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Incel Rhetoric: Origins of Digital Misogyny

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Content Warning

This thesis is the result of an in-depth study of a community that uses truly vile language and expresses similarly vile ideas. In order to convey the seriousness of addressing online misogyny and in following Emma Jane's model of scholarship (discussed later), I have chosen not to censor any sexually explicit language. This is a content warning for descriptions of sexually violent acts and extremely derogatory language.

Introduction

In May 2014 in Isla Vista, California, near the UC Santa Barbara campus, Elliot Rodger murdered six people and injured 14 others with his vehicle, a gun, and a knife. While the victims themselves were random, his motivation was not. Rodger was an incel, an involuntary celibate, and he was angry at women. Before the terrorist attack, Rodger uploaded a video to YouTube wherein he laid out his motives: he was tired of women rejecting him and jealous of the men they chose to sleep with instead of him. It is important to note that not all incels are violent and that most of them, at least outwardly, denounce Rodger's actions¹; however, it is the rhetoric of incels and their various subgroups that allows for and encourages violent thoughts and behaviors. Rodger's attack also inspired similar attacks, such as Alek Minassian's Toronto van attack in 2018. Minassian claimed to be an incel and before he killed 10 people and injured 16 more with a van, he posted this: "Private (Recruit) Minassian Infantry 00010, wishing to speak to Sgt 4chan please. C23249161. The Incel Rebellion has already begun! We will overthrow all the Chads and Stacys! All hail the Supreme Gentleman Elliot Rodger" (Minassian qtd in Collins and Zadrozny).

¹ In public forums like Twitter, very few posts can be found in support of Roger, but on the private incel forums there are dozens of posts in support of his attack and similar attacks.

In this post, there is incel terminology that shows Minassian was a member of the incel ingroup: “Chads,” “Stacys,” “Gentleman,” and of course “Incel.”

Many scholars have studied online violence against women, attributing the problem to widespread misogyny in our society. I contend that the language used by the incel community spills out of that space and contributes to the online/emotional and real-life/physical violence against women discussed in Digital Misogyny scholarship. Online attacks on women cause emotional harm and use rhetoric that directly contributes to the types of violent acts committed by men like Elliot Rodger and Alek Minassian. In this paper I outline the basic ideological beliefs of incels, which provide insight into the community’s violent tendencies. In addition, because I believe incel communities are more directly to blame for digital misogyny than a larger and more broad group of men, I examine posts from within their community and comments under Anita Sarkeesian’s video “Tropes vs. Women in Video Games” in order to demonstrate that the rhetoric in both online locations is from the same source.² Finally, I discuss actions that can be taken to mitigate the online violence perpetrated by the incel community, which will, in turn, limit the physical acts of violence stemming from their rhetoric.

Review of Literature: Incels and their belief system

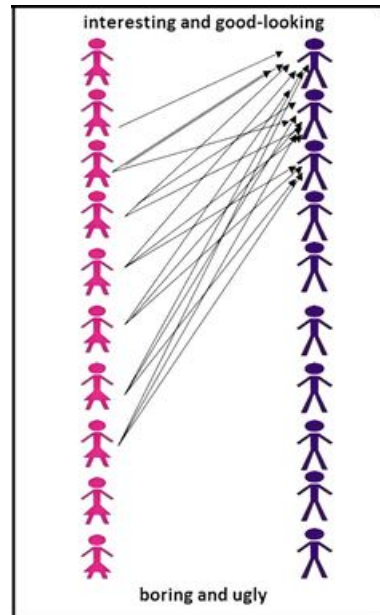
In order to mitigate the online and physical violence perpetrated in part by the incel community, scholars must understand the core beliefs of the incel community. This knowledge provides a backdrop to the posts on their forum and the comments Sarkeesian received that helps scholars understand the importance of examining incel rhetoric and its implications.

² Anita Sarkeesian’s video was uploaded in 2012 and was intended to gather support for a Kickstarter Campaign that would fund a series of videos about the representation of women in video games. The comments are now turned off, but Sarkeesian uploaded a screenshot of the comments made in the first two hours after her video was posted. The majority of these comments are either vitriolic in nature or responding to that vitriol. In addition, Sarkeesian reported receiving thousands of comments, emails, and other forms of contact that were threatening and/or disparaging in nature in the aftermath of her video.

The term *incel* was first coined by a Canadian woman who went by the name Alana. The term was created on her website titled, “Alana's Involuntary Celibacy Project,” which was intended to be a place for single college students to talk about the difficulties of dating. She gave control of the website to an unnamed person when she no longer felt it was valuable to her, and the community began to form the incel ideology. The community that now uses the term is not associated with Alana, and she has publicly denounced them. (Taylor). The self-identified incel community left the original website and appeared in places like 4chan and Reddit, where the ideology developed further, likely into the state it is in today. Reddit, after many years of ignoring the problems the incel community posed, finally began “quarantining” incel communities. This meant that those who were already in the communities could still use their subreddits, but no one could find them through a search or join them. Incel communities now largely exist on forums like incels.co, where there are no rules about death threats or doxxing.

