really want are unattainable to me. I shouldn't indulge in this line of thinking, it just makes me want to curl up and die.

Commenter 2: ... Why does it matter so much to take a girls virginity? Or be her first kiss and all that. You're sounding like a female all sensitive. Meanwhile (*sic*) chad gives no fucks and tears pussy up.

Extract 8 is also an example that demonstrates that “Chad” has multiple partners and further develops the idea seen in extract 9 which claims that men are supposed to have sex with multiple partners. In this way, the relationship between a normie and an incel is made clear. ‘Chads’ exist at the top of the incel social status hierarchy, followed by ‘normies’, with incels at the bottom. An incel is constructed as biologically inferior to both ‘chads’ and ‘normies’, because a normie is able to have sex and fulfil this biological imperative. However, a normie, in incel discourse, believes that one is supposed to only have sex with one person which is a negative attribute amongst incel members.

All of this evidence points towards an idea that incels believe all people in the world to have their success predetermined because it is their genetics that defines whether one is an incel or not. This allows an incel to construct themselves as subhuman and as such are at the bottom of this biologically determined social hierarchy. For an incel, this hierarchy is impermeable as it is based on biology. By constructing this hierarchy as impermeable, incel members inevitably feel stagnant in their lives and believe that there is nothing that they can do to change their circumstances. Beyond this, the idea that biology rules all thoughts and behaviours is also indicated within this discursive theme. This indicates that, for some incel members, their subhumanity is explained through their constructions of a hierarchy and that biology is what controls decisions and thought.

4.3.2 Coping

Building on the idea that incels seem to think of themselves as ‘subhuman,’ incels think of life as something that cannot be improved and that they are stuck in their subhuman position. This leads to the development and use of the term ‘coping’ which often indicates the things an incel

must do if they are to survive their lives as incels. This section will unpack this discursive theme of ‘coping’ by first understanding the constructions of the role of death amongst some incel community members and then unpacking the usage of the term ‘blackpill’ within incel spaces which connects to extreme displays of hopelessness. Through this understanding of constructions of the notion of death as something that incels deserve, one can see the foundations of the ‘blackpill’ ideology which was discussed at length by Lindsay (2022). As was mentioned in the literature review, the metaphorical swallowing of the ‘blackpill’ is an ideological position which believes that women are favoured in the world and that one cannot do anything to change one’s social position in a hierarchy constructed by those that believe in the ‘blackpill’ (Lindsay, 2022).

The idea of death being important to incel discourse, can be seen in the usage of the object ‘death’ within the data. In context, ‘death’ is constructed as something that some incel members believe will be the release from their difficult lives. This often leads to a sense of hopelessness because they do not believe life can be improved. Lindsay (2022), links these feelings of hopelessness to taking revenge which they call stochastic terrorism, which further links to a sense of aggrieved entitlement (Kalish & Kimmel, 2010) amongst incel communities. Aggrieved entitlement is described as a state that young men experience when they feel as if the world has been unfairly cruel to them and that they deserve recompense (Kalish & Kimmel, 2010). This link between online anger and offline violence can be seen in the data where commenters talk about Elliot Rodger. This can be seen in references to ‘ER’ which, in incel spaces, is the abbreviation of the name Elliot Rodger. In context, this indicates one possible response an incel can have to their feelings of hopelessness. Beyond expressions of revenge and anger that result from realisation of the ‘truth’ of the ‘blackpill’, the sense of hopelessness that accompanies these constructions means that the incels not inclined to murder need different ways of ‘coping’ with their hopeless experience. Thus, the discursive theme of ‘coping’ is developed.

The data suggest two possible ways in which coping can be expressed. It can be used as a description of valid things a person can do to cope with their existence as an incel, or the term can be used as an insult which indicates that another person is coping with their hopelessness using invalid means. Regardless of what is seen as either valid or invalid, all forms of coping indicate some form of denial of the ‘blackpill’ position. This is interesting considering incels’ reverence for the concept. Finally, an exception is discussed in which the hopelessness of the ‘blackpill’ is challenged. This discursive heterogeneity is an example of what Williams (2020),

had found. However, an exception does not disprove the idea that incels still often see their lives as hopeless and as such something that must be coped with.

As mentioned, the first step to understanding the ‘blackpill’ position is understanding the expressions of death within the data. The extract below indicates that some incels believe that death is the only outcome they can expect because of a life without improvement.

Extract 10: OP: ... Instead they want to put you through physical and mental suffering because of your genes and other circumstances. ...

...

Commenter 1: hopefully we all die soon

Commenter 2: Hopefully a quick death.

This extract demonstrates the existence of some incels wanting to die. This is not to say that all incels want to die but that the notion exists within incel community spaces. The two commenters are responding to the OP who is complaining about the difficulty of their life and lack of success in having sex. As mentioned in the literature review, Lindsay (2022), speaks about how this focus on death and a belief that the world is biased and oppressive against men without the chance of improved circumstances is the ‘blackpill’ ideology. The idea that men are oppressed is also described by O’Malley et al. (2022). Furthermore, extract 10 allows one to see another way in which some incel members understand death. By making it seem as though all incels are destined to die, the commenter makes the claim that more than individual death being an expectation, the commenter is asserting a form of ‘species’ death. By combining this overreliance on biology and the sense that some incel members want to die, one can see a nihilistic orientation towards the meaninglessness of life and the inevitability of both individual and collective death. They are not only worried about dying alone themselves, but, because they are unable to breed and extend their genetic line, they are worried that they, as a part of the human species, will die out. This expression of a species death is about the sense that some incel members seem to have in relation to the human gene pool. They feel as though they are excluded from the gene pool for undeserved social and biological reasons. The sense of hopelessness that comes with acceptance of the ‘blackpill’ position is likely, in part, also fuelled by the feeling that there is nothing that they can do to change their circumstances to improve their chance at entering the gene-pool. The idea that men are oppressed is also described by O’Malley et al. (2022). This ‘blackpill’ ideology is also referenced in the data and is demonstrated in this extract:

Extract 11: OP: ...So my question to you brocel is how would one go about completely ignoring the blackpill or go back to living naively?

...

Commenter 1: You can't. That's why the blackpill is so brutal.

...

Commenter 2: The blackpill lifts the blue veil and provides valuable insight into how the world operates, not just women - in that regard, almost impossible to ignore it.

Extract 11 involves the responses of two commenters to the OP who is asking how they can go back to living naively before they became aware of the truth of the 'blackpill.' In this context, the first commenter of extract 11 talks about the 'blackpill' being 'brutal' which is what makes it impossible to ignore. In this way, incels are brutalised by the realisation of the harsh truth of the consequences of their social status because of the 'blackpill.' The second commenter of extract 11 goes into more depth as to why the 'blackpill' cannot be forgotten. The commenter indicates that it is because it is the truth that the 'blackpill' unveils that it cannot be ignored or forgotten. Analysing both of these commenters together one can see that truth is painful and that because of its pain, it cannot be ignored or forgotten. This aligns with what Lindsay (2022) was discussing in their research that identified the 'blackpill' as a 'knowing' of the truth of the world.

The idea that the 'blackpill' represents, in part, an inability to improve one's life was not always connected in the data but the sentiment was there:

Extract 4: OP: ... I came to another realization that if you are a truecel(90% of .is isn't) there is soo much we haven't done. Interacted with females(I went to an all boys schools so it was truly ovER (*sic*) before it even begun), socialized with foids etc. Even if I were able to get a foid friend or even a girlfriend, what would we do, I wouldn't know what to say or what to do. She would eventually break up with me because of my lack of experience(Don't believe that foids will love you cuz (*sic*) you're inexperienced jfl , it's a lie) ...

Commenter: We are always stagnant there is no upgrade from here.

Extract 12: OP: Kind of depressing to hear that there isn't a solution

Extract 13: OP: ... There's no hope for me and even if there is I wouldn't be ascending till mid-late 20s anyway.

Each of these extracts indicate a sense of hopelessness. The first of the three extracts above indicates that life cannot get better for an incel member and does so through the use of the term 'upgrade.' This was seen in the subhumanity discursive theme and, as indicated previously, also links to ideas of stagnation, hierarchy, and status. Extract 4 suggests that without an upgrade, an incel member is stagnant in their lives. This is also true for hierarchy, in that they are at the bottom of a social hierarchy and can do nothing to improve their circumstances, or status outside of incel spaces. This all implies that, without access to the things that those of higher social status have, there is no ability for those of lower social status to reach a higher

social status. Without the chance of improving, stagnation and hopelessness follows. Extract 12 uses the term ‘solution’ which, for different reasons, also contains a sense of finality when it comes to the experience of an incel member. The term ‘solution’ indicates a belief that one’s difficulties in life either are solved or unsolved. This binary view of experiences does not allow for nuance but does allow for certainty. When one is certain that there is no option for improvement, one can reasonably expect to feel hopeless. The final of the above three extracts (extract 13) indicates a lack of hope. In this context, not only does the OP express hopelessness, but also a need to prove that they are hopeless. This is a way of trying to prove that they are ‘blackpilled.’ If, as Lindsay (2022) puts it, the blackpill is a form of truth for incel members, then it is understandable that an incel member would want to prove that they believe in the truth. One way of doing this, is to indicate that one is hopeless, as demonstrated in the above extracts.

Lindsay (2022) goes on to make the connection that belief in the ‘blackpill’ can sometimes lead to offline violence which they term stochastic terrorism. As a reminder, stochastic terrorism is defined by Lindsay (2022), is an act of terrorism that is committed by members of a group or followers of an individual who demonise the person or group the act of terrorism is committed against. This is also seen in the following extracts:

Extract 14: Commenter: ER fuel, I feel the same thinking about this

Extract 15: OP (Original Poster): ...I went to an all boys schools so it was truly ovER (*sic*) before it even begun...

Both of these extracts involve the term ‘ER’ which is an abbreviation of the name Elliot Rodger who was the Isla Vista Killer mentioned in previous chapters (Ging, 2019; Lamoureux, 2018; Van Valkenburgh, 2018). Ging (2019). This usage indicates that there is reverence for Elliot Rodger amongst some incel members because of his ability to enact a kind of revenge on women for denying them sex. Importantly, Rodger committed suicide after killing several people (Ging, 2017; Lamoureux, 2018; Van Valkenburgh, 2018). It is at this point that one can see the usage of the ‘ER’ term in the data. For something to be ‘ER fuel’ presumably means that the commenter is being fuelled to feel feelings of revenge and suicide by what a previous commenter had said. While one cannot be certain that a person using the term ‘ER fuel’ will definitely enact stochastic terrorism, one must be aware that these sentiments exist within these spaces. Lindsay (2022) has also demonstrated a link between these online expressions of revenge with offline violence which further references aggrieved entitlement (Kalish &

Kimmel, 2010). An important link, however, is that Elliot Rodger also committed suicide which means that violence committed by incels in the real world might involve suicide because of the hopelessness the belief in the ‘blackpill’ creates. This means that some incel members express their belief in the ‘blackpill’ to demonstrate not only that they believe in truth, but also that the hopelessness that flows from this belief can lead to suicide. In order to survive the hopelessness that results from belief in the ‘blackpill,’ incels have developed the term ‘coping’.

The data also suggests that the construction ‘coping’ has two uses. The first is as an indication of actions to take in order to better survive life, and second as an insult. In this context, an incel must strike a balance between being aware of the ‘blackpill,’ and coping with the negative attributes that it has. Examples of ways of balancing this dynamic can be seen in the following extracts:

Extract 16: Commenter 1: You’ll spend your time on better things till then

...

Commenter 2: No he won't i (*sic*) bet he has no friends, no job. Wtf is he gonna (*sic*) do with his time besides cope with video games and anime

Extract 17: OP: ... So my question to you brocel is how would one go about completely ignoring the blackpill or go back to living naively? ...

...

Commenter: Unless you strike gold and become an exception to the rule or are able to immerse yourself in copes, not much to do about it.

The context for extract 16 is, again, an argument where the commenter is saying that the OP is actually an incel while another member is claiming that they are too young to be an incel. The member claiming that the OP is too young, was saying that the OP will spend their time doing better things than being an incel member until they are older. With this mention of time, commenter 2 of extract 16 indicates that the OP will not do anything better with their life besides ‘coping’ with video games and anime. This implies that the distraction that video games and anime provide are considered a valid way of coping with the stress of life. Extract 17 is meant as advice to someone asking for help existing as an incel member. The commenter claims that one should try to distract from and avoid exposing oneself to the entire truth by using ‘copes’ This commenter does not indicate which ‘copes’ he considers valid, just that one needs to cope with the existence of life and the truth of the ‘blackpill.’ It is at this stage that one begins to understand what a ‘cope’ is for incel members. In more ordinary terms, it is a coping strategy that is used to deny the difficulties of life and delude oneself into being happy. This means that to ‘cope’ is, in varying degrees, to deny the truth of the ‘blackpill’ and delude

oneself so that one has a more comfortable life. Through the above two extracts (extracts 16 and 17), one can see that there are some coping strategies that are seen as more valid within incel spaces even though ‘coping’ is a kind of denial of the ‘blackpill.’ In extract 16, one can cope with video games and anime. In extract 17, the commenter does not indicate what ‘copes’ are valid just that some are valid. In a way, through valid copes, an incel is allowed to deny, in varying degrees, the truth of the ‘blackpill’ and delude themselves into having a happy life.

