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## Attitudes towards incels

A meta study on negative attitudes in research





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This thesis is worth 45 study points

## Summary

This thesis addresses incels or involuntary celibates. A group that entered the sight of mainstream media in 2018 after the Toronto van attacks, and since have garnered an increasing amount of media attention. Several mass-killers have been linked to the group, either self-identifying or describing the same plights that incels describe. However, with the increase of focus on incels in mainstream media there has also been an increase on academic articles on incels. In this thesis I seek out to understand the academic work that has been published on incels and whether these articles are written with a sufficient understanding of internet culture and if they have a sufficient understanding of incels. Conducting a meta-study on existing literature on incels chosen by conducting a rapid review with set criteria through search engines such as Google Scholar and Oria I have found articles that suit this thesis well. To analyse the data I have chosen to go with Toulmin's model for argument analysis to break down the arguments made in the existing literature on incels to find whether there are pre-conceived attitudes from the authors found within the data material. This thesis seeks to broaden the understanding of incels through a neutral understanding of the group.

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# Contents

## Table of Contents

<b>1</b>	<b><i>Introduction</i></b> .....	<b>7</b>
1.1	Outline of thesis.....	7
<b>2</b>	<b><i>Background</i></b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>3</b>	<b><i>Literature review</i></b> .....	<b>12</b>
3.1	The manosphere .....	12
3.2	Negative attitudes on incels in research.....	14
3.3	Non-negative attitudes towards incels in research .....	16
<b>4</b>	<b><i>Methodology</i></b> .....	<b>18</b>
4.1	Meta study vs. meta-analysis .....	18
4.2	Search and selection of data.....	19
4.3	How will negative attitudes be uncovered?.....	20
4.4	Relevance to human rights and scope.....	22
4.5	Limitations.....	23
<b>5</b>	<b><i>Lexicology</i></b> .....	<b>25</b>
<b>6</b>	<b><i>Presentation of data</i></b> .....	<b>29</b>
6.1	Misogyny .....	29
6.2	Violence.....	39
6.3	Mental health .....	47
<b>7</b>	<b><i>Discussion of data</i></b> .....	<b>52</b>
7.1	The different claims about misogyny in the incel community .....	52
7.2	Are incels inherently violent? .....	57
7.3	Is there a solution to the poor mental health of incels? .....	61
7.4	Are viewing incels as a violent group sufficient?.....	64
<b>8</b>	<b><i>Conclusion</i></b> .....	<b>66</b>
<b>9</b>	<b><i>Bibliography</i></b> .....	<b>68</b>

## Foreword

First and foremost, I want to extend my eternal gratitude to my supervisor, Feroz. he has been an incredible help throughout the writing of this thesis. After losing the data material I based my original thesis on Feroz helped me develop the idea for this thesis after the trends that we found in the data material. He has encouraged me, given me constructive criticism and help when developing this thesis. I am also grateful for his extended support even when he did not need to give it after postponing the thesis.

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# 1 Introduction

In 2015 Caitlin Dewey wrote an article in the Washington Post about a new subculture which she categorized together with 4Chan – namely incels. She makes the claim that it is one of the internet’s most reviled subcultures. The term is still relatively unknown to the broader public and is a combination of two words – involuntary and celibate. (Dewey, 2015). Dewey goes on to write that they gather on 4Chan and Reddit to discuss their stories and debate the causes for their situation. Some of them have physical handicaps or psychological disorders that prevent them from meeting women. However, despite Dewey’s article incels would not enter popular media yet.

Where incels first entered popular media is in 2018 after the Toronto van attack perpetrated by Alek Minassian, from previously having close to no traction it became a widely searched for term on Google in April 2018 after the attacks (Google, 2022). Incels became a focus in popular media as Alek Minassian identified as an incel and attributed the attack to rejection from women. Incels were not a newly founded group at this point – but it was the first time it was this exposed to the global community. Along with the popular media attention that incels got after the Toronto van attack there was also a surge in academic articles written about incels, many of them taking the standpoint that incels are inherently misogynistic. At this point incels had a few relatively stable communities gathered on different forums, either created by themselves or on popular webpages like Reddit. The media attention that incels suddenly received made larger websites such as Reddit more aware of these communities and they were subsequently removed for breaching the rules – causing the incel community to migrate onto forums created by the community to get rid of moderation caused by “normies”. A lot of the research on incels are based off of these forums that function as an echo-chamber for the incel community. As the research on incels primarily revolves around their connection to misogyny and violence I have created the following research question:

***What pre-conceived attitudes are found in the research on incels?***

## 1.1 Outline of thesis

I will start my thesis with a background chapter on incels in chapter two, I will here present the inception of incels, why they are portrayed as violent, and what their primary platforms have been



and how they have changed throughout the years. As well as presenting two of the core words can incels use. This is important to display incel attitudes and how they can be portrayed as anti-feminist.