An incel is someone who believes that they have an inability to form a relationship with a woman due to genetics, inequitable social structures, and “evolutionarily determined traits in women” (Incels: A Guide to Symbols and Terminology). Many incels believe in the theory of lookism, the idea that their appearance is the reason they have difficulty with women. They attribute their failure to find a suitable woman to their height, weight, the distance of their eyes, the size of their wrists, the shape of their jaw, or any other number of random physical attributes. Additionally, they believe that “Chads,” genetically superior men, and “Stacys,” genetically superior women, are worthy of both worship and hatred simultaneously. The theory of hypergamy states that women only sleep with men who are genetically or socially superior to themselves due to evolutionary instincts. Because of this, incels believe that before women gained financial and social autonomy, men had less difficulty finding a mate and, therefore,

stricter gender roles should be enforced to solve their current problem. Incels also assert that because of hypergamy, the top 80 percent of women only sleep with, date, or marry the top 20 percent of men, also known as the 80/20 rule. The figure below demonstrates this rule (Mahlo).



The pill system is likely the most widely used theory within inceldom. The theory is derived from *The Matrix*, and has a long list of -pills that indicate a certain belief system within the wider incel ideology. The most important -pills are bluepill, redpill, and blackpill. In *The Matrix*, choosing the blue pill means to remain ignorant of the simulation and choosing the red pill means you will become aware of it. For incels, being bluepilled means to subscribe to mainstream beliefs about the ways men and women interact with each other and to reject the incel way of thinking (Incels). Incels who are redpilled have become aware of the “reality” of sexual and social relationships with women. Redpilled incels believe that being aware of the system means that they can subvert it by -maxxing, or improving looks or social status to become a Chad (William). Blackpilled incels reject both mainstream ideology and redpilled

ideology, believing that they would be better off dead and that they will be incels forever (Incels).

Racism in the Incel Community

Due to the composition of the incel community, there is a fair amount of racism. The community originated on Alana's website, but after joining reddit it became associated with the Men's Rights Activists, white supremacy groups, and pick up artists--all groups of majority white male demography. Several in-group terms, such as Chad, Stacy, and Tyrone, are race-based stereotypes that at times cross over into overt racism. Chads are white alpha males who have basically unlimited access to women. They have stereotypically attractive European features such as being tall with a square jaw. There are non-white Chads, but they often have the European features to which incels attribute the sexual success of Chads. Tyrones are "Chads of sub-saharan descent... commonly found in gangs or insurance companies" ("Tyrone"). Stacys are the female equivalent of a Chad and are also almost unanimously white. Incels seem to have some affection for Asian women, due to their culture enforcing sexual purity until marriage, but otherwise find women of color to be "sub-human." There is no term for a sexually superior woman of color, indicating that they cannot be sexually superior. Additionally, studies have found that women of color are targets of a greater amount of online abuse. An Amnesty International study found that Black and Asian women received 35 percent more abuse on Twitter than white women Members of Parliament in England (cited in Barker and Jurasz). This study highlights the racial aspect of online misogyny as a whole, including the extreme subset of incels. Racism in the incel community contributes to a greater number of online attacks being directed at women of color.

Incels have several practices that exhibit their racism stemming from the core beliefs of the identity. JBW, or Just Be White, is used often in online discourse to indicate their belief that white people are more attractive than other races. Incels believe that going to a country that views white people as exotic is the best way to find a sexual partner, as long as you are white. They also believe that white incels have a greater chance of -maxxing, improving looks or status, to find a partner than other incels. Non-white incels refer to themselves and each other by putting a race identifier before the suffix -cel, such as ricecel or currycel. Other names for non-white incels include racial slurs before -cel, which indicates not only racism in the community, but internalized racism as well. Self-hatred and a general disregard for the lives of others based on superficial characteristics is a driving factor in many instances of incel perpetrated violence.

Incels and Violence

Incel communities often claim to not encourage violence in any form, though this is demonstrably untrue and will be examined more in depth later. Incel communities have been banned from mainstream social media sites explicitly because of the violent language and behavior they exhibit. There are three types of violence that are most common in the incel community: personal, interpersonal, and societal (Incels).

Personal Violence

Personal violence refers to suicide and suicidal ideation, most common among blackpilled incels. Blackpills believe there is no hope for them to ever have a close personal relationship with a woman, and society has demonized them to such a point, that they should just

“rope.” Rope or sui is the way incels refer to suicide. There is also a tag on the incel forum incels.co called “suicidefuel,” and many users with names like “rope2cope.” Incels post to online forums about their intent to commit suicide and are often encouraged by other incels to follow through or even ridiculed for posting about it and not just doing it.

In one post on incels.co, Zekr says that seeing a man commit suicide on facebook live made him “realize its not that big a deal,” and the comments are all about how he committed suicide “incorrectly,” and how they would do it in a quicker, cleaner way. In another post, a user says he is going to approach 1000 women until someone agrees to go out with him, but many of the comments discourage him from even trying (Uninstall). Grencel says, “Cope until you come back to rope,” meaning that the original poster is going to be unsuccessful and will eventually decide to return to suicidal ideation.

Interpersonal Violence

According to Moonshot, a research foundation that has done extensive work about incels, interpersonal violence within the incel community is not violence against each other, but discussions with each other about acts of violence against women and “normies,” or non-incels (Incels). Incel communities as a whole claim to not encourage any type of violence, but the majority of posts on incels.co are focused on discussions of violence-- either regarding other people who have committed violent crimes against women, or the intention or desire to commit violence themselves. These discussions are directly responsible for encouraging societal violence by idolizing those who commit them or encouraging those who are already considering it.