As has been described, there are two different expressions of coping. One is valid, as previously discussed, and the other is invalid, which is expressed as insults. The second expression is demonstrated in the following extracts:

Extract 18: OP: ...Women are multi-orgasmic and their orgasms last longer than men's only because their orgasms are premature and incomplete. ...

...

Commenter: Dickcel cope tbh

OP: Female worship cope

Extract 19: OP: ...Looking to enroll (*sic*) at my local community college next school year so I don't have to become a wagie...

...

Commenter: Education is cope. ...

The first of the above extracts (extract 18) is describing an invalid way of coping with life. Extract 18 has a commenter claim that what is being said by the OP is a ‘dickcel’ cope. In this context, a ‘dickcel’ is a person who is an incel because of a small penis. In this context, the commenter asserts that the OP’s claims are actually a way for the OP to make excuses for their status as an incel because of their small penis without realising that they are making an excuse. The OP responds by saying that the only way that someone would disagree with them, as the commenter does, is because they secretly or unknowingly worship women. By claiming that ‘worshipping’ women is an invalid way to cope with living, they indicate that the commenter is both not an incel member and not accepting of the ‘blackpill’ truth. This indicates that ‘coping’ can also be seen as something someone else can do in order to avoid facing the truth. In the context of extract 18, the OP asserts that the commenter is disagreeing with them because they cannot face the reality that the point made by the OP describes. If it can be accepted that a cope is a way that an incel member ‘copes’ with the ‘blackpill,’ as mentioned prior, then then OP is asserting that the commenter is only disagreeing with him because he ‘copes’ with the ‘blackpill’ by worshipping women.

As mentioned in relation to previous extracts, the truth of an incel's life is brutal and painful and needs to be coped with. By using it as an insult, it sets up the idea that there are valid ways of coping and invalid ways of coping with the 'blackpill' truth. The second extract (extract 19) demonstrates that, in this context, getting an education is an invalid way of coping with life. This makes sense when one considers that the 'blackpill' involves a sense of hopelessness and an inability to improve one's circumstances. If education is a way of improving one's life, then getting an education means to deny the 'blackpill.' Extracts 18 and 19 are both examples of invalid ways of denying the 'blackpill.' Extract 18 has two examples within it as the commenter asserts that the OP is denying the truth through their claims that women have incomplete orgasms because they have a small penis, while the OP asserts that the commenter only denies the truth of the OP's claims because they worship women either intentionally or not. Extract 19 demonstrates a belief that if one gets an education, then one is denying the hopeless nature of the 'blackpill' because doing so is an attempt at improving one's life when no improvement is possible for an incel member and believer of the 'blackpill.'

Within the data gathered for the present research there does exist some indication that not all members believe in the strictest definition of the 'blackpill' and assert that a person can improve their life. This only occurred in one commenter but it is enough to indicate that there are exceptions to the idea that all incels believe life cannot be improved.

Extract 20: OP:... Even if I were able to get a foid friend or even a girlfriend, what would we do, I wouldn't know what to say or what to do. She would eventually break up with me because of my lack of experience(Don't believe that foids will love you cuz (*sic*) you're inexperienced jfl, it's a lie)....

...

Commenter: Like if you don't anything and end up rotting here, as you please, then you can't keep being sad about it.

In the context of extract 20, the commenter indicates that one must attempt to improve one's life before claiming that one cannot improve one's life. This commenter acts as an interesting exception because they believe one should try before claiming that everything is hopeless.

Extract 21: Commenter: Yet, I'm still ugly so it never begun for me, but I prefer being happy in my own way than suicidal.

idk too redpilled? bluepilled? dnc i (*sic*)said wanted to say

The commenter in extract 21 indicates that because of their physical appearance, they never had any hope of having sex and as such having a good life even though they indicated before that one should attempt to better one's experience. This comes across as an attempt to cope

with the 'blackpill' by denying parts of it while still believing in the 'blackpill.' They later indicate that what they had said might not be 'blackpilled' and instead either 'redpilled' or 'bluepilled.' Regardless of acknowledging that what they said might not be part of 'blackpill' ideology they stand by this. Soon after this another member responds:

Extract 22: Commenter: Bluepilled though I'll ignore it.

The commenter in extract 22 indicates that what the commenter in extract 21 has said is 'bluepilled' and so not even remotely part of incel ideology but that they will ignore the fact that it is 'bluepilled.' To be 'bluepilled' is to not be aware of the supposed reality that women control the world and that men are oppressed (Van Valkenburgh, 2018). Extract 22 indicates that an allowance for non-blackpill ideology exists within the incel space. Within the coping discursive theme, this is important to note as one of the ways one can cope with the 'blackpill' is by ignoring some parts of the 'blackpill' and while not accepted, it is acknowledged. Williams (2020), made the point that incel spaces are heterogenous in identity and ideology and this is a clear example of how complicated and dynamic the idea of 'copes' are and how the understanding of the 'blackpill' is different depending on which member is speaking.

All of this comes to the point that incels see life as something that needs to be coped with. This is due, in a large part, to the concept of the expressions of death, 'blackpill,' and its associated hopelessness which generates the belief that an incel cannot improve their circumstances and must spend their life either rotting or coping with their idea of a harsh reality. This creates the 'coping' discursive theme that demonstrates the view of life as something to be coped with because of their supposed oppression by women. The existence of an exception to the acceptance of the 'blackpill' helps demonstrate the heterogeneity that Williams (2020) describes. How the 'blackpill,' and as such, coping, is expressed changes depending on context and who is speaking.

4.3.3 Intelligence and rationality

The demonstration of intellectual ability is an important part of incel identity and this can be seen in the discursive theme of intelligence and rationality. This discursive theme is, in short, about how incel members jostle for positions within incel discourse. This is done in three different ways. The first is as a way of establishing credentials and authority to speak within incel interactions. The second is as a challenge to other incel members' social position. The third, and final, way is to question the authenticity of other members' claims to incel status or group membership.

Firstly, incel group members seem to indicate that they are incels through establishing their credentials. This occurs primarily as a way of appealing to authority. They do this through technological, scientific, and numbered language. This attempt at social status is made, in part, because they are motivated by a sense of aggrieved entitlement, as described by Kalish and Kimmel (2010), and the perceived social status that comes with being oppressed as described by O'Malley et al. (2022), without actually experiencing oppression.

Incels project a rational and intelligent façade, by using, among other things, technological, scientific, and numbered language.

The technological language can be seen in the following extract:

Extract 4: OP: ... I came to another realization that if you are a truecel(90% of .is isn't) there is soo much we haven't done. Interacted with females(I went to an all boys schools so it was truly ovER (*sic*) before it even begun), socialized with foids etc. Even if I were able to get a foid friend or even a girlfriend, what would we do, I wouldn't know what to say or what to do. She would eventually break up with me because of my lack of experience(Don't believe that foids will love you cuz (*sic*) you're inexperienced jfl , it's a lie) ...

Commenter: We are always stagnant there is no upgrade from here.

By implying that an incel cannot improve their circumstances using the word 'upgrade,' in extract 4, the commenter implies that incel members are bound to their social position in a similar way to a computer being unable to run complicated programmes without sufficiently upgraded hardware. By constructing themselves as hardware, they also construct limits for what they are capable of doing. As computers can either have, or not have, the correct hardware for a specific task, incels insist that, like a computer, they do not have the correct hardware to have sex. The OP also uses a percentile (90%) as a way to try and make their argument seem more plausible. This is an example of numbered language.

Their use of scientific wording can be seen in several places and will be discussed below.

Extract 5: Commenter: I don't blame bears for shitting in the woods, I certainly can't blame women for acting out their biological imperatives and tendencies. I hate them all nonetheless though.

Extract 5 is a response to an OP who is arguing that their life has not been good because women had not had sex with him. The extract is a commenter who is claiming that women are biologically determined to act in a certain way. This extract is another example where some incels display an overreliance on biology (O'Malley et al., 2022), as will be further discussed below under the theme of biological determinism. By relying on scientific wording, the incel member is indicating that they are correct because they are using words with scientific connotations. As has been mentioned and what is described by O'Malley et al. (2022), biology,

and, as such, science in general, are held in high-esteem which is likely why some incel members try to use language that is associated with science to gain the respect and power that they give to science.

Extract 24: OP: Basic human biology? Feminist propoganda (*sic*) at best. I've never heard of femjaculate until you brought it up. And I did very good (*sic*) in biology and am pretty well versed in foid physiology.

Extract 24 uses the term 'physiology' when trying to indicate that they have good knowledge of how women's bodies work. Through the use of terms such as femjaculate, foid, and physiology, the OP is making an attempt at using scientific language. The term 'femjaculate' is a merging of the words female and ejaculate. The intention of doing this is to indicate that they have enough knowledge of both of the terms to combine them. The term 'foid' is a combination of the terms female and humanoid which is a way of attempting to use language that sounds as if they know about biology and science. Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that using terms like female humanoid references the objective and descriptive language used in the classification taxonomies of the biological sciences. Not only does this reference biology yet again, it also evokes the idea of objective and above all dispassionate description of the nature of things (i.e. we are dealing with facts, not opinions). The term physiology is another example where the OP is attempting to use words associated with science in order to make their point seem more valid. By attempting to gain the authority that a scientist has, the incel member is able to claim authority within incel hierarchies and prove themselves an incel member to others.

Posts using numbers and statistics are using these discursive strategies to convince the reader to agree with them without looking into how those numbers were achieved. In incel discourse, it is also used to indicate that the incel members are intelligent and therefore deserving of being an incel member. Best (2004) argues that numbers are often used to convince the reader of their position regardless of the truth of the numbers. Incel members seem to be doing the same thing in their discussions. They use numbers to convince the reader of their position regardless of the source of those numbers.

Extract 3: OP: Brocels idk what to do mang (*sic*). It's friday (*sic*) and instead of going to fuck becky's roast beef flaps, I'm here browsing incels.is and cooming non-stop. I came to a scary realization that I'm in my prime, I'm in Uni, This (*sic*) is literally my peak biologically speaking yet I had to pay a foid to open her legs for me. ...

...

Commenter: Welcome to the other 2/3s of men.

Extract 23: OP: ...That's why it's damn near impossible to please women in bed unless you're in the top 1% of the male population. ...

Each of these extracts involve numbers in one way or another. Each is trying to make their point seem more valid through the use of these numbers. Extract 3 uses the term '2/3s' in an attempt to make its point seem more plausible because of its use of numbers. Extract 23 also does this as it tries to convince the reader that, due to biological features, such as a large penis, only 1% of men will be able to give a woman an orgasm. This gross overgeneralisation is spoken about with conviction as though what they are saying is a fact. The use of a percentile further pushes the idea that what they are saying is rooted in scientific research that can produce percentages. As Best (2004) might describe it, they are using numbers to convince readers regardless of the truth of the numbers. By doing this, the incel members are signalling to themselves and others that their familiarity with scientific discourse and ways of speaking reflects their levels of intelligence and rationality.

What each of these different ways of speaking does is create a sense of authority. By asserting that one's points are scientific, one hopes the reader will assume them to be true. This ability to appear true provides the language with weight that it can use even outside of incel spaces. When one takes the points made by other theorists, the use of this discursive theme is an attempt at legitimising those points. These points include the 'shitposting' feature described by Daly and Reed (2022), and the idea that people function as part of a sexual marketplace, while simultaneously seeing women as naturally evil, as described by O'Malley et al. (2022). For a community that displays itself as at the bottom of the social hierarchy, this is a way to express power and develop ingroup cohesion despite insisting that they have no power. In this way, they seek some of the masculinity features of old forms of hegemonic masculinities (i.e. rationality) (Connell, 2013), but also seek the power that aggrieved entitlement provides (Kalish & Kimmel, 2010). Through the use of this discursive theme, incels want to have the status that oppressed people have access to without the actual oppression. By using scientific language, they are able to develop the idea that the reasons for their 'oppression' are rational and, as such, true. They need to do this because they do not have actual stories of real-world oppression to draw on and as such must rely on other tactics. Ultimately, this first strategy in the intelligence and rationality discursive theme is to gain authority through their language and through this authority assert themselves as members of incel spaces.

The second way in which incel members use intelligence and rationality to jostle for status and positions within the incel hierarchies is through challenging other members.

Extract 25: Commenter: Ok, normally I don't make assumptions without concrete scientific evidence but here's my theory: The reason female orgasms feel way better is because pregnancy is a net loss for a woman. They need some sort of incentive to fuck. Therefore they evolved to reward themselves handsomely from fucking. Meanwhile men didn't evolve like this because they don't lose anything from jizzing (*sic*) in a woman. ...