In chapter three I will present the literature review, where I have chosen to divide it into three parts. The manosphere, negative attitudes in research on incels and non-negative attitudes in research on incels. The main article to be used in this part of the thesis is Debbie Ging's *Alphas, Betas and Incels: Theorizing the Masculinities of the Manosphere* from 2019, as Ging's article was one of the first articles to theorize the different groups found within the manosphere and also in writing about incels in a research article that was not related to the 2018 Toronto van attack. In chapter four I will be discussing my method, I will be discussing my methodological approach – meta study. Showing the criteria of how the articles used have been chosen, and why I have chosen these criteria. I will also be discussing my perspective on the research being conducted, the considerations that had to be done when writing this thesis as well as the scope and limitations of the thesis.

In chapter five I will be presenting the lexicology often used by incels and referenced in the data material that is to be presented in chapter six. In chapter six I will be presenting the articles that will be used for the meta study, explaining their contents and showing their alignment if they are written from a negative understanding on incels as well as analyzing them through Toulmin's argument analysis model. This will make it easier for the discussion and comparison that will happen in chapter six where I will be discussing the articles chosen. In the first part of chapter five I will be breaking down the articles into segments that are similar to each other, if possible, to uncover attitudes that the authors might have towards incels. In chapter six I will be discussing how these attitudes might be negative and a detriment to researching and understanding incels. I will present my conclusion in chapter seven.

## 2 Background

The formulation of the concept of incel or involuntary celibate was developed as early as 1993 where a Canadian woman by the name Alana created a webpage dedicated to her involuntary celibacy . This webpage started off as a gender-inclusive forum for users to share their experiences and thoughts on the subject. She left the community around 2000 thinking the community would keep being an open and flourishing community without her being there (Hoffman, Ware, & Shapiro, 2020) . The incel community would grow but would not retain the same openness and gender-inclusiveness as it once had. The term incel or rather the people identifying with the term also changed, in 2001 Donnelly, Burgess, Anderson, Davis and Dillard recognized incels as *“One who desires to have sex, but has been unable to find a willing partner for at least 6 months”* (Donnelly, Burgess, Anderson, Davis, & Dillard, 2001). This article is recognized as the first article corresponding to incels. According to the incels own Wiki there is no agreement within the incel community who counts as an incel (Incels.wiki, 2020) The first instance of a resurgence of activity within the incel community can be found in the aftermath of the 2014 Isla Vista killings, a man named Elliot Rodger killed seven people, two of them sorority girls due to the fact that despite describing himself as being the “ideal magnificent gentleman” he had never kissed a girl at the age of 22 and these frustrations led to the killings (BBC News, 2018). Rodger became an incel icon to many within the incel community (Inceldom refers to both the state of being an incel and the incel community), however, Rodger had never used the word ‘incel’ to describe himself and thus the group did not get mainstream recognition until 2018 where a man by the name of Alek Minassian drove a van into a crowd of people killing 10, and accrediting the incels and giving tribute to Elliot Rodger (Hoffman, Ware, & Shapiro, 2020). This sparked the media's attention and incels, at least for a period, became a well-known phenomenon. While Incels got mainstream recognition, the group also grew in activity as seemingly many could relate to their problems, the subreddit /r/ Braincels (A incel forum) grew from 11,000 members in April of 2018 to 41,000 in October 2018 (Subreddit Stats, 2022). In January of 2020, Alex Stavropoulos tried to kill a woman and her child due to his incel community and became widely renowned within the incel community (White, 2021). Early 2020 Incels were included as a domestic terrorism threat in the Texas Terrorism Threat Assessment (Texas Department of Public Safety, 2020) In Ging’s article Alphas, Betas, and Incels: Theorizing the Masculinities in the Manosphere she finds that some of the incel

communities praised these attacks and wanted to form a “beta uprising”. Ging describes this as a campaign of revenge against women, alpha males and “social justice warriors” who had deprived them of sexual success (Ging, Alphas, Betas, and Incels: Theorizing the Masculinities of the Manosphere, 2019).