In 2019, an “e-girl”³ named Bianca Devins was murdered by a man she met on 4chan named Brandon Clark. Two prominent posts on incels.co discuss her murder and even justify it. The first post, by user NeetSupremacist⁴, was uploaded the same day of the murder and includes a link to an instagram post where the murderer shared a photo of Bianca, dead with her throat slashed, though the photo has been removed from instagram at the time of accessing the post. The comments under the post range from disgust, the normal reaction, to celebration. Robtical says, “Good riddance to another dirty hypergamous whore who drove the wrong guy crazy,” clearly justifying the violent act. The other post was uploaded the next day and focuses on why Bianca Devins was a “horrible person.” The user, Asiacel, claims that he is not supporting Brandon (the murderer), but provides extensive “evidence” to justify her death. The evidence includes her sexual activity and e-girl persona, as well as her alleged drug use. The comments even more explicitly support the actions of Brandon - Reddit_is_for_cucks says, “This was 100% her own fault and nobody else. She was a victim of her own actions.” Incels do not value the lives of women or normies, because they are valued in a world that has shunned incels. Incels perceive themselves as being othered by society, and as a result have detached themselves from it. This detachment makes it much easier to threaten and insult people online and to commit physical acts of violence. Incels do not see themselves as part of society, but have formed their own with different rules. In the incel community, berating people online is a source for “lifefuel,” something to encourage them to continue living. Somewhat contradictorily, killing a large number of “normies” before committing suicide is seen as the “ultimate blackpill,” and is worthy of worship from the community.

³ An e-girl is someone who plays video games on the streaming platform, Twitch. The meaning has expanded to include girls who post videos and pictures online, typically asking for money, and who wear a certain style of clothing.

⁴ NEET stands for “not in education, employment, or training”

Incel terrorists such as Elliot Rodger and Alek Minassian have already been discussed, but it is important to note that they are also worshipped in the incel community, having been granted the status of “saint.” Minassian himself worshipped Elliot Rodger, mentioning him in his facebook post prior to killing 10 people with his van. A post by BlkPillPres, who showed up frequently during my research, on incels.co that has since been archived not only worships Elliot Rodger, but suggests mass-raping in his name:

Not to mention we will be spamming his image and memeing him into an immortal internet presence as we have for Elliot Rodger, they won't ever be able to forget, and society won't be able to either, and it is at that moment that normies will truly fear us, you see if we kill them then everyone gets to move on, and the ones left alive get to have to cope of "they're in a better place", but if we rape instead of murder for ER, they don't get to move on, they don't get these BS copes to ease their pain. Women fear rape more than death, because it is a many forcefully taking the only thing from her that makes her have worth, her sexuality, now imagine an incel raped you, and having the world know about it, chad won't even be able to look at his cheerleader GF the same after she's been defiled by an incel. ITS OVER for her dream life lol.⁵

Among the many horrifying sentiments in this post, there is Elliot Rodger worship and the idea that the value of a woman is inherently based solely on her sexuality. Rhetoric like this has significant potential to encourage others to leave the online space and commit acts of physical violence. Incels spend a significant amount of time on incel forums, engaging with posts that denigrate women and cite “evidence” for their lack of value. Posts on these forums simultaneously lament the posters’ lack of a relationship with women and devalue them based on appearance and their supposed sexual activity. Incels, especially blackpilled incels, are incredibly angry about having been shunned from society, while also actively othering themselves from it. After months or years of consuming this material, some incels decide to commit physical acts of violence, and they are often rewarded for it in their community.

⁵ incels.co was formerly known as incels.me

Societal Violence

Societal violence is often perceived only as physical acts of violence, but online violence against women is the most direct result of interpersonal violence and is the stepping stone from interpersonal to physical violence. Physical acts of violence perpetrated by incels have been widely covered in the media, such as Minassian and Roger's attacks. Widely known terror acts by incels include a shooting at Umpqua Community College by Chris Harper-Mercer in 2015, the 2018 Tallahassee shootings by Scott Beierle, and a shooting at Westgate Entertainment District in Glendale Arizona by Armando Hernandez, Jr. in 2020. Harper-Mercer stated in his manifesto, "here I am, 26, with no friends, no job, no girlfriend, a virgin. I long ago realized that society likes to deny people like me these things. People who are elite, people who stand with the gods," identifying Elliot Rodger as one of those people, and clearly aligning himself with incels (Anderson). Scott Beierle is known to incels as St. Yogacel, because he entered a yoga studio with the intent to kill women (outherebrothers). He also identified as an incel, posting several videos to YouTube about his hatred of women and mentioning Elliot Rodger. Hernandez shot 3 people, and though he did not manage to kill anyone, that was his intent. According to a prosecutor on his case, "He's a self-professed incel... Mr. Hernandez had the express purpose of taking out his expressed anger at society, the feeling that he has been bullied, the feeling that women don't want him" (Bowling and Vandell). All of these attacks and many more were perpetrated by men who subscribed to incel ideology and were either active in incel communities or espoused the same beliefs on YouTube and in manifestos, making it clear that the incel ideology is partly to blame for their actions.

Online violence does not seem to be as newsworthy as these acts of physical violence because of the obvious tangibility of physical harm or death. But it is my assertion that online

violence is emotionally damaging to the victims, for it pushes them out of online spaces and manifests in physical violence. Studying the rhetoric of online violence shows the link between it and incel communities, which is vital for understanding how best to address it. The breadth of scholarship on digital misogyny lays an extensive groundwork for research into online attacks perpetrated by incels and those who share or parrot their ideology.