In this context, the commenter in extract 25 uses scientific words such as 'assumptions,' and 'evolved' which attempt to ground their arguments through appeals to science and scientific language.

Extract 26: Commenter 1: They're SUPPOSED to enjoy it, or else we as a species would die out. No woman would have sex if they didn't enjoy it.

Commenter 2: i just posted statistic that only 50% of women orgasm during sex but i see no point in talking anymore than this tbh if statistic isnt even believable for u then im talking to a wall. ...

Extract 26 adds another layer to the theme of challenging other incels' intelligence. In this context Commenter 2 is asserting that in order to not be considered an inanimate object, one must be rational and accept data as though it were truth. Commenter 2 goes on to call Commenter 1 a wall because they refuse to listen to the statistics that they have mentioned. This is a way of undermining Commenter 1's rationality or intelligence because they refuse to listen to supposedly obvious statistics.

Extract 6: Commenter 1: A simple high school biology class would teach you that women's orgasms do help in reproduction.

Commenter 2: It's feminist propaganda.

Commenter 1: No it's just science but whatever helps you sleep at night I guess.

Commenter 2: You're strongly indoctrinated! Time to take the anti-indoctrination pill.

The context for extract 6 is two different commenters who are responding to the claim that high school biology is a valid source of information. Commenter 1 is attempting to make a claim that what they are saying is based in high school biology. Commenter 2 attempts to challenge this by asserting that the point made by commenter 1 is feminist propaganda. Commenter 2 extends this by asserting that commenter 1 is indoctrinated. This is an example where incel members will challenge the intelligence of other members. Commenter 1 is attempting to claim authority and status by referring to 'high school biology.' Commenter 2 does not accept this attempt at authority by commenter 1 and instead asserts commenter 1 is actually not an incel member and instead indoctrinated.

As has been mentioned, Commenter 2 goes on and, very specifically, indicates that the commenter claiming high school as a valid indicator of intelligence is indoctrinated – likely

into anti-blackpill rhetoric. Again, this sets up education as something that is negative and is an enemy of incel ideology. Extract 6, while being an example of incel members challenging other members for status, is also an example of incel members trying to identify members and police boundaries. This construction of ‘us versus them’ will be discussed in more depth later, but for now it is important to note that those that receive an education are seen as enemies who have been indoctrinated by mainstream social ideology and are therefore ignorant of the truth of the ‘blackpill’ position. This adds another layer to incel hierarchies where to prove one has value within incel spaces, one needs to prove one’s understanding of the ‘blackpill’. It should be noted that within the data, those that believed in education as a valid source of information were in the minority. This implies that, while education is sometimes seen as a valid form of intelligence, most members believe education to be an enemy that makes people doubt the truth of the ‘blackpill’.

As mentioned in the section on ‘coping’ the knowledge of the ‘blackpill’ is seen as a marker of being an incel member. By constructing the ‘blackpill,’ as a form of truth, their knowledge of the truth indicates that being knowledgeable and, as such, intelligent and rational is important for incel members. This knowledge is seen as something negative but still a mark of pride. In a way, they are saying that they know the truth, which is good, but that the truth is horrible. This can be seen in the extract:

Extract 27: OP: Brocels idk what to do mang (*sic*). It's friday (*sic*) and instead of going to fuck becky's roast beef flaps, I'm here browsing incels.is and cooming non-stop. I came to a scary realization that I'm in my prime, I'm in Uni, This (*sic*) is literally my peak biologically speaking yet I had to pay a foid to open her legs for me .

...

Because I live in a 3rd world country I thought maybe the blackpill didn't fully apply to me mang but buddy boyos was I wrong I can't even get foids that lived in poverty because even they think I'm disgusting.

...

So my question to you brocel is how would one go about completely ignoring the blackpill or go back to living naively? ...

In this context, the OP of extract 27 claims that they are in their biological prime but cannot have sex with women because they are an incel. They then go on to talk about the ‘blackpill’ and how the truth of it makes his life difficult. He ends his post by asking other members how to ‘live naively.’ By seeing life without knowledge of the ‘blackpill’ as ‘living naively,’ the OP constructs those who do not believe in the ‘blackpill’ as naïve. With naïve being a negative description of someone’s level of intelligence, one can see that understanding of the ‘blackpill’ equates to being more aware and/or knowledgeable about the nature of reality, and in this

context, consequently more intelligent. This helps set up the idea that a person must understand and believe in the 'blackpill' if they are to be considered intelligent enough to participate in the incel space. However, by also constructing this knowledge as something that has a negative effect on those that know and believe in it the OP sets up the idea that incel identity is something difficult to live with. This idea of life being difficult for an incel was discussed in the previous discursive theme but in this case the use of the word 'naïve' creates a new sense of difficulty which stems from being aware of their supposed oppression. This idea that men are oppressed in incel discourse is also described by O'Malley et al. (2022). By describing their knowledge of the 'blackpill' as 'not-naïve' and the 'blackpill' being partly about being aware of men's oppression at the hands of women the OP of extract 27 is co-opting the language of the oppressed and fulfilling part of the requirement for being considered a hybrid masculinity. In a sentence, acceptance of the 'blackpill' truth constitutes an indicator of membership and allows for the policing of boundaries.

Through the intelligence and rationality discursive theme, incel members demonstrate positioning strategies within incel hierarchies. First, they attempt to attain status within incel spaces by establishing authority with their language. They then use their language to challenge the intelligence and rationality of other members. Through this second strategy, incel members are able to police their boundaries and indicate who is an incel member and who is not. Together, this forms part of a strategy to jostle for status within incel discourse.

4.3.4 Membership

In-group membership is a very important part of incel identity. This can be seen in the use of insults that attempt to brand other members as non-members, often by appeals to supposed rationality, as discussed under the previous theme. By asserting that a participant in an interaction is actually not a true incel community member, they reinforce the expectation to prove oneself as a member as an important aspect of incel interactions. The discursive theme of identity is thus central to the interactions between online community members of this kind, because it focuses on establishing and reinforcing the boundaries around the incel identity as Glace et al. (2021) suggests incels do. The various aspects of incel identity seem to revolve around 'truecels', the 'blackpill,' and 'infiltrators'. Truecels appear as the prestigious label that applies to members who are recognised as real incels. This reinforces the idea that membership is an important aspect of incel interactions.

Extract 4: OP: ... I came to another realization that if you are a truecel(90% of .is isn't) there is soo much we haven't done. Interacted with females(I went to an all boys schools so it was truly ovER (*sic*) before it even begun), socialized with foids etc. Even if I were able to get a foid friend or even a girlfriend, what would we do, I wouldn't know what to say or what to do. She would eventually break up with me because of my lack of experience(Don't believe that foids will love you cuz (*sic*) you're inexperienced jfl , it's a lie) ...

Commenter: We are always stagnant there is no upgrade from here.

As will be discussed below, extract 4 is an example of the use of the term 'truecel'. In this context, the OP is claiming that the majority of incel members are not true incels (truecels) and indicates an attempt at describing why they are an incel more than other members.

Another important part of incel membership appears to be acceptance of the 'blackpill'. The discursive construction of the idea of 'ascending' helps indicate the importance of the 'blackpill' position within incel membership.

Extract 8: Commenter 1: I don't really blame them, but I'm never going to forget it. Honestly I don't want a used up whore, even if I did ascend, the experiences that I really want are unattainable to me. I shouldn't indulge in this line of thinking, it just makes me want to curl up and die.

Extract 11: OP: ...So my question to you brocel is how would one go about completely ignoring the blackpill or go back to living naively?

...

Commenter 1: You can't. That's why the blackpill is so brutal.

In its relative position, 'ascend,' in extract 8, helps indicate that incel members associate having sex with ascension, which carries religious connotations. By connecting sex with something as unobtainable as ascensions, one sees the importance of seeing one's prospects of having sex as impossible and hopeless, which is an important part of the 'blackpill' position as seen in extract 11. In extract 11, one can see that an important part of the 'blackpill,' is the impossibility of ignoring it because of how brutal it is. There is also the more mundane connotation to ascension - which is simply elevating one's status position. The two connotations are not mutually exclusive, but it is worth mentioning that ascending links with the subhumanity discursive theme. If they are subhuman, biologically, then the only way that they might 'ascend' is with a miracle that overrules the biological. Once an incel actually succeeds in having non-paid for sex, they ascend in social status and become equivalent in social status to a normie. Despite the possibility of being a normie, they would still hold the 'blackpill' as true and therefore remain slightly different to normies.

Finally, part of this process of policing membership is also an indication that incel members are aware that they are being watched by outside groups which leads to some members attempting to reinforce incel identity markers in order to find out who is actually watching

them by developing their disagreement reinforcement mechanism as described by Nguyen (2018). This labelling as an infiltrator can be seen in the object ‘foid infiltrator.’

Extract 28: Commenter: Women's jaculates are made up of completely different compounds to neutralize the acidity of the vagina so that sperm have a better chance of survival and fertilization. Are you saying the periodic table itself is brainwashing society into feminist retardedness(*sic*)?

...

OP: Take your feminist pseudoscience back to r/twoxchromosomes. Even if your fake science was real, none of that femjaculate BS is required for foids to get impregnated. You're obviously a foid infiltrator. My factual post made you so triggered that made an entire account just to respond. GTFO toilet. Go suck a big smelly Chad dick.

In context, the object ‘foid infiltrator’ in extract 28 is an insult that attempts to assert that another member is both a woman and an infiltrator. If one can assert that anyone one disagrees with is an infiltrator, then echo chamber dynamics are easier to achieve. There are several attempts at incel members trying to demonstrate that either they are a member or that another person is not a member which reinforces the boundaries of what it means to be an incel member and indicates the importance of membership within incel interactions.

Extract 4: OP: ... I came to another realization that if you are a truecel(90% of .is isn't) there is soo much we haven't done. Interacted with females(I went to an all boys schools so it was truly ovER (*sic*) before it even begun), socialized with foids etc. Even if I were able to get a foid friend or even a girlfriend, what would we do, I wouldn't know what to say or what to do. She would eventually break up with me because of my lack of experience(Don't believe that foids will love you cuz (*sic*) you're inexperienced jfl , it's a lie) ...

Commenter: We are always stagnant there is no upgrade from here.

Extract 4 uses the discursive object ‘truecel’ which indicates a specific class of incel. A truecel is an incel who is actually an incel (a ‘true incel’). In this way, according to this OP, only 10% of the total population of incels.is are truecels. This means that the vast majority of incels only feel like an incel but are not considered, by this OP, a real incel. It is not specified what criteria need to be met in order to be a ‘truecel’ just that most people who call themselves incels are actually not. This subject is treated in a positive way and is seen as the true mark of an incel. The OP is attempting to identify themselves as a truecel in order to gain sympathy and understanding from what the OP might consider other truecels. It is also an attempt at alienating most of the website in the hopes that their cynicism be taken as an indicator that they are actually a truecel.

Another instance where incel members appear to be trying to understand incel identity is when trying to unpack what the ‘blackpill’ means in these spaces. As Williams (2020), mentions, the incel space is heterogenous and as such the concept of the ‘blackpill,’ which is an important

part of incel identity, is also defined or understood differently depending on which incel member is being asked. This can be seen in the following extracts.

Extract 29: Commenter: Sex is a nice bonus. I long just as much for kissing and cuddling and edging with a cute women (*sic*). Watching a movie together, then fucking. Or simply cum on her. Sex (not just her riding) seems so tiring I don't think I have the stamina. I'd have to train first

OP: Whatever gets your rocks off brocel. That kissing and cuddling stuff is bluepilled though.

In extract 29, the OP is asserting that an incel should not seek out and enjoy kissing and cuddling. This is a response to a commenter who is claiming that those two things are what they want from a woman. For the OP these kinds of actions are 'bluepilled.' This indicates that someone who is 'bluepilled' is, among other things, accepting of mainstream society's ideology about romance and relationships. Beyond what is defined in this context, the 'bluepill' also means someone who is unaware of the truth that society is gynocentric and that men are oppressed by women (O'Malley et al., 2022). If being 'bluepilled' is the antithesis of being 'blackpilled' then describing what the 'bluepill' is sheds some light on what the 'blackpill' is. This mild confrontation in extract 29 is, therefore, an attempt at more clearly defining the boundaries of what it means to believe in the 'blackpill' (Lindsay, 2022), and, as such, exist as an incel (Glance et al., 2021).

Extract 8: Commenter 1: I don't really blame them, but I'm never going to forget it. Honestly I don't want a used up whore, even if I did ascend, the experiences that I really want are unattainable to me. I shouldn't indulge in this line of thinking, it just makes me want to curl up and die.

Commenter 2: ... Why does it matter so much to take a girls virginity? Or be her first kiss and all that. You're sounding like a female all sensitive. Mean while (*sic*) chad gives no fucks and tears pussy up.