Defining Misogyny

Before a fuller discussion of digital misogyny scholarship, it is necessary for misogyny to be understood and perhaps be (re)defined. The most common definition of misogyny is “a hatred of women.” This definition is somewhat flawed, despite the fact that most incels do have contempt for women. In *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny*, Kate Manne defines misogyny as “primarily a property of social environments in which women are liable to encounter hostility due to the enforcement and policing of patriarchal norms and expectations-- often, though not exclusively, insofar as they violate patriarchal law and order” (1). She also argues that misogyny should be understood as the system that operates “within a patriarchal social order to police and enforce women’s subordination and uphold male dominance” (31). Manne’s definition of misogyny allows for the fact that *most* people do not hate women, but that they do engage in enforcing patriarchal norms. Incels are a special case, because both definitions can be applied to them. Incels use violence to punish women who behave adversely to how they “should” behave. When a woman expresses an opinion about women’s issues online or refuses to have sex with a man, she is doing something the incel perceives as wrong, and he may choose to punish her. On the surface, expressing an opinion and refusing to have a relationship with a man are not closely related but, for incels, they are. The motivating factor in incels’ hatred of women is that they do

not behave in the way that incels think they should. Incels believe women should be submissive and pure, that they should behave in a way that makes them dependent on men, and they resent that modern women often are not submissive or pure. Digital misogyny scholarship explores the idea of misogyny as the policing of women's behavior more in depth.

Online Abuse

Scholarship on digital misogyny focuses mainly on the problem of the abuse women receive online and the instances where online threats manifest in physical violence. Many scholars have worked to define online violence in an attempt to solve the issue, though it is unlikely to be solved without ending misogyny in its entirety. There are several ways online violence is defined by scholars, but the main three are Online Violence Against Women (OVAW), e-bile, and gendertrolling.

OVAW is a term coined by Kim Barker and Olga Jurasz referring specifically to online violence in response to women speaking out about women's issues on the internet. Barker and Jurasz argue that OVAW, "is not only damaging, but also severely undermines the idea of equality of participation in public life" (96). They also suggest that these behaviors reflect the "normalization of inequality offline," and that the internet has become a tool for "silencing women online" (Barker and Jurasz 97). They point out that threats distributed online impact women's ability to participate in the online community, but do not connect that fact to the reality that these online threats are sometimes carried out physically (Barker and Jurasz 100). Barker and Jurasz's work focuses mostly on women in politics, but their research is easily applicable to a broader community of women who express opinions online.

Another way of defining violence against women online is what Emma Alice Jane calls e-bile, “gendered vitriol on the internet... a type of discourse marked by graphic threats of sexual violence, explicit ad hominem invective, and unapologetic misogyny” (558). Her article primarily focuses on not only talking *about* e-bile, but talking about it in “*its unexpurgated entirety*,” in order to help people truly understand how serious the issue is. For this reason, it is my intention to be fully explicit (barring racial slurs), quoting the exact phrases used by incels that insult and berate women. Additionally, Jane concludes that e-bile is simply a new medium to express a “much older discursive tradition: one which insists women are inferior and that their primary function is to provide sexual gratification for men - and then denigrates them for this self-same purpose” (566). The purpose of e-bile is to force women out of the public sphere and back into their clearly defined gender roles. E-bile emerges when a woman speaks out about something like putting a woman on the £10 note or the sexist portrayal of women in video games (Jane 562-3).

Gender trolling, defined by Karla Mantilla, is the misogynist variant of aggressive online behavior known as trolling. Interestingly, the demography of trolls and of incels are similar: mostly white males. Mantilla argues that while trolling is often insincere and is done specifically to cause a disturbance, gender trolls often express their actual beliefs (564). Gender trolling is somewhat, though not totally, distinct from e-bile. E-bile tends to be in direct response to women speaking about women’s issues, while gender trolling is a more broad attack on women who do something the gender trolls do not like, be it speaking on women’s issues or trying to talk about *Star Wars* on Twitter. Mantilla points out several features that contribute to gender trolling being significantly more destructive than normal trolling: coordinated participation of multiple people, gender-based insults, vicious language, credible threats, intensity and longevity of attacks, and

that they are a reaction to women speaking out (564-5). All of these features are identifiable in the 2012 attack on Anita Sarkeesian, especially considering she is still being attacked on Twitter as of 2020. Mantilla concludes her exploration of gendertrolling in several communities stating, “the harassment is about patrolling gender boundaries and using insults, hate, and threats of violence and/or rape to ensure that women and girls are either kept out of, or play subservient roles in, male dominated arenas” (568).

In addition to these definitions of online violence, other scholars have discussed the motivation of perpetrators of online violence and the types of online cultures they might be a part of. Sarah Banet-Weisner and Kate Miltner argue, as do the majority of scholars, that online vitriol is fueled by women invading white male spaces. Invasion as a motivating factor appears repeatedly in the scholarship, highlighting the exclusionary nature of male-dominated spaces and why women are the target of such hatred online. Incels engage in a contradictory psychology wherein their community is made up of men who are upset about being rejected by women, but it also actively participates in its own othering. This is more prevalent in blackpilled incels, who no longer seek relationships with women, which indicates that contradictory ideas stem from the redpill/blackpill split in the community. Blackpilled incels do not want women in their communities, because they have decided to embrace their own othering and reject society.

Adrienne Massanari discusses geek culture and masculinity, which are characterized by exclusionist white males, though not all geeks identify this way. She argues that geeks often feel marginalized despite increasing popularity of their stereotypical pastimes, and that they make their spaces unwelcoming to women and especially women of color. Massanari defines the term “toxic technoculture” as an online culture “enabled by and propagated through sociotechnical networks” (332-3). She describes these cultures as pushing against diversity and encouraging a

homogenous culture. Blackpilled incels, who have decided to completely other themselves from society, become territorial over their spaces, like gaming and geek culture. Their largely self-inflicted separation from society leads them to believe that if women and people of color enter their spaces, incels will be forced out.

Methods: A Deep Dive into the Culture

Previous scholars have identified the motivation for online violence against women as an effort to patrol gender boundaries and police women's involvement in what men perceive to be their spaces. The primary concern of a redpilled incel is to convince women to want them the way women are supposed to want men, while a blackpilled incel has moved beyond wanting women to want them and has become angry that they never will. Within their own communities, incels speak freely about their hatred of Chads and Stacy's, of themselves, and of the society that has rejected them. It could be argued that incels should welcome women into their communities in an effort to un-other themselves, but their own rhetoric prevents them from this option. Redpilled incels become angry at women who they perceive as "sluts," because they are no longer worthy of pursuing, and must also be aware that the type of rhetoric in incel spaces would be a repellent for any woman who joined the space. Blackpilled incels are more likely to attack women online and physically because they have fully detached themselves from the possibility of being with them or participating fully in society. I argue that by studying the rhetoric of incels in their own spaces and comparing it to the rhetoric used to attack Sarkeesian, it is clear that incels and those who share their ideology are major perpetrators of online violence.

In order to find a varied selection of incel rhetoric, I studied forum posts on the website incels.co and analyzed the "Inceldom Discussion" forum, a place to "discuss your experiences,

vent, or share anything related to incelism.” Other forums on the site include “Must Read Content,” which is a forum for posts pinned by the mods, and “The Sewers,” a forum with no rules. I chose “Incelism Discussion” because it was the most middle ground option. I examined the most viewed post from each of the 23 tags⁶ and compared these posts with the first two hours of comments under Anita Sarkeesian’s video “Support my Kickstarter Project - Tropes vs Women in Video Games” in conjunction with attacks on Twitter. In the four minute video, Sarkeesian asks for funding to support a video series about female representation in video games. The comments under the video became so vile that Sarkeesian turned off commenting, but on her blog she shared a screenshot of more than 100 comments that appeared in the two hours following the upload. Ultimately, she received thousands and is still receiving hate today. After analyzing both selections, it became clear that incel rhetoric, barring discussions of personal violence and basic ideology, can be organized into five categories: (1) insults based on sex or sexuality, (2) gender-role enforcement, (3) racism, (4) reductionism, and (5) rape or death threats. The existence of these categories within the incel community and in Sarkeesian’s comment section indicate a connection between the two events-- the overlap in rhetoric and obvious calls to incel ideology link the incel community to the attack on Sarkeesian, and similar methods could be used to find links between the incel community and other massive online attacks on women. By understanding this link, scholars can begin to address some of the most violent and vitriolic online misogynists more directly.

⁶ Blackpill, LifeFuel, SuicideFuel, RageFuel, Serious, Experiment, JFL (just fucking lol), Venting, NSFW, News, Hypocrisy, LDAR (lie down and rot), Story, It’s Over, TeeHee, Soy, Cope, Discussion, ToxicFemininity, Whitepill, Theory, Brutal, and Based.

Results and Discussion

Utilizing the five categories mentioned above to organize the comments about Sarkeesian, my selections of comments and my discussion of them shows how the rhetoric against Sarkeesian can be traced to the rhetoric of incel communities.

Sex and Sexuality Insults: “The bigger the hoops, the bigger the whore”

Insults that focus either explicitly on gender or on the sexual activity of the person on the receiving end are sex and sexuality insults. These attacks are meant to be demeaning and insinuate that a woman has less value than men, because she is a woman, and even less value if she has been sexually active. Ironically, incels tend to call women who refuse to sleep with them “sluts” and “whores” because of their ideological belief that all women sleep with Chads, even if they will not sleep with incels (hypergamy).

Sarkeesian’s comment section was full of these comments, some focusing on the way she dresses herself: “The bigger the hoops, the bigger the whore” (Metroidman90) and “Why don’t you shave your head bald, stop wearing makeup and stop wearing huge slut earrings. You are a fucking hypocrite slut” (DrMuganda). Others focus on appearance: “Looking like you are, I can understand where the hate for sexy female characters comes from, but please, scamming people won’t solve a thing you useless cunt” (CJJPro), and others still resort to misogynist name calling: “you disgust me, you fucking bitch” (Zeredek).

This type of insult is incredibly common in the incel community and appears at least once in the replies to almost every post that was examined. Under the tag [Suicidefuel] on incels.co, mikepence tells a story about a girl who allegedly had sex with a black boy while physically *at* the school. He describes the girl as a “thot” who is “only like a 4 or a 5 btw, kinda fat and a huge

makeup/angle frauder.” The post is in a tag meant to share stories of things that make users want to end their own lives. According to mikepence, a girl who he describes as not at all attractive having sex in a public place is inspiration for suicide. Recall that Bianca Devins is the girl who was murdered by a man she met online. In two separate discussions on Bianca Devins, one under [TeeHee] and the other [NSFW], she is repeatedly insulted based on her sexual behavior. One user says she was a “dirty hypergamous whore” (Robtical), another says “Thot Status: Patrolled” (Rope2Cope), and another says, “Rest in piss, stupid whore. Another crazy bitch off this planet” (Ordinaryotaku). All of these comments indicate that Devins deserved to die because of her perceived sexual status.

Incels often use sex and sexuality to insult women, because they believe that all women are sleeping with a huge amount of men and denying sex to incels specifically. The prevalence of this type of insult in Sarkeesian’s comments indicates that incels were participating in the onslaught that became thousands of derogatory comments.

Gender Role Enforcement: “Women are the oppressors”⁷

Incels suggest that the reason they are unable to have sexual or romantic contact with a woman is that women have strayed too far from gender roles and have become financially independent. They argue that when women required a man to survive, they were much less likely to be “denied” sex. Online hate that attempts to force women out of male spaces and especially that explicitly tells women to behave in a more typically feminine way is gender role enforcement.