Extract 8 takes on a similar role as extract 29. In extract 8's context, the commenter is indicating that being sensitive is not part of being a man and, as such, not part of being an incel. This lack of sensitivity is sometimes included in the definition of the 'blackpill' (Lindsay, 2022), and therefore is another example of incel members trying to use arguments to try and define their identity and the features of their ideology. Both extract 29 and 8 indicate an aspect of the membership discursive theme where incel members are trying to define what the 'blackpill' is and through that ideology, define what it means to be an incel. This is done through argumentation that asserts others are not incel because they do not live according to the 'blackpill.'

As mentioned, some attempts at insults were also an attempt at finding out who is watching the incel spaces. Part of incel membership is the process of identifying who is trying to observe and possibly dismantle the incel spaces from the inside. The paranoia is a demonstration of

incel members not only trying to reinforce their membership markers but also an intention to try and defend their borders against infiltrators. This can be seen in the following extracts and paragraphs.

Extract 6: Commenter 1: A simple high school biology class would teach you that women's orgasms do help in reproduction.

Commenter 2: It's feminist propaganda.

Commenter 1: No it's just science but whatever helps you sleep at night I guess.

Commenter 2: You're strongly indoctrinated! Time to take the anti-indoctrination pill.

Extract 6 is an argument between two incel members. Commenter 1 first claims that a woman's orgasm does help with reproduction. Commenter 2 is responding by saying that commenter 1 is indoctrinated. This implies that commenter 2 believes that commenter 1 is not an incel because they believe in a theory that, within incel logic, asserts women have more value in the sexual context than they should. This is a serious way of indicating that another is not part of the incel space because of their beliefs and, as such, are an infiltrator. In this context, the commenter 2 is asserting that commenter 1 is an infiltrator but not necessarily aware of their status as an infiltrator. This indicates that one can be an infiltrator without being aware that one is an infiltrator. This extra layer allows one incel to accuse another incel of not being aware of their non-incel status and, as such, reinforce their own identity.

Extract 30: Commenter: ...Clearly, you're just a self-centered (*sic*) individual who really wishes he had an actual pussy to fuck instead of a body pillow.

OP: ... I'm an escortmaxxer. But I don't see that as a flex. Your IT level shaming tactics don't work on me.

Extract 30 is more deliberate in its attempt at asserting another is part of a hostile group and therefore an infiltrator. 'IT' in this context refers to the subreddit r/inceltears which consists of screencaps of incel posts and discussions and shames them for, among other things, their misogyny. The OP is claiming that someone who does not agree with their point, and is shaming them, is using tactics that are used by the enemy and, as such, are the enemy. This is enough of an indication that for some incel members, one needs to be aware that there might be non-members who are trying to sabotage the incel identity from within and must be named and shamed.

Extract 28: Commenter: Women's jaculates are made up of completely different compounds to neutralize the acidity of the vagina so that sperm have a better chance of survival and fertilization. Are you saying the periodic table itself is brainwashing society into feminist retardedness(*sic*)?

...

OP: Take your feminist pseudoscience back to r/twoxchromosomes. Even if your fake science was real, none of that femjaculate BS is required for foids to get impregnated. You're obviously a foid

infiltrator. My factual post made you so triggered that made an entire account just to respond. GTFO toilet. Go suck a big smelly Chad dick.

Extract 28 is the most obvious example of awareness of infiltrators in some incel spaces. In this context, the OP is accusing someone who does not agree with their post that the commenter is a woman and was so ‘triggered’ by the ‘factual’ nature of the post that they needed to make an account with the website so that they could comment on OP’s post to try and discredit them. This very aggressive accusation also demonstrates some misogyny that will be discussed in a later discursive theme section, but for this section, this extract demonstrates that incel members are aware that there are non-members within incel spaces who are watching what is being said. This awareness of others watching them, also further develops the ‘disagreement reinforcement mechanism’, which Nguyen (2018) describes as one part of an echo chamber which states that anyone trying to disagree with the in-group, will just re-entrench the in-group’s held beliefs. The incel space’s knowledge that they are being observed also means that it becomes very hard to openly argue with incel members because an incel member can claim that the opposing voice is an infiltrator and not trying to use good faith arguments but rather trying to dismantle the community from the inside. This is another way that incels seem to re-entrench their beliefs and reinforce their boundaries both from outside voices and from inside voices.

All of this together is intended to demonstrate that incel members are very concerned with understanding what it means to be an incel member and who is observing them. This is very understandable when considering what Williams (2020) suggests. As a group that is heterogenous as incels are (Williams, 2020), understanding membership markers is both complicated and necessary. Incel members constantly argue about this, both, because Hall (1996), Herring (1996), Herring (1992), Herring (1993), and Savicki et al. (1996) suggest that online spaces dominated by men are hostile spaces, and that they are unsure what it is they are arguing for. Throughout this discursive theme, there exists three different concepts that are important to incel interaction. These are that truecel, the ‘blackpill,’ and infiltrators are all important for incel membership. Furthermore, by asserting that others might be infiltrators, incel members are able to develop a disagreement reinforcement mechanism as described by Nguyen (2018), that helps guard against external and perceived external voices that challenge incel beliefs. In this way, this discursive theme is about incel members trying to understand themselves and is used to further develop the incel identity by reinforcing boundaries as suggested by Glace et al. (2021) and figure out who is observing them thus further reinforcing boundaries by developing a disagreement reinforcement mechanism as described by Nguyen (2018).

4.3.5 Misogyny

This discursive theme was identified as a result of commonly used ways of speaking in incel interactions that degrade women, both as a way to indicate why men, and incels, are better than women and why women are objects or animals. In this discursive theme, women are only accorded subject status when it is strategic for an incel to do so. In most other contexts, however, women are discursively constructed as little more than objects and are frequently spoken about in incredibly degrading and pejorative ways. The idea of ‘women’ created in incel spaces usually only exists within incel minds and, as such, the women that incels speak about never attain full personhood.

The discussion of this discursive theme is divided into three sections. The first concerns how women are described by some incels; the second concerns what women are able to do according to some incels; and the final concerns expressions of what some incel members say they want to do to women. These three sub themes stand out as important aspects of how incel members construct women and their relative positions to incel members.

The intention with a discussion of these three sub themes is to develop a full picture of how some incel members construct women in their discourse. Within these three sections, one will see that women are described as naturally evil; the legitimization of violence; the overstatement of the role of biology within social spaces and interactions; the development of the notion of the sexual marketplace; the idea that men are oppressed (as described by O’Malley et al.; 2022); and ‘shitposting’ (as described by Daly & Reed; 2022). Analysis of this discursive theme will demonstrate that within incel discourse, women can be constructed as either things, sexual beings, and/or cruel.

To begin, the analysis will focus on some of the ways in which women are referred to in discussions between incel community members. The use of the term ‘toilet’ is a good example of how some incel members think of women as things.

Extract 31: Commenter: Nature rewards toilets for being born toilets, this is why 100% of all toilets can experience 100 successive orgasms all the time whenever Chad even touches her hand. Sex is brutal, toilets enjoy it way more than men.

Extract 33: Commenter: ...I know even if I got with a foid I wouldn't be able to relate to her at all, and she'd probably despise me.

In context, the discursive object ‘toilet’ in extract 31 is used to describe women and is a particularly violent way of reducing women down to things. Furthermore, the term ‘foid’ in

extract 33 is another example of how incel members reduce women to things. The term ‘foid’ is an abbreviation of the term ‘female’ and ‘humanoid.’ These two terms together are more violent ways of removing women from being human.

Extract 32: OP: ...All it would take is one woman to come up to you and try to befriend you, but no. They are too cruel to make a subhuman's day just a little bit better. Instead they want to put you through physical and mental suffering because of your genes and other circumstances. ...

Commenter: Women must pay. Rape and kill.

As will be seen below, sex becomes a major theme when incel discuss women. Finally, the object ‘subhuman’ in extract 32 indicates how some incel members think of women as cruel. While incel members have demonstrated that they themselves believe they are subhuman, extract 32 indicates an incel belief that women think of incels as ‘subhuman.’ This allows for incel members to think of women as being cruel.

As mentioned above, how women are described will be unpacked first. It will be found that women are usually discursive objects but never subjects and people.

Extract 33: Commenter: ...I know even if I got with a foid I wouldn't be able to relate to her at all, and she'd probably despise me.

Extract 27: OP: Brocels idk what to do mang (*sic*). It's friday (*sic*) and instead of going to fuck becky's roast beef flaps, I'm here browsing incels.is and cooming non-stop. I came to a scary realization that I'm in my prime, I'm in Uni, This (*sic*) is literally my peak biologically speaking yet I had to pay a foid to open her legs for me .

Extract 24: OP: Basic human biology? Feminist propoganda (*sic*) at best. I've never heard of femjaculate until you brought it up. And I did very good in biology and am pretty well versed in foid physiology.

These first three extracts (extracts 33, 27, and 24) all have the term ‘foid’ in common and these are not the only places this term can be seen. This term is a portmanteau of the words: female humanoid which, first, reduces a woman down to their biology, by using the term ‘female,’ and then removes them from being a human by indicating that they are ‘humanoid.’ The term ‘foid’ appears to be the most common way in which incel members within this data refer to women. If this is the dominant way of describing women, then the idea that women are not even human is a major part of how some incel members think of women. This kind of sexism is another example of some incel members engaging in ‘shitposting’ as described by Daly and Reed (2022) and helps justify violence done against women which was described by O’Malley et al. (2022). By using the term ‘foid’ incel members are successfully reducing women down to things. However, despite this being the most common way in which women are described, it is not the only way. The below extracts help indicate other words that are used to describe women.

Extract 34: Commenter: At best, female orgasm is to bond with her owner so they like each other enough to raise their offspring.

But in any good civilization, they don't have a choice, so it's useless.

By describing men as ‘owners,’ in extract 34, women become objects to be owned. Through the use of the discursive object ‘offspring,’ the commenter is trying to claim that women should be owned by men which seems to indicate a kind of slavery. This concept of slavery is also connected to the idea of a ‘good civilisation’ in which the commenter is using his language to claim that a civilisation with slavery of women is a good civilisation. This is degrading to women and an attempt at removing agency and will from women so that they have no say in what happens to them. While this comment does indicate that sex is part of the relationship between a man and a woman, they are also asserting that men should have power over women. By dehumanising women in this way, incels make it more possible for violence to be done to women. This kind of justification for violence is another example that supports what O’Malley et al. (2022) argue when they claim that incels want violence and revenge against women. In short, this is another way in which incel members construct women as ‘things.’

The second important aspect of extract 34 is that women and men can raise ‘offspring.’ It is important to note that, for this commenter, both men and women are responsible for parenting. This would be a remarkably equal viewing of men and women if it were not for the previous expression of women being owned by men. This means that the parenting, when put into context, would likely be whatever the man wanted the woman to do because he ‘owns’ her. This again makes parenting centred on the man, and the woman, who takes part in the parenting, is effectively a slave to whatever the man insists the women do for the family. This slave and owner construction is one of the ways that some incel members seem to legitimise violence against women as described by O’Malley et al. (2022). Furthermore, the point made by the commenter about a ‘good civilization’ is also worth unpacking in this context. This kind of language demonstrates what incel members believe to be a good society. For them, the move to a more egalitarian society was a negative move and that life was better when women had fewer choices. This kind of language is able to assert another way in which incel members feel about women and believe that they do not deserve rights. Beyond violence against women, the above extracts are some examples of ‘shitposting’ as described by Daly and Reed (2022) because of their misogynistic and sometimes violent content. By describing women as slaves, women become things to be used by incels.

Extract 31: Commenter: Nature rewards toilets for being born toilets, this is why 100% of all toilets can experience 100 successive orgasms all the time whenever Chad even touches her hand. Sex is brutal, toilets enjoy it way more than men.

The term ‘toilet,’ within extract 31 occurs commonly, but still not as commonly as ‘foid,’ In this context, a woman is equated with a toilet. This is another attempt at removing all subject status from women by asserting that they are as valuable as a receptacle for human waste. This demonstrates the deep hatred some incel members seem to have for women as this is a violently dehumanising way of thinking of women. In this context, a ‘toilet’ is not a sexual object; rather it is a way in which some incel members express the domination of women. Both of these comments indicate that for some incel members, sex is only what they report that they want. More than sex, some incel members seem to want absolute power over women to do with as they please. Ultimately, through their language, some incel members seem to make women into things which, in turn, dehumanises them.

The second sub theme in the discussion of misogyny revolves around constructions of what women are able to do and the amount of power women are afforded according to incels. It should be noted that most of the actions women are constructed as being able to perform, involve sex, which in the incel context is something that women usually have done to them. This positions women as having less agency because they do not have the ability to be active within the world. The way in which women are described by some incel members indicates that they are either powerful enough to oppress men or they are objects to be used, depending on the point an incel member is trying to make.

Sex being primarily what women can do can be seen in the following extracts. Each of the below extracts will indicate that, for some incel members, sex is the main thing women can do. This construction of women as primarily the object and recipient of men’s sexual desire and behaviour both sexualises and objectifies women in denigrating ways.

Extract 2: OP: ...She will probably have already given most of her youth to other men while giving you the leftovers. A person's life really only matters for the first 30 years. After that it's just waiting until you die if you're the average person. An incel had to spend his whole life rotting. If you missed out on highschool(*sic*)/ College puss then it's over. The best you can hope for is Chad's sloppy seconds. You will have nothing to look back at when you're old and wrinkly and the sooner you realize that the better.

In extract 2, the OP is indicating that if one does have sex with a woman later in life, one will only be getting ‘leftovers’ because women give away their ‘fresh’ sex to other men when they were young. Firstly, by describing sex as ‘leftovers’ they indicate that sex is like food, and, furthermore, it becomes a finite resource. This implies that the sex women can provide while

they are young is fresh and when older is stale. By talking about women in this way, they seem to think that women ‘offer’ sex to men which is a very passive way of describing sex but also that women are commodities that degrade with time. By making women a commodity that can degrade with time, they are constructing the idea of a sexual marketplace wherein people have a certain value based on how much sex they can have or have had (O’Malley et al., 2022). By equating women with a finite and perishable resource such as food, incels also indicate the importance of the sexual marketplace within their discourse. This way of thinking about sex as something that can be traded is described by O’Malley et al. (2022) as the sexual marketplace. It is important to note that in this context, the ‘giving’ of youth is an example of active providing to other people.

As there is a strong sense of biological determinism within incel discourse - the idea that women will give away sex when they are younger does not necessarily mean they are full sexual agents when they are simultaneously constructed as following biological imperatives to mate with Chads, or to procreate. While, in extract 2, a woman can give her youth to other men, it is not constructed as an ability to choose if they give their youth away or not. It is, rather, seen as a fact that women do this as a biological imperative, rather than by choice. This construction makes them dependent on men in order to do the action that they are biologically determined to do. This manages to make women into both things and sexual objects. What further develops is that incels are constructing a contradiction. The contradiction emerges only when incels talk about their own inability to gain access to sex. When they cannot have sex, it is the fault of cruel ‘foids’ who decide not to make the subhuman lives of incels better. When a woman has sex with someone like Chad, she has no choice and cannot be blamed because of her biological programming despite still being hated for it. In this way, women can choose not to have sex with an incel but must have sex with higher value men. This allows for incel members to always lose. Incels are able to use the biological imperative angle when they do not want themselves to be seen as failures. By claiming that women are preprogrammed to not have sex with them, they are able to claim that there is nothing that they can do to change their circumstances. However, when they want to express hate towards women, they provide some agency to women so that women can cruelly deny incels sex. In this way, it is women’s fault which means that they deserve the hate.

Extract 5: Commenter: I don't blame bears for shitting in the woods, I certainly can't blame women for acting out their biological imperatives and tendencies. I hate them all nonetheless though.

Extract 5 is an attempt at removing the active ability for women to choose what they can do. This extract implies that women only act based on their biological imperatives. This creates a very deterministic worldview that removes the concept of free will from women. This commenter is indicating that women cannot help acting in the ways that they act. When put into context, this makes the few actions that women can take seem beyond the control of their bodies. This is another way to remove agency from women by asserting that they are not in control of their own choices. By doing this, incel members are able to think of women as sexual beings whose actions are based on their biology.

Extract 35: OP: Nature only made getting fucked feel good to them so they can tolerate it long enough for men to get them pregnant.

Extract 35 indicates that women only tolerate the physical act of sex long enough to get pregnant. In both of these constructions, a woman is someone who has things done to her for biological reasons only. By making women into things that are passive receivers of sex this construction also entrenches a patriarchal and phallogocentric construction of sexuality where the agency of women is not important and heterosexuality is the norm. As this construction denies women the ability to have sexual agency, it also denies women the ability to have sexual desire themselves as they, in this construction, have no desire at all. The notion that women can get pregnant does not construct pregnancy as the result of an act engaged in by two mutually participating agents. Instead, by using the phrasing ‘for men to get them pregnant’ this discursive construction renders pregnancy as something that is done to women by men. This again puts men at the centre and women as receivers of actions and reliant on men for their existence. Even if pregnancy is included, women, according to extract 35, are almost entirely sexual objects in this context.

However, despite sex being a major part of a women’s identity as an object, they are sometimes given agency so that they can be cruel to incel members. This small allowance for agency, at the expense of incels, can be seen in the following extracts:

Extract 1: OP: They have starved you for the entirety of your youth. While you were stuck inside LDARing (*LDARing is an acronym meaning to lay down and rot*), they were getting penetrated by Chad and making the most of their youthful lives. You missed out on years of your life, being inside playing video games, fapping, maybe going on lonely walks wishing you had a beautiful foed by your side. All it would take is one woman to come up to you and try to befriend you, but no. They are too cruel to make a subhuman's day just a little bit better. Instead they want to put you through physical and mental suffering because of your genes and other circumstances. ...

Extract 1 contains one of the few instances where women are not predominantly described as sexual objects. In this context, women are constructed as capable of befriending an incel but

choose not to because they are too cruel. This affords women with the power to make some incel members life better but choose not to because they are cruel. This expression of free will in women stands in contrast to when they were described as without free will and only able to follow their biological imperatives. This is an example of heterogeneity that Williams (2020) discusses but it might also be how some incel members use logic strategically in ways that better support their arguments. In this context, women require free will in order to be described as cruel whereas in a different context, they have their free will removed so that they can be reduced to their biology. It is likely that extract 1 is an example of incel members allowing for women to both be objects and for them to have some agency because incels need to maintain the construction of themselves as being in a losing position regardless of the position of women. In this sort of dual construction, incels are precluded from securing sex with women because of their own supposed genetic inferiority, while at the same time they are also prevented from ever gaining access to sex with women because women also have agency to deny incel members sex.

Another aspect of extract 1 is that women are seen as the source of happiness for some incel members. While usually happiness involves sex, this OP indicates that what they want from women is not sex but friendship. This is likely done to make their request seem easier to fulfil which, in turn, makes the fact that women do not fulfil it seem even more cruel. As such, the intention of extract 1 is used to assert that they believe women have power, but choose not to use that power to benefit incels, because they are cruel. Furthermore, by constructing women as 'cruel,' they are reinforcing what O'Malley et al. (2022) found when they claimed that some incel members treat women as naturally evil.

Extract 36: Commenter: ...Meanwhile foids can make money just having sex.

Extract 36 comes back to the concept that women and sex are intertwined. In this context, women are constructed as able to actively make money. However, their ability to make money is closely linked to their ability to have sex. If power comes with money, then women gain power through sex. This still indicates that men are at the centre of interactions because a woman requires a man to make money in this context. In this way, women become almost entirely sexual objects.

Extract 37: OP: Some can, but most complain about Chad being "bad at sex".

Extract 37 indicates that another action women can take is to complain about sex being bad. This indicates that, for some incel members, women have access to what incels want but instead of being happy, they complain about it. This is likely done to try and indicate that even women

who have happiness (in this context, sex is happiness for some incel members), are ungrateful for what they have. This is another attempt at degrading women by indicating that one of the few actions women can do is complain about happiness. This kind of sexism is, again, another example of ‘shitposting’ as described by Daly and Reed (2022). As a reminder, the concept of ‘shitposting’ is the use of generally unacceptable language (violence, misogyny, racism, and sexism) on social media platforms (Daly & Reed, 2022). Furthermore, this is another way in which women become cruel beings to incel members.

Extract 38: OP: ...Nature doesn't reward women with sex, because women live life on easy mode. They don't have to do anything except exist and get everything handed to them by a man. ...

Extract 38 indicates that women live life on ‘easy mode.’ This construction makes women undeserving of their supposed higher social status in relation to the relative position of incels. This is another attempt at asserting that women have higher social status than incels. This expression of status can be linked to the biological hierarchy that was displayed in the subhumanity discursive theme. In that theme, because sex is the primary need of all people, women have control over the world because, when women are given the agency to choose who to have sex with, they, biologically, only have sex with the highest social status men. In this context, women are only given some agency so that incel members can claim that women are choosing to be cruel to incels by denying them sex. The incel member makes this construction of women seem unfair to incels because women should not have this status, partly because it is given to them without having to do anything on the women’s part. Whenever a woman is accorded status or agency, it is done to indicate the suffering that some incel members supposedly go through. This is another example that supports the claim that women are naturally evil as stated by O’Malley et al. (2022). All of the above indicates that when women are not involved in sex, or constructed as sexual objects, they are positioned as being involved in the oppression of some incels. The idea that men are being oppressed was also described by O’Malley et al. (2022) and these ideas within these extracts further provide support for those claims. This is another example of women becoming cruel beings who do not deserve their status within incel discourse.

The final sub theme of misogyny unpacks what some incel members want to do to women. Discursive constructions of women that relegate them to the status of objects or possessions removes subject status and sexual agency from women and makes consent impossible. When some incels describe women, they use language that reduces women to sexual objects or tools, with the result that most of the discussions concerning sex with women in online incel

communities tend to adopt a reckless attitude towards questions of mutuality and consent. However, as with the previous two sections that demonstrated how some women are described and the agency that is sometimes attributed to them, this section has some examples of contradicting incel statements. At this stage, one can see that when a woman is accorded subject status and agency, it is typically to position her as acting cruelly towards incels. In other cases, women have their subject status removed and are relegated to object status either as a female humanoid (i.e. fooid), or as a physical object that can be possessed or owned. The use of such discursive constructions and positioning strategies suggests that incels want power over women more than they want sex with women.

Extract 3: OP: Brocels idk what to do mang (*sic*). It's friday (*sic*) and instead of going to fuck becky's roast beef flaps, I'm here browsing incels.is and cooming non-stop. I came to a scary realization that I'm in my prime, I'm in Uni, This (*sic*) is literally my peak biologically speaking yet I had to pay a fooid to open her legs for me. ...

...

Commenter: Welcome to the other 2/3s of men.

Extract 3 demonstrates another instance where violence is a part of what an incel wants to do to a woman. The OP mentions that they want to have sex with a woman but reduce the women down to their labia and see them as tools to have sex with. The reference to labia through the term 'roast beef flaps' in the extract, is both an objectification of women that reduces them to their genitalia, as well as an attempt to assert that the OP can tell if a woman has had many sexual partners due to the appearance of their labia. This pejorative and reductive language is intended to invoke disgust and make women, and their bodies, seem repulsive. This term 'roast beef' is not only intended to invoke disgust, but also reduce a woman down to her labia and, therefore, a sexual object. By reducing women to a sexual tool, they construct women as things to be used. A consequence of this objectification of women, and their reduction to mere sexual objects is that incels do not appear to consider women's sexual agency / desire / choices at all. When they do talk about women's choices in relation to sex, it is either in biologically reductionistic ways - and therefore not a choice - or it is in ways that make women seem capricious and/or cruel for not choosing to gift an incel with ascension (thereby reinforcing incels' victimhood). When incels do talk about themselves having sex with women, there is no consideration of women's sexual agency or desire, because they talk about women, or their genitalia, as passive objects. It is an indication of the centring of men's experience and the assumption that male climax and sexual gratification is the be-all and end-all of heterosexual interaction. This orientation towards sex (and the privileging of male sexual pleasure)

contributes towards problematic attitudes and beliefs that do provide some of the social scaffolding for rape supportive attitudes and general tolerance for sexual violence.

Extract 39: Commenter: ... But I've never jizzed (*sic*) into a sluts (*sic*) cum dumpster so all I can do is trust in the science that has been proven. ...

Extract 39 is another example of how women are reduced to tools. An incel member expresses the want to ejaculate into a woman's vagina. By referring to a vagina as a 'sluts cum dumpster' they reduce a woman down to their sexual organs and again think of them only as a tool to have sex with. In extract 39, the use of the term 'dumpster' associates women with waste. When considering that, earlier in this discursive theme, it was demonstrated that some incel members call women toilets, one can see a pattern in how some incel members think of women. As both of these words involve waste, one can begin to see that some incel members think of women as waste, and sex as wasteful. Referring to women's reproductive organs in this way (specifically as a dumpster) equates sex with waste (and as wasteful). It talks about women (and their sex organs) in highly misogynistic language that equates them with receptacles for trash. Sex itself also becomes a throwaway activity - devoid of significance or emotional connection, or context - a base, biological act that is somehow demeaning and dehumanising for women (who are only thought about as the receptacles of men's fluids). The imagery is explicitly repulsive.

Extract 32: OP: ...All it would take is one woman to come up to you and try to befriend you, but no. They are too cruel to make a subhuman's day just a little bit better. Instead they want to put you through physical and mental suffering because of your genes and other circumstances. ...

Commenter: Women must pay. Rape and kill.