There are at least four instances of comments under Sarkeesian’s video telling her to go back to the kitchen. Jane named her e-bile article after TheDaveKD’s comment, “Back to the

⁷ FeminismsCancer in Alfen

kitchen, cunt.” Deadman204 insists that Sarkeesian show her “tits” or go back to the kitchen. Max547490 suggests that the video would be better if Sarkeesian filmed it in the kitchen, and Hellothereboyo commands her to “get back in the kitchen.” It all seems a bit redundant and almost comical on the surface; however, the intention of these comments is to push Sarkeesian out of the “male” space of gaming.

There are other comments focused on forcing Sarkeesian out of the gaming world that are less explicitly about gender roles like, “Fucking downvoted and flagged for terrorism. Dumb ass nazi cunt” (BooxyizQueen). This comment and the alleged action taken by the commenter is intended to silence Sarkeesian, to force her to not speak about the issue of women in gaming. Another common method of silencing is invalidating Sarkeesian’s topic. Several commenters claimed that feminism was ignoring the sexism that men faced. Even if the issues brought up by these commenters are a problem, the hypersexualization of women in video games is still an issue. Commenter Rougeish1 argues that women and men are “different creatures” and will never be equal, but goes on to complain that women “get into everything free especially on the weekends,” and that men “have to pay for your shit if we have kids and get a divorce.” Another commenter complains women are responsible for “FALSE rape culture, belittling of men, destruction of modern marriage, hypergamy, men shaming, treating men as cattle with no rights, femal [*sic*] quota in every job, misandry, sexism that goes unnoticed [*sic*], no rights for divorced fathers, and on...” (RatalTA). Not only are these men trying to silence Sarkeesian, they are parroting typical incel complaints.

In addition to complaining about the lack of attention they receive from women, incels believe that women who are in relationships are only using men for their money and are continuing to sleep with Chads, unbeknownst to their bluepilled partner. Incels refer to this as

“beta-buxxing,” and “cucking.” Incels also believe that men are entitled to sex in return for “services” they are expected to provide in a relationship. A post titled “‘Women don’t owe you sex, honey.’ Oh Really?” under the [hypocrisy] tag argues exactly this point:

‘Women don't owe you sex.’ but men owe women larger wages? Men owe women the bill for dates and dinner? Men owe women full custody of the child and alimony support even though he fully supported the house financially? Men owe women a car... men owe women surprises [*sic*] dates, excitement, flowers and spontaneous gifts or else... men owe women incredible sex or else, if the dick aint right I take the next one in sight? Men owe women marriage and big beautiful pricy weddings? (Alfen)

The overlap between this post and the comments on Sarkeesian’s video is overwhelmingly obvious. Incels feel that women believe they are entitled to special treatment and they resent that. The commenters on Sarkeesian’s video and the incels in the forum express a desire to return to the days where women were required to marry a man in order to receive the “privileges” they can now get from a boyfriend or in some cases a first date. Despite this fact, the commenters and incels also express resentment at the fact that they are supposed to be the financial provider.

Racism : “Fucking ovendodger”

Racist and anti-Semitic comments are prevalent in incel communities due to the white supremacist influences in the community. Racism serves to invalidate the person it is aimed at, similar to the way misogynist comments are often used to invalidate women. The commenters on Sarkeesian’s post use anti-Semitic comments to invalidate her and encourage others to ignore her opinions.

There are two comments on Sarkeesian’s video that, despite her being of Armenian descent and identifying as Canadian-American, insult her for being Jewish.⁸ One comment calls

⁸ I am aware that Jewish is an ethnicity, not a race. However, I felt that the disdain for a woman based on her supposed ancestry was closely related to the disdain incels have for nonwhite women.

Sarkeesian an “enemy of the West, a traitor to the land she lives in,” and cites specific facial features as evidence that she is Jewish (KTSWhite). Another commenter says, “so you’re a bolshevik feminist jewess that hates White people... Fucking ovendodger” (Haploguy). It is unclear why these two commenters resorted to anti-Semitism to insult Sarkeesian, but both achieve a significant level of shock value and serve to undermine her claims in the video.

It has been previously established that the majority of the incel community is white, that it has origins in white supremacist groups, and that there is a fair amount of internalized racism from the few non-white incels. Much of the racism in the incel community is directly aimed at men, but there is a tendency to be much more hateful toward women of color than men of color. For example, in a post in the [story] tag, Genma says, “Almost all white women are hotter than almost all black women,” and another user says, “ I live with Arab women and I think they're subhuman” (RREEEEEEEEEEE in Vintage Aesthetic). The focus of incel racism is mostly on appearance, but is occasionally focused on a hatred for the race itself. Under the [suicidefuel] post discussed earlier is a comment that says “Genocide [N-word] lovers” (IKillCucks, censorship mine).

Racism is prevalent enough that this alone would not bind Sarkeesian’s commenters and the incel community together, but it is still important to note that both communities express dislike or even hatred for certain people groups beyond misogyny.

Reductionism: “Rest in shit, foid”⁹

The term “reductionism” here means the use of a sexualized synecdoche to refer to a woman, with the intent of reducing her value to the value of that part, and the reduction of a woman to something less than human.