Extract 32 contains one of the most extreme examples of incel members expressing a wish to cause violence to women. The commenter is responding to the OP who is claiming that women are to blame for their incel status. In this context, this commenter is replying to the OP who is lamenting their status as an incel and blames women for their failures in life. The OP's points reinforce the idea that there is an antagonistic relationship between men and women. By claiming that women are cruel, the OP indicates that women choose to make the lives of incel members miserable. The idea that women are inherently cruel towards men then allows for the response by the commenter who is claiming in such extreme terms because, for the commenter, it is an appropriate response to the ways in which women treat incel members from the commenter's perspective. The commenter is able to use such extreme terms because women are deserving of such cruel punishment because women, in incel discourse, treat incels in a

similarly cruel manner. This is an example where violence and revenge are legitimised as described by O'Malley et al. (2022). Finally, Daly and Reed (2022) would describe extracts 8, 3, 39, and 32 as examples of shitposting as they contain generally unacceptable language and occur on a social media platform.

The discursive theme of misogyny indicates that incels have a very warped construction of women. The language incels use either constructs women to be sexual objects without agency or the ability to consent to the things that are done to them, or as capricious and cruel beings who do not deserve the social status that is accorded to them. This is an important aspect of incel discourse. Women are primarily constructed as objects that have things done to them. This is another way of robbing women of agency and subject status by describing them as having little to no ability to act on their own. Finally, the things some incel members appear to want to do to women always seem to usually involve violent and explicitly derogatory language that characterises sex as something done to women for the sole gratification of the men doing it. The language used in incel spaces seems to be deployed strategically in terms of their descriptions of women. Either women are described as having the agency to choose to be cruel, or women are described as objects with no ability to consent. These dual and sometimes-contradicting constructions are used to reconcile the contradictory construction of women as both objects and sometimes subjects that is necessary for incels to maintain their construction of themselves as oppressed (O'Malley et al., 2022).

4.3.6 Biological reductionism

Considering that so much of incel masculinity is constructed upon a sense of failure as described by Daly and Reed (2022), one must consider what it is like living as an incel. Some incels seem to think that the most important part of life is to either have sex or procreate. This is a belief that states that, as biological beings, our only goal is to further the species.

Extract 5: Commenter: I don't blame bears for shitting in the woods, I certainly can't blame women for acting out their biological imperatives and tendencies. I hate them all nonetheless though.

This biologically reductionist belief seen in extract 5 allows for some incels to claim that they have not succeeded at life and, as such, express anger that they cannot achieve what they were designed to achieve because women deny them the chance to have sex. The use of the terminology 'biological imperatives' in extract 5 is a good example of this, as it constructs the idea that social interactions are reducible to biological functions. In order to demonstrate this sentiment more fully, the idea that the purpose of life is to facilitate procreation and sex is

unpacked first. Secondly, the sense of failure that accompanies this discursive theme allows some incel members to attain status by seeking community and establishing a sense of aggrieved entitlement as described by Kalish and Kimmel (2010). A sense that incels have failed at masculinity is demonstrated as an important aspect of incel ideology. While incels do not directly indicate that they have failed at masculinity, they indicate what they believe masculinity to be, and then argue that they have failed at life because they have failed at successfully achieving masculinity. This can be seen in extract 40.

Extract 40: OP: Sex is nature's way of rewarding men for all the hardship that our gender has to go through in life. ...

Extract 40 is explicit in its indication that sex is the driving force behind living. In this extract, the OP is stating that men have difficult lives which are made bearable because they can eventually have sex. This sets up the power dynamic that men deserve sex from women which makes it seem as though women are indebted to men. While this comment does not directly indicate a connection between biology and life, it does make the point that sex is what all men live for. By claiming that the life of a man is hard, they indicate that men need some form of incentive to live life. For this OP, this incentive is to have sex. In this way, sex becomes the goal of life and considering the number of commenters who later agree with this OP, one can assume that other incel members also believe that the goal of life is to have sex. By reducing life down to biological functions, incel members are able to assert the importance of biological reductionism within incel discourse. Extract 40 indicates that the life of men is hard and that sex is the incentive for living a difficult life. By asserting the importance of biological reductionism, one can see that, for some incel members, having sex is a reward for a difficult life.

Through the use of extract 40 one can see the importance of biological reductionism within incel spaces which indicate that life's purpose is sex and procreation. From this point, one can begin to see the effect of this construction on incel discourse.

Extract 1: OP (Original poster): They have starved you for the entirety of your youth. While you were stuck inside LDARing (*LDARing is an acronym meaning to lay down and rot*), they were getting penetrated by Chad and making the most of their youthful lives. You missed out on years of your life, being inside playing video games, fapping, maybe going on lonely walks wishing you had a beautiful foid by your side. All it would take is one woman to come up to you and try to befriend you, but no. They are too cruel to make a subhuman's day just a little bit better. Instead they want to put you through physical and mental suffering because of your genes and other circumstances. ...

Extract 1 indicates that Chad men are able to enjoy the youth of their lives by assuming that their enjoyment stems from having sex with women. On the other hand, this OP asserts that the

incel member who is reading the post was not enjoying their lives because they were inside and 'laying down and rotting' (LDARing). In relation to the earlier points that are made about sex being viewed as a reward for / incentive to overcome the challenges of life, this extract is making the link between this idea of 'sex as reward' (either for actions or for one's genetically defined attributes - which incidentally is a biologically reductionist way of thinking about a social behaviour) and the supposed 'cruelty' of women for withholding this reward from some men (i.e. incels). This is the foundation of aggrieved entitlement (Kalish & Kimmel, 2010).

Incels believe they deserve this reward, simply by existing (there is nothing - especially in this extract - to suggest the idea that men have to go out and demonstrate value in order to 'earn' sexual attention from women). Incels can simply live the incel life (playing video games, fapping, going on lonely walks wishing they had someone) and never actually proactively demonstrating value, and still blame women and women's cruelty for their incel status and the fact that they (i.e. incels) have no other option but to LDAR. The reason women are so cruel is because incels are genetically subhuman (as described by the biological reductionism incel discourse constructs as so important), not at all because incels are entitled misogynists who feel entitled to have access to women's bodies. So here we have a perfect example of how explaining a set of social behaviours in a biologically reductionist way (Chads are genetically superior, incels inferior - i.e. the subhuman theme) provides the rhetorical and ideological justification for: a) feeling a type of way about themselves as a group (which has consequences for self-esteem); b) feeling a type of way about others (i.e. Chads and foids/women) as outgroups; and c) hating the perceived sources of their 'persecution' and absolving themselves of any culpability for their social position.

Extract 3: OP: Brocels idk what to do mang (*sic*). It's friday (*sic*) and instead of going to fuck becky's roast beef flaps, I'm here browsing incels.is and cooming non-stop. I came to a scary realization that I'm in my prime, I'm in Uni, This (*sic*) is literally my peak biologically speaking yet I had to pay a foid to open her legs for me. ...

...

Commenter: Welcome to the other 2/3s of men.

Extract 3 indicates an OP who claims that they are at the stage of life where they should be having the most sex but are only able to have sex by paying a woman. By linking the concepts of a biological prime with having sex, the OP thinks that they are at the age when they should be having the most sex, but, because of their incel status, they need to pay women to have sex with them. Furthermore, sex that is paid for, does not seem to be considered real sex which indicates that sex, for this OP, needs to be something that a woman wants to do with a man

without monetary incentive. There is a distinction in incel rhetoric between paying for sex and getting sex the 'natural way'. One can pay for sex, but not ascend, or become less of an incel - so there is a recognition that paying for sex is not really sex or does not undermine their involuntarily celibate status. This is likely because it is recognised as an artificial / transactional arrangement. This creates a scenario where the OP thinks that, if they failed at this time in their life when they have the best chance of having non-paid for sex, then they will fail at having sex for the rest of their life. For this OP, they have failed at life because they have failed at having sex that is not paid for. By doing this, the OP is able to reduce the social experience of intimacy and connection with a biological need and further develop patriarchal ideas that the only important part of sex is the man's pleasure. Furthermore, this instance of sex is not about procreation. So here, the biological imperative is different - sex is necessary for the release of an experienced pressure. But this is still understood biologically, not as a social need for intimacy / connection. Additionally, this idea of a biologically felt pressure to have one's needs for sex met can be linked to patriarchally infused constructions of masculinity and heterosexuality. It is fundamentally phallogocentric - the only sexual pleasure and/or release that is important is a man's.

Extract 41: Commenter: This is universal for incels brother. My university years sucked. I never got pussy once that I did not pay for. Foids never noticed me once. Incels don't get a "prime of life".

Extract 41 is an extension of the extract 3. These happen in the same thread and the comment in extract 41 is a response to the OP of extract 3. Where the OP was speaking specifically about themselves, this comment helps illustrate that other incel members believe that there is no 'prime' for an incel member. If they have no prime, then they can never fulfil their biological reductionist purpose of having sex and, as such, have failed at masculinity which means that they have failed at life.

However, for one commenter, biology also means that one cannot be sure about one's incel status before one's body fully develops. This can be seen in the following extract:

Extract 42: Commenter 1: Cope he is still a (*sic*) incel even if he is 16, I knew i (*sic*) was incel ever since i (*sic*) was a freshman in high school now i'm (*sic*) out of high school

...

Commenter 2: He isn't an incel his face and body hasn't finished growing yet.

This demonstrates a rare instance where the biological reductionism some incels believe in has a benefit. For commenter 2 in extract 42, one cannot be sure about one's incel status until one's body has finished developing. Firstly, this is an attempt at reassuring another member

that they might still have a non-incel life and succeed by having sex because they might grow to have a face and body that is more attractive by this incel's standards. By attempting to reassure another member, this commenter is trying to give status back to someone who feels worthless because they have not had sex. However, the responses from several other incel members within the thread indicates that this view is a minority and that one can know one is an incel before one's body and face has finished developing. This is interesting as it casts being an incel as an identity position that one must recognise in oneself. As such, it could be read as a "born this way" argument, rhetorically bolstering arguments that incels themselves cannot help how they are. These responses to this comment help indicate that most incel members believe that they can know that they are biologically predestined to fail before their body and face finish developing. In a way, commenter 1 is saying that, if gay and trans people can be gay and trans from birth, then they are incels from birth. This rhetorical strategy further entrenches the biological determinism that incels use in their language. Beyond demonstrating that some incel members want to believe they are unable to improve their lives, the responses to this comment indicates failure is an important part of incel identity. As mentioned previously, this idea of failure being important to some incel members was also described by Daly and Reed (2022). More reasons as to why some incel members seem to want to be labelled as an incel is likely that they are more able to feel a sense of community, and experience aggrieved entitlement as described by Kalish and Kimmel (2010). This means that for a person who feels so powerless, they are able to develop a sense of status through community and a sense that they have been unfairly wronged and deserve compensation for being wronged. As individuals seek a positive social image partly through group processes (Abrams & Hogg, 1990), one could assert that individuals choose to be a part of incel spaces because they are allowed to attach their identity features and status to the group's identity features and status (Abrams & Hogg, 1990). Social identity theory helps explain that because an incel might see the incel group as having positive in-group cohesion, they will attach their identity features to the group so that their own status is supported by this positive in-group cohesion (Abrams & Hogg, 1990).

All of this comes together to indicate how some incel members construct life. As mentioned in the rational and intelligence discursive theme, oftentimes scientific language is used to develop status within incel spaces. However, this discursive theme indicates that, although it is used to develop power, it is also likely part of the genuine belief that life is governed entirely by a kind of incel biological reductionism. By doing this, they demonstrate that they truly believe that

women are worse than men because they are biologically inferior to men. Incel members are, therefore, able to indicate that they believe science, and, as such, biology, is a source of truth. This strong belief in a form of biological reductionism that governs one's choices indicates that in order to succeed as a man, one must have sex. This point expands to be part of the reason why some incel members feel as though they have failed at masculinity, and therefore, at life. Furthermore, by expressing that the most important goal in life is to have sex/procreate, some incel members are able to express that they want power over women more than they want sex with women. This allows them to indicate that women are things and not people. Some incel members are able to use this discursive theme to indicate the natural beliefs that they hold which give them power over women and explain why they feel as though they have failed in life.

4.4 Concluding comments

This chapter has provided a detailed discussion of the six discursive themes that were found to be operating in incel discourse which is supported by relevant extracts in from the data. These six themes were:

1. Subhumanity
2. Coping
3. Intelligence and rationality
4. Membership
5. Misogyny
6. Biological reductionism

The following chapter concludes the research dissertation by offering an integrative discussion. This discussion will look at how the six discursive themes, taken together, constitute what this research is going to identify as incel discourse. This will also be followed by a reflection of the process of the research, some ethical considerations, and an assessment of the limitations and strengths of the study.

4 Conclusion

The purpose of the present study was to try to identify if and how incel discourse constructs notions of self and others, how incels use language to construct their own and others' social positions, and how the use of language and positions are supportive of inequitable gender relations and gender-based violence (GBV). In order to remind the reader, the research questions were as follows:

The overall research question was:

- What is the nature and content of online, textual interactions in 'incel' communities and interactive spaces?

Three focused sub-questions emerged from this broader orientation, namely:

- What ways of speaking, language resources and cultural assumptions do the 'incel' community use in their construction of social reality, their sense of selfhood, as well as the identity positions constructed for discursive 'others'?
- How do members of the 'incel' community actively use these language resources and discourses to construct their own and 'others' relative social positions?
- In what ways might this use of language and positioning in the construction of a collective identity potentially reproduce values, beliefs and practices that are supportive of inequitable gender relations and gender-based violence?

In order to answer these questions, the present research identified six discursive themes that are argued to constitute incel discourse. These discursive themes were, in order, the subhuman, coping, intelligence and rationality, membership, misogyny, and biological reductionism themes. From these six, one is able to identify the features of incel discourse and understand what it might be like to exist in incel spaces.

4.1 Features of incel discourse

This section of the chapter will present an integrative summary and discussion of the six main discursive themes that were identified by the analysis and which were discussed in depth in the preceding chapter. The intention of this integrative summary is twofold. Firstly, it is to develop an understanding of the ways in which the six different discursive themes fit together in order to make up incel discourse. An appreciation of the nature and features of incel discourse will also allow for the development of an understanding of the kind of subjectivity that this

discourse makes available for those who are constituted by it. In other words, understanding incel discourse may lead to a more detailed understanding of the ways of being that are rendered possible for those who self-identify as incels.

The second purpose of this integrative summary is to provide a reflective assessment of whether and how a discursive approach to investigating the social phenomenon of incels allows for an understanding of the phenomenon that potentially goes beyond the kinds of analyses that more mainstream social psychological approaches like Social Identity Theory (SIT) or Social Representation Theory (SRT) could offer. This will be done by reminding the reader what both SIT and SRT are and how their respective theoretical limitations could potentially be transcended through the use of a discursive approach.

4.2 Discussion of the Discursive Themes

The discursive themes identified in the analysis intersect in several ways and some of these intersections will be explored below. These intersections come to be important markers of incel discourse and indicate some of the overarching themes.

4.2.1 Biological reductionism

Arguably the most fundamental theme underpinning incel discourse that was identified by the analysis was that of biological reductionism. This discursive theme acts as the basis of incel discourse and is able to explain how incel members use their language. Since biological or scientific language and arguments are used in several discursive themes (e.g. subhumanity, intelligence and rationality, and misogyny), it is important to note that incels appear to demonstrate an overreliance on this kind of language, as described by O'Malley et al. (2022), in an attempt to make their often absurd claims more convincing.

Through constant appeals to biology as the basis and motivation for complex human social behaviours, incels develop a social status hierarchy and subsequently locate themselves at the bottom of this hierarchy as also seen in the biological reductionism discursive theme. Because everything is grounded in biology, it is then accepted that an incel's life cannot be improved. This hopelessness is a core feature of 'blackpill' ideology and becomes an important part of incel identity (Daly & Reed, 2022; Lindsay, 2022). The consequences of rendering their own social status as subhuman are that incels subsequently develop discursive constructions of their own behaviours that are oriented towards managing or 'coping' with their low status positions,

as well as a particularly hostile orientation towards perceived outgroup members, especially women. This is evidenced in the pervasive misogyny that characterises incel use of language.

4.2.2 Subhumanity

The pervasive biological reductionism prevalent in incel discourse leads to the creation of a subhuman social status, grounded in constructions of incels' supposed biological inferiority. If a human is biologically designed to have sex, and incel members cannot fulfil this biological imperative, then they are subhuman. By creating a category subhumanity - and situating their own social position within this category - incels are able to develop a social status hierarchy with themselves at the bottom. Through the construction of 'subhumanity,' incels are able to generate a sense that others are unfairly positioned as better off than they are. This positioning enables incels to employ the language of the oppressed in order to give themselves status. This was also described by Kalish and Kimmel (2010) as aggrieved entitlement and might lead to stochastic terrorism as described by Lindsay (2022). This overreliance on biology (O'Malley et al., 2020), is another way in which some incel members construct women and reproduce online support and justification for various forms of GBV. This is done by reducing women down to their biology which removes women's ability to have agency. As women have no agency, their consent does not need to be considered at all. The language used to do this, therefore, perpetuates unequal gender relations and allows incel members to feel as though they deserve sex from women.

4.2.3 Coping

Through constructing themselves as subhuman and according themselves low social status positions, incels are then required to manage the consequences of the manner in which they have positioned themselves. They are obliged to grapple with their low social status position, including a profound sense of hopelessness. Their response to this lack of hope is to develop what they construct as strategies to cope with their negative social position. The coping discursive theme demonstrates how the discursive construction of the 'blackpill' is the dominant way in which coping is navigated in incel spaces. In most cases, the 'blackpill' is the belief that society is gynocentric, oppresses men, and that incel members can do nothing to improve their circumstances. The anger seen in some of the data, might be partly attributed to the fact that they cannot improve their circumstances. If they cannot improve their own circumstances, they can shift the responsibility for improvement to non-incels, reinforcing a

position of aggrieved entitlement. This means that in incel discourse, there are some ways of denying the 'black pill' that are acceptable and others that are invalid. In context, valid forms of denying the 'blackpill' appear to be playing videogames, and anime, among others, whereas invalid forms of coping appear as worshipping women, or getting an education, among others. However, both are ways of denying the 'blackpill' in varying degrees.

4.2.4 Misogyny

The misogyny that characterises incel language use is a fairly widespread discursive theme that itself frequently provides the connection to other themes. A large proportion of the interactions in the data was characterised by language that expresses the idea that women are objects to be used and owned. This construction is largely achieved through the use of denigrating language that either reduces women to not-quite-human status (i.e. 'foids', or 'toilets'), or through violent and repugnant language that equates women with their genitalia. Such use of objectifying and misogynistic language constructs women as objects without sexual agency or desire that cannot or - in extreme cases in the discourse, should not - say no to sex. In this way, women are rendered unrapeable because their capacity for having their own sexual desire, volition, or the ability to consent is not even considered to be important in incel discourse.

Furthermore, the variable ways in which incels make use of misogynistic constructions of women appears to suggest flexible beliefs regarding women's agency and social status. If they need women to be objects, then women are objects. The same is true for when they need women to have agency. This demonstrates a complicated online space that often lacks coherence. This contradictory language is used purposefully in order to allow incels to construct themselves as simultaneously more powerful and of higher social status than women, while at the same time being oppressed by them. When an incel member needs to assert that women have no power, they do so in a way that makes it seem as though women are objects. On the other hand, when women are given agency, it is done to explain that women choose to be cruel and deny incel members the chance of sex.

Finally, the misogyny inherent in incel use of language to construct identity positions for themselves in relation to women is characterised by aggrieved entitlement, which is described by Kalish and Kimmel (2010). This can be seen throughout incel discourse and indicates a possibility of future offline violence. As Kalish and Kimmel (2010) described it, this can lead to offline violence. This argument is supported by Lindsay (2022), who describes how acceptance of the 'blackpill' position can lead to stochastic terrorism. While there is only minor

reference to offline violence within the data, the fact that there have been attacks in the past leads one to believe that, while rare, the motivation for, and support of, offline violence within incel spaces is possible.

4.2.5 Intelligence and rationality

Beyond these consequences, one can then understand the identity management strategies of incel members. As incel members construct their ingroup membership as one with low social status, it becomes clear, through the deployment of the intelligence and rationality discursive theme, how some incel members jostle for status and position in incel hierarchies. This competition for status and position within incel hierarchies is often connected to the notion of the ‘blackpill’ which incel members use to develop a very nihilistic sense of social reality. The second aspect of identity management that is notable here is that incel members will police their borders and identity markers, partly, through use of the idea of the ‘blackpill.’

Furthermore, the construction of intelligence and rationality becomes an important aspect of incel interactions that determines whether some incels can participate in incel spaces and how valuable their contributions are. This is done when incel members use technological, scientific, and numbered language to gain status within incel spaces and assert intelligence and rationality. By constructing intelligence in this way, incels are able to determine who is an incel and how much status their voice has. This is, partly, how some incel members jostle for social status within incel spaces.

4.2.6 Membership

The discursive theme of membership centres on the ways in which incels demonstrate their status as incels to other participants in interaction, as well as how they police the membership boundaries of their incel communities. There appear to be two distinct identity management strategies that incels use. The first is that incels will police the boundaries of their in-groups through the use of particular constructions of identity markers. These include labels such as ‘truecels’, ‘blackpill,’ and ‘infiltrators.’ In order to indicate that an incel member is a better incel than other members, they will sometimes use the ‘truecel’ label. This helps members distinguish between who should have status within incel spaces and who should not. Part of becoming a truecel, is accepting the ‘blackpill’ entirely and this is expressed within incel spaces where members express that the majority of incels are not truecels. This is because, in order to

be a truecel, one must accept the nihilism of the 'blackpill' and accept that there is no ability for upward social mobility for incel members.

The second strategy for constructing identity that was seen in the data was that incel language would be used to indicate that other discussion participants could not be members of incel communities if they disagreed with what was being said in a thread. In this way, incels are able to assert that dissenters were infiltrators who did not fully accept the 'blackpill.' This is because accepting the 'blackpill' is the first step in accepting other forms of incel rhetoric. This identity management strategy is another way in which incel members control their boundaries and police their identity markers. Using this method, incels are able to further develop what it means to be an incel member and control who is allowed to speak in certain spaces.

4.3 Theoretical contributions

In both the methodology and theoretical framework chapters, Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Social Representation Theory (SRT) were mentioned as possible theoretical tools for analysing incel communities and groups in online spaces. However, there are several theoretical limitations with both SIT and SRT that made these orientations unsuitable for answering the questions of the present research. At this stage, some examples will be detailed explaining why a discursive approach gave the present research more insight into incel language than SIT and SRT.

As a reminder, SIT focuses on the “dynamic mediation of the socially-constructed self between individual behaviour and social structure” (Hogg et al., 1995, p. 1). This means that a person is understood as having a self-concept that contains multiple layers of identity that are connected to various social groupings. Furthermore, SIT progresses from three basic assumptions. These are that people will attempt to maintain or enhance their self-esteem, group membership can have either positive or negative value connotations, and the value connotations of a group will be determined by comparing value-laden attributes and characteristics (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). However, as mentioned within the theoretical framework chapter, SIT has some limitations in relation to the present research questions.

Firstly, SIT struggles to understand how members within a group manage their identities. This means that SIT does not understand which identity markers become salient or why they become salient (Hogg et al., 1995; Huddy, 2001). When understanding incel identities, this means that it would have struggled to account for why hopelessness and the 'blackpill' are apparently salient markers of incel identity. Secondly, SIT is a cognitivist approach which assumes

language to be representative of reality (Tajfel & Turner, 2004) which would end up taking information presented by incel community members at face value. As an example, incels articulate that they are oppressed by women. A cognitivist approach would not challenge this in the same way as a discursive and social constructionist approach does. SIT analyses of social comparison and the resulting social identity management strategies tend to take the existence of an inter-group status hierarchy for granted and do not really question where these hierarchies (which are assumed to be universal and objective) originate or how they are created. The present analysis of incel discourse shows the process of how a hierarchy is set up through language use that draws on particular sets of socially circulating ideas, as well as how this hierarchy is maintained and naturalised (through appeals to biology) so that it may be taken for granted.

SIT analyses of identity management strategies also tend to stress the ways in which groups with low status may adopt a range of ways of thinking about their status differently in order to boost their self-esteem. This approach is cognitivist. What the analysis shows is how a low status position is deliberately crafted out of a particular use of discourse in order to justify an ideological stance. Incels don't try to make themselves feel better about their low status (i.e. they recognise that coping is 'denial'). Instead, they use it as rage-fuel that permits a backlash of the 'disaffected' against social change towards a more gender-equitable society as well as the expression of misogyny and support for violence.

A third way that a discursive approach goes beyond SIT is seen in the analysis which shows how discursive positioning strategies are deployed in interactions to engage in social mobility manoeuvring, as well as to construct and maintain intergroup membership boundaries (something that SIT links to universal processes of social cognition / perceptions of similarity / difference). A discourse analysis shows how intergroup membership boundaries (and identities) are constructs that are enacted through the use of language, and not simply perceptual categories.

This allows for the present research to answer questions of how incel discourse is supportive of inequitable gender relations and perpetuates language associated with GBV.

SRT is a method for understanding how people make sense of their surrounding contexts with little to no first-hand knowledge (Moscovici, 1988; Moscovici, 2001). It does this through the elaboration of two processes that describe how ways of making sense of the world become taken-for-granted amongst a community of language users - anchoring and objectification

(Moscovici, 1988; Moscovici, 2001). Anchoring is defined as a process in which new information is connected to familiar categories (Abric, 1996; Moscovici, 2001). Objectification is the separation and decontextualization of new ideas from their original discourse (Abric, 1996). SRT is useful because it allows, through reflection on the above two processes, for understanding how new shared ways of making sense of the social world become integrated into language and become taken-for-granted (Abric, 1996). However, an important part of the critique of SRT is that it does not consider what a person can do with their words as an important aspect of understanding how information becomes take-for-granted (Potter & Edwards, 1999). For SRT, language is not a means to action, but a source of answers for specific questions (Potter & Edwards, 1999). SRT is able to see how representations of the world through language become taken-for-granted, but not what the consequences of such forms of expression and representation of the world achieving this taken-for-granted status may be (Potter & Edwards, 1999).