⁹ Rope2cope in NeetSupremacist

There are countless comments under Sarkeesian's video effectively reducing her to her breasts. They appear in fragmented sentences, demanding that breasts be shown and that beyond that Sarkeesian's opinions have no value. One comment reduces Sarkeesian to her reproductive organs, "I hate ovaries with a brain big enough to post videos" (Xaninha123). These comments are explicitly attempting to invalidate Sarkeesian and to express to her and to others that she is worth no more than her body parts.

Incels repeatedly express their disdain for women by almost exclusively referring them to as femoids (foids for short). This term is a combination of female and android or humanoid and is meant to indicate that women are less than human. Again referencing Biana Devins, Rope2Cope says, "rest in shit, foid." In another post, this one about a man who shot himself on facebook live, a user says "He still shouldn't have killed himself over a 3/10 foid. R.I.P." (Zekr). In both of these posts, the users are suggesting that the woman they are speaking about is less valuable as a person because she is a woman. In a post under the tag [theory], an incel named Irredeemable complains about another incel who makes fun of incels who "simp" for women, but seems to have a "soft spot" for white women. In the post, he refers to women as "holes," which is a euphemism for female genitalia. Incels do not value the lives of women, which can be seen by their celebration of violence against them, nor do they value their opinions or think they qualify as whole people.

The use of reductionist insults by both commenters and the incel community indicates a similar devaluing of the lives and opinions of women. By suggesting that women's opinions are not valuable, these men are working to push women out of the public forum and to convince other people that they are not worth listening to.

Rape and Death Threats: “She needs a good fucking”

Arguably the most egregious type of online violence, threats of physical harm, rape, and death are not uncommon on the internet. These threats are the most direct link between interpersonal and societal violence and appear most often when women suggest a societal change to remedy problems of misogyny. These threats, more directly than any other type of insult, are used to force women into silence and compliance with patriarchal norms.

In Anita Sarkeesian’s comments, the rape and death threats are not extremely explicit; however, she notes in a 2012 blog post that “In addition to the torrent of misogyny and hate left on my YouTube video...the intimidation effort has also included many threatening messages sent through Twitter, Facebook, Kickstarter, email and my own website.” Noting this, the screenshot did include two comments that can be understood as threats. One comment reads “what a stuck up bitch. I hope all them [*sic*] people who gave her money get raped and die of cancer” (Grondylion1), which is both a rape and death *wish* on people who support Sarkeesian. Another comment states that “she needs a good fucking,” but indicates that she might have trouble finding someone who would “fuck” her (Radioactivetoy89). This comment is in line with the contradictory incel concept that women are both deserving of being raped and too ugly to get raped.

Within the incel community, there are also many posts suggesting women and normies deserve to die simply for being sexually active. In one post, Soulartemis tells a story about his college roommate having sex with a girl while he was in the room. This is an experience many college students have, but Soulartemis takes it personally, saying “Normies need to be shot and killed.” The replies to the post agree, saying “you should have killed both of them” (LastGerman) and “I would point a gun at them. I just couldn’t take that level of humiliation,

ever.” In the [venting] tab, the post that was studied is about how much the poster hates pregnant women. After a long tirade, he states “All pregnant women deserve to fall down a flight of stairs and lose their baby, even then their pain wouldn't come close to our pain” (Total Imbecile).

There are some incels who think rape is wrong; however, there are many more who do not. The popularity of BlkPillPres's post, discussed earlier, indicates that a large amount of incels feel that mass-rape is a good alternative to mass-murder, and that incels should move to that as the preferred method of terrorism. In a thread titled “The term rape survivor is a meme,” users discuss why living through a rape is supposedly not an accomplishment. One user suggests that this is because rapists do not intend to kill their victims, but to “forcibly roleplay as her Chad for a short period of time then be done with her” (BoardWalkCel). Other users insist rape is not actually wrong, because society has progressed beyond caring about virginity: “The stigma against rape comes from a time when getting raped meant disgracing the woman's and her family's honor. But modern roasties don't have any honor nor do they assign any special meaning to sex, so yeah” (Lv99_BixNood¹⁰) Additionally, some incels believe that when a woman is raped, she is permanently ruined, much like in the “time” that Lv99_BixNood is referring to. TheMostAncientCel denigrates men who stay in a relationship with rape victims: “Imagine [*sic*] the cuckold looking at the whore's pregnant belly caressing it while saying with an emasculated face ‘this little angel has no fault, I'll try to be the best father I can for her/him/they/hers.’” Incels believe not only that it is a woman's fault if she gets raped, but that she secretly enjoys it and only complains to get “victim status.” There is a thread titled “is it true that women get more pleasure from rape than normal sex” in which incels claim that women enjoy pain and have rape fantasies, and that there should be less jailtime for rapists.

¹⁰ “Bix Nood” is a racist term, though not considered a slur, that gained popularity on 4chan. It is based on an extremely racist cartoon that depicts an African-American speaking gibberish English including the words “bix nood.”

What the comments directed at Sarkeesian and the posts on the incel forum indicate is that both groups have little regard for women, especially women who are not quiet, submissive virgins. The onslaught of rape and death threats that Sarkeesian received in 2012 and the way that incels suggest that rape and murder are not only not a big deal, but a good idea in some cases, indicates that the groups share ideology.

Conclusion: Mitigating the Threat of Societal Violence

The foundational ideology of incel communities, which advocates for a deeply negative view of any and all outsiders to the community, is at the heart of the issue of digital misogyny. Incels engage in interpersonal violence, which serves to desensitize them to egregious acts of violence. They also worship mass-murderers, support raping women, and berate anyone who strays too far from the ideology. In addition to feeling isolated from society individually, the group feels it is largely misunderstood *as a group*, and that incels get an unfair amount of hatred from outsiders. These factors contribute to societal violence. When incels feel that women are encroaching on their already narrowing territory, they react by attacking them online. When online attacks no longer suffice, or the pressures they feel by society to conform become too great, incels carry out the threats from their online attacks and are supported by their community in doing so.

Knowing that a significant portion of the most violent online attacks is perpetrated by incels and that several mass-murderers also align themselves with incel ideology makes the threat easier to mitigate. Scholars have suggested several different ways to attempt to control the vitriol online. For example, Massanari and others argue that the spaces in which the toxic cultures that are responsible for online violence are formed should work to remove those toxic

cultures from their platforms. Massanari's original article discusses how Reddit's "karma point system, aggregation of material across subreddits, ease of subreddit and user account creation, governance structure, and policies around offensive content" are to blame for the existence of "toxic technocultures" (330). An Afterward, added for the 2017 edition, notes that Reddit changed many of its policies. In 2020, it is virtually impossible to find an incel subreddit that does not strictly adhere to reddit guidelines, but it is not difficult to find individual users who espouse incel ideas. Many incels actually reject Reddit after the mass "quarantining" of the main incel subreddits, and have moved to forums like incels.co instead.

Barker and Jurasz argue similarly that in order to combat online violence, "the platforms themselves must accept that there are problems with the abuse of their spaces" (107). This would include much more human moderation of platforms like YouTube, Twitter, and Reddit; reporting violent language to the police; and providing support to victims of online abuse, especially when that abuse "manifests itself in threats" (107). Navigating these methods and free speech laws, especially when platforms are available in multiple countries, is a nearly impossible nightmare. They also argue that governments should enact policies that consider online forms of violence in addition to physical forms, and that non governmental bodies should lobby for these changes. This article does not provide insight to how valuable these actions would be in the fight against incel perpetrated societal violence. However, their suggestion that "greater attention needs to be paid to the forms of online harm which can be caused by online abuse of women, especially where that abuse incorporates threatening messages indicating the likelihood of physical violence in the form of rape, assault, or even murder" is essential to combatting those acts of online violence (108).

However, it is likely that removing incels from mainstream websites will only serve to isolate and radicalize them further. While direct threats of violence and insults bordering on hate speech should be removed, and sites like Reddit should work toward improving their mechanisms for this, removing incel communities from platforms is a net negative.

Other scholars suggest raising awareness about online violence, in the same vein as the #MeToo and #YesAllWomen movements. Jane argues that in order to counter e-bile, scholars must study it without censoring it. She argues that it is a dominant part of internet discourse, is self-generating and therefore likely to become “even more dominant,” it would be more likely to be considered unacceptable if more people knew its exact nature, and it provides “critical insight into the degree to which misogynist views are still held by many in the community. (567).

Mantilla, like Jane, argues that the best method for reducing “gendertrolling” is speaking about it openly. She argues that viewing it as a widespread societal issue, rather than an individual issue, is the most important way of mitigating its effects. She says “it is... important to name and understand the phenomenon of gendertrolling as a strategy to keep women from full participation on the internet” and that by recognizing this, “we can focus on strategies to address gendertrolling proactively, with the goal of preventing women... from being bullied out of participating in yet another public forum” (569).

The concept of naming and shaming online violence is likely to bring greater awareness to the prevalence and importance of the issue of digital misogyny, but it does not provide a definitive method for ending it. My aim here is to contribute to scholarship that advocates for sharing online vitriol in its “unexpurgated ugliness,” by providing insight into a specific group of perpetrators. There is an interesting paradox in exposing the ugliness of violent and vitriolic online rhetoric and identifying ways of mitigating it. No matter how we balance those aspects, I

believe it is vital that more scholars become aware of the role incels play in online violence and the way that online violence is a precursor to physical violence. By knowing exactly where the rhetoric comes from and what it sounds like, actions to mitigate online violence can be more focused and more effective. Examining the incel community shows that isolation of these toxic cultures is not likely to improve the state of the internet, even if this seems to be the correct move on the surface. Incels already feel isolated, and this fuels their hateful rhetoric.

In order to mitigate misogynistic societal violence, incels should not be further isolated. Instead, scholars, social media platforms, governments, and organizations should work together to understand incels and their behavior, and women should work together to raise awareness about the online abuse they are subjected to. Moonshot suggests that the way to mitigate incel perpetrated violence is to give incels better access to mental health services. They recommend developing a treatment program for incels to help them disengage from the toxic community that would include “education, employment, or training programs adapted for incels to directly address the social isolation and depression exhibited by individuals” who are steeped in incel culture. Such an approach can be part of a major effort to address the continuing toxic masculinity and speed our progress toward responsible and healthy gender relations. By increasing our awareness of the origins and reasons for the online violence perpetrated by incels, we can possibly help incels leave their toxic communities. The contradictory motivations that drive incel rhetoric cannot be understood nor helped by isolating them further; however, it is unlikely that the programs suggested by Moonshot would be effective, because incels do not wish to leave their communities.

This article creates more questions than it answers, and they are difficult questions to answer. Acknowledging that, I believe further research into incel communities would be

extremely beneficial for digital misogyny scholars. More research is needed into the effectiveness of the mitigation strategies discussed above, as well as new strategies and ways to implement them. Does isolation of these communities benefit society as a whole or does it lead to further radicalisation? Does exposing the explicit language of digital misogyny benefit attempts at mitigation or does it only serve to spread the language farther and injure more women? Additionally, the existence of online communities as pseudo-physical spaces capable of being “invaded” and protected is incredibly interesting and would be worth studying through the lens of digital misogyny.

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