In the present research, understanding the consequences of the language of incel members is important to answering the research questions as they are asking how language causes and perpetuates unequal gender positions and gender-based violence. This then demonstrates part of the strength of the present research. By not using SRT, the present research is able to make claims about what some incel language does and how it impacts other people negatively. As an example, the term 'foid' illustrates the benefit of using a discursive approach rather than SRT. The term has developed amongst a defined community of users and has become both anchored and objectified in their ways of speaking. A discursive approach takes this analysis further by showing how this term comes with a specific ideological orientation (i.e. women are not human) and reproduces specific positioning effects that allow for the justification of misogyny and potential violence against women. Like SIT, SRT is cognitivist in nature. This, again, means that language is taken as a valid source of knowledge. As the present research looks to unpack what incel members do with their language, such a cognitivist approach lacks the ability to look past the words and see the less obvious meanings behind them. This is, again, one of the strengths of using a discursive approach. By asserting that the language used by incel members have layers of meaning it can unpack these layers and allow for a more in-depth look at what incel discourse is. Through a discursive approach, one can see why incel members use misogynistic language and what such language is able to achieve. The present research, through a discursive approach, is able to understand how incel members use their hierarchy and status

as subhuman, to claim that they deserve sex and status from women. This would not have been possible with SRT.

4.4 Ethical Considerations

This research was given ethics approval by the relevant authorities at Rhodes University and stayed within the bounds of the approval. Nevertheless, one aspect should be addressed. The study ensured that the collected data was drawn from publicly accessible online discussion forums and that said data was further anonymised by removing the usernames of the commenters and OPs in discussion threads selected for inclusion in the data set. However, in relation to the ethics of participation in research, one must consider how an incel discussion thread participant might have felt about having their posts included in the data set for this study without their explicit consent. As mentioned in the methodology section, Hudson and Bruckman (2004) found in their study that if an online community were asked if they could be studied the answer was almost always no. While not identical to the present study, these findings can still be considered as relevant when gathering data from online incel discussion spaces in the way that the present research has done.

Regardless of the sentiments that are expressed in their online discussion forum posts, the members of incel communities are still people and deserve to be treated in ways that respect their dignity. This consideration raises two ethical concerns: the first, and most obvious, relates to informed consent and the right to withdraw from participation; the second concerns issues of representation. In relation to the first concern, it is the position of this research that since the data was collected from publicly accessible discussion forums, there should be reasonable expectation amongst discussion thread participants that their contributions in these spaces could be accessed by audiences other than those they explicitly intended. Nevertheless, as mentioned above, all reasonable precautions were taken to anonymise the data and to present it in such a way that no individual contributor could be identified.

In addition, even if participants in the selected online discussion forums did not want their contributions to online discussions to be used in the study, this is arguably outweighed by the potential benefits of the present research. Considering the dangers posed by the violent misogyny inherent in incel discourse, and the ideological support for GBV that it entails, it is important that their discourse be interrogated and understood. If, the eventual intention of research into the incel phenomenon as a whole is to dismantle incel spaces, then research

understanding these spaces is vital to this project. In this way, how incels themselves might feel about the present study is less relevant than the potential good the present research can do.

In relation to the second ethical concern over representation, the researcher is aware that the present research is highly critical of incel discourse. It should be noted that the orientation of the present research is to contribute towards the challenging of incel ideology because of the harm that has occurred, and will likely occur again, as a result of the toxicity inherent in incel spaces. This orientation is not just towards reducing the likelihood of real-world violence, such as mass shootings, but is also an attempt to protect incels themselves. As mentioned, suicide has been identified by Ribeiro et al. (2021) as a part of a threat to men claimed by Men's Rights Activism (MRA). It has also been demonstrated that incel ideology is informed and grown from MRA movements. Therefore, the chance of incel members committing suicide is a dangerous possibility, especially considering the hopelessness baked into the 'blackpill' ideology. A critical look at incel discourse is necessary in order to dismantle this harmful ideology. The critique of incel discourse is also motivated by the possible harm that such discourse entails for non-members. Incel discourse, as shown, presents a threat to women because of how incel discourse normalises violence against women. Bearing all of this in mind, reflection on the representation of incel community members and incel discourse in this study leads to the position of this research: as far as possible, the focus of analysis remained on the actual language used in interactions by incel community members and its effects.

Despite this, one might still claim that the present research is overcritical of incel discourse. This is partly because the research has a strong belief that historically oppressed groups like women still experience oppression in modern society. However, in order to ensure that the results were accurate, close attention was paid to the data. All analysis of extracts was done by remaining as close to the data as possible and avoided making assumptions about what incel members might have intended, or focusing on their psychological states as far as possible. Furthermore, because part of the analytic process involved unpacking the interactions within incel discourse, extracts were often provided with context from the original data to ensure that they were not taken out of context to make them look worse than they actually were.

4.5 Limitations

There were several limitations that arose in the research which should be noted in order to understand what it was able to achieve and how future research can build on the present study. Firstly, the sample size was very small. The sample consisted of only four discussion threads

and therefore might not represent the potential diversity of participants and their perspectives. The present research still maintains that within those four threads, there were sufficient interactions to enable a comprehensive understanding of incel discourse, but certainly a larger sample might provide additional insight. With more time, future research could collect more threads and this might add to the findings of the present study. Another limitation is that all of the data came from a single website. While this was done purposely to ensure that all commenters were incel community members, it does mean that the results might only apply to discussion threads on the site incels.is, where the data was gathered. While difficult, future studies could attempt to confirm or expand the present findings by collecting data from other websites while also ensuring that such data does come from incel community members.

Furthermore, the data in the present research would tend towards being dominated by a few 'key' contributors. This means that some threads were primarily a discussion between a few major contributors, which further reduces the potential diversity of participants and their perspectives. However, as was seen in the research done by Jones et al. (2020) on MGTOW (men going their own way) speakers on X (then twitter), 54% of 1688 X's (then tweets) were done by three key contributors. Despite this vocal minority, the results of that study are still useful in understanding MGTOW language. An avenue for future research would be to establish how common it is for internet spaces to be dominated by a few key contributors and if this is something to expect of online spaces.

A further limitation is that the selection criteria for the data was very broad. This means that most threads were relevant and reduced how focused some of the research was. In some ways, the questions were necessarily broad to allow for a comprehensive understanding of incel discourse but future research could focus on one of the six discursive themes in order to deepen the understanding of an aspect of incel discourse.

4.6 Reflexivity section

As stated in the theoretical framework chapter, Hackings 'grades of commitment' is being used to identify what the goals of the research study are (1999). At this stage in the research process, one must look at how well the research achieved its intended grade of commitment. In the theoretical framework chapter, it was stated that the present research would reach the unmasking stage. Unmasking is the second category in the third grade of commitment seeks to expose the functions that the social construction of an object or idea serves and, as such, to attempt to expose and undermine both the function of said construction as well as the power

relations upon which the construction relies (Hacking, 1999). The present research has reached this grade as it has successfully shed light on constructions and ideas used by incel members to try and justify their misogyny. It unmasked that much of the misogyny is a product of belief that women are not even human, it unmasked the ways that many incels fend off opposing views by constructing their own perspective as scientific, it unmasked how social interactions were reduced to biological imperatives as a means of making claims of truth, and more. In this way, the present research has reached the goals it intended to reach by unmasking the discourses behind some of the language used by incel members.

While important, the South African context is not addressed in this research, as it is beyond the present scope. However, there will be some acknowledgment of the potential links between this research and the South African context. Firstly, the levels of South African GBV are staggering (Meyiwa, Williamson, Maseti, & Ntabanyane, 2017). When this is considered together with the rising importance of online spaces, one should ask questions about how GBV might infiltrate the language of those in South African online spaces. It is unlikely that the language of South African online spaces is the same as that found in incel spaces. What should be asked is whether there are indicators of incel language in South African online spaces. This might help one understand and get ahead of misogyny that might already be seeping into South African online spaces. Future research might use the language markers found in the present research and apply them to South African online spaces.

4.7 Further research

The focus on incel discourse has provided insight into how incel members use their language to achieve goals, but it ignores two other important questions. These two are how an incel member becomes an incel and the violence that has happened because of an incel member's participation in incel spaces. This limitation could be addressed with two studies. The first would focus on the pipeline from disgruntled young man to incel. This kind of research would provide insights into what is needed to dismantle this pipeline. The second research would look to understand the link between incel language and incel violence. Again, this is a pipeline that, through study, could be dismantled to prevent mass murder and suicide.

A further point is that the research done here is exploratory and does not look at providing support to incel members in a way that dismantles the incel ideology. The present research provides a base for such an approach as it allows future research to identify where incel discourse is and therefore where incels are. Future research focused on intervention would be

useful in actively dismantling the harmful discourse that the present and other research has identified.

4.8 Contributions of the project

Possibly the most similar in methodology to the present research was the study done by Williams (2020), which used a critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach in their analysis of a previous incel website that has since been shut down. While not identical to the approach adopted here, CDA also focuses on power and how it is used in language (Williams, 2020). Whereas there were some similarities between the research done by Williams (2020) and the present study (such as subhumanity being a core aspect of incel discourse), there were some differences that highlight the important contributions of the present research. As a reminder, Williams (2020), demonstrates the development of incel ideology from MRA. This development further signals that misogyny within discourses drawn on in Western culture can be shown to be thriving and growing because if it wasn't, then incel spaces would not exist (Williams, 2020). Within the context of the present study, the results support the claim that misogyny is still a blight in discourses drawn on in Western culture and this is one of the study's important contributions. The second main finding by Williams (2020), was that incel spaces are heterogenous and often a space where incel members are fighting about what it means to be an incel member. This contention and heterogeneity were often seen within the present research and further demonstrates how contradictory the incel discourse often is. The final finding of the Williams (2020) research was that incels have a complicated relationship with hegemonic masculinities. Williams (2020) states that because incel members have a very narrow idea of what masculinity is, they have failed at it and therefore believe they are subhuman, among other beliefs. An important part of this finding is linking it to the development of the misogyny that so often occurs within incel spaces to the past and how it developed. This is important as it places incel discourse within history and helps explain why it is the way that it is. This is another way in which the present research differed from what Williams (2020) did. Whereas Williams (2020) focused on placing the whole incel discourse within historical context, there was less focus on how incel members position themselves within incel discourse.

As the present research focused on unpacking the interactions between incel members, one was able to see how incel members jostle for status and use concepts like the 'blackpill' to police identities and membership boundaries. This allows for an understanding that focuses on the operations of incel discourse to generate an in-depth understanding of how it is constituted and

what speakers of this discourse are able to achieve, both in terms of the constitution of their subjectivities, as well as in terms of their positioning in relation to other social groups in their environment. The identification of six discursive themes that constitute incel discourse in this analysis allows for the core ideas and background assumptions underpinning incel subjectivities to be more readily identifiable, as well as potentially providing some suggestions for how such potentially harmful discourse can be challenged.

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presented at the *8th Annual Arts, Humanities, Social Sciences & Education Conference*,
1-22.

Appendix 1

 RHODES UNIVERSITY <i>Where leaders learn</i>	Rhodes University Human Research Ethics Committee PO Box 94, Makhanda, 6140, South Africa t: +27 (0) 46 603 7727 f: (27 (0) 46 603 8822 e: ethics-committee@ru.ac.za NHREC Registration number: RC-241114-045 https://www.ru.ac.za/researchgateway/ethics/
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1 July 2022

Email: krugert10@gmail.com

Review Reference: 2022-5580-6804

Dear Mr Kruger

Title: "Chads, Beckys, Alphas and Cucks": Examining the discursive features of the language used in identity constructions in online "face" communities and their impacts on other online communities.

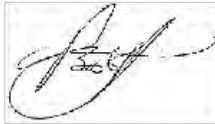
Researcher: Mr Thomas Kruger

This letter confirms that the above research proposal has been reviewed and **APPROVED** by the Humanities Faculty Research Ethics Committee (HF-REC). Your Approval number is: 2022-5580-6804

Approval has been granted for 1 year. An annual progress report will be required in order to renew approval for an additional period. You will receive an email notifying you when the annual report is due.

Please ensure that the Humanities Faculty REC is notified should any substantive change(s) be made, for whatever reason, during the research process. This includes changes in investigators. Please also ensure that a brief report is submitted to the ethics committee on the completion of the research. The purpose of this report is to indicate whether the research was conducted successfully, if any aspects could not be completed, or if any problems arose that the Humanities Faculty REC should be aware of. If a thesis or dissertation arising from this research is submitted to the library's electronic theses and dissertations (ETD) repository, please notify the committee of the date of submission and/or any reference or cataloguing number allocated.

Sincerely,



Dr Priscilla Boshoff

Chair: Humanities Faculty Research Ethics Committee