After Alana left the incel community it developed several platforms to communicate. Reddit was their primary platform for a long time. According to Google Trends, the subreddit or forum board /r/Incel community rose greatly in popularity between August 2016 and up until their ban in November 2017. They spread out to different “cel” groups on Reddit where subreddits like /r/Braincels and /r/Shortcels were formed, these two rose in popularity after the Toronto Van attack, however, have both since been removed from the site. /r/Shortcels was banned on March 24<sup>th</sup>, 2020 (Reddit, 2020). This has led to the incels to forming their own webpages to interact. These communities are part of what is commonly referred to as the “manosphere”, Ging describes the manosphere as communities that came alongside Web 2.0 (websites with user-generated content) (Ging, Alphas, Betas, and Incels: Theorizing the Masculinities of the Manosphere, 2019). Ging recognizes the manosphere as a toxic brand of antifeminism adopted by men’s rights activism groups (MRAs) (Ging, Alphas, Betas, and Incels: Theorizing the Masculinities of the Manosphere, 2019). These groups within the manosphere often develop their own vernacular to describe what is wrong with society or the characters found within society. On the Incel wiki they acknowledge that they are part of the manosphere, but have created their own concept of the “Incelosphere”, which are blogs and forums created by incels like their previous subreddits and current forums. The groups within the manosphere often develop their own vernacular to describe what is wrong with society or the characters found within society.

During the early stages of the incel community, Alana, their “founder” had created some incel-specific words like dating shy (Taylor, 2018). The vocabulary of incels has since greatly evolved to describe their perception of society and the characters within it. These words are often misogynistic and have racial stereotypes connected to them. Two of the core words that incels have included in their vernacular is “Chad” and “Stacy” According to the incel wiki a *Chad is “[...]a man who can elicit near universal positive female sexual attention at will. He is usually good looking, muscular, tall, and wealthy or has otherwise high status. He also tends to have intimidating masculine features such as a square jaw, hunter eyes, pronounced cheekbones, a broad chin, and a thick neck.”* (Incels.wiki, 2020). A Chad is a sort of ideal character to be, and

in more classic terms would be what is described as an alpha male. Incels generally do not mind Chads as it is what a lot of incels wish to become. A Stacy on the other hand is the female counterpart to Chads, and the Incel wiki describe them as *“A Stacy is a woman able to secure sexual intimacy with Chad. Stacy is vain and obsessed with jewelry, makeup, and clothes. She is an entitled whore whose rich daddy funds her Caribbean vacations to go “find herself.”*” (Incels.wiki, 2020). Where being a Chad is a positive thing, a Stacy is wholly negative and is described as a “whore”, despite the fact that the concept of a Stacy is necessary for the concept of Chad. This marks what Ging described about the manosphere being a toxic brand of antifeminism. Previous studies have touched upon the language of incels, but have failed to grasp the importance of the language within the incel culture (Jaki, et al., 2019). These previous studies seem to not want to look at how, or why incels use the words they use. Incels believe that sex functions as a social power where having more would leave you with an increased amount of power, and thus they face oppression when not having sex (Incels.wiki, 2020)

### 3 Literature review

Looking back on when I started writing my thesis in 2020 there was not a vast amount of literature written about incels, and the literature that existed primarily based itself on topics broader than the incels community itself – they would include the manosphere as a whole. However, as Covid-19 ran rampant throughout the world and research that had previously been done in person now centered itself more around online social media and forums, the research and articles on incels increased exponentially as well. Incels and other online communities became the meta (most effective tactic available) of research. However, the researchers seem to look for typically the same thing within the incel community – toxic attitudes, behavior and threat towards society. This understanding of incels as “toxic extremists” might not be the best way to understand a group that sees itself as oppressed. I have therefore chosen to split this literature review into three parts. First and foremost, while this thesis is looking at incels specifically I believe the concept of the manosphere is important to understand to get a better grip of which groups incels are portrayed with, and the culture within the manosphere. Along with the manosphere I want to look at literature that seeks to display incel toxicity and other negative values and literature that tries to develop a non-negative understanding of incels.

#### 3.1 The manosphere

While I said there was little research on incels when I started my thesis, there was loads written about the manosphere, a collection of groups that are typically men’s rights activists. According to a research paper by Jessica O’Donnell men’s rights activists are groups that argue that *“there is a legal and social preference/prioritisation for women; for example, they point to affirmative action initiatives as examples of women’s advantages.”* (O’Donnell, 2020). Incels have been pitted in as a sub-group of MRAs and thus the literature found on MRAs often refer both directly and indirectly back to incels. While this research focuses on incels it is important to understand how the manosphere operates to understand how incels can be seen as one of the extreme groups of the men’s rights activists.

The manosphere, like most online-based terms is a relatively new term – it started getting used in various research articles from 2016 and beyond. The manosphere is one of the groups described to exist within Web 2.0 or websites that has user generated content as their primary focus e.g., social media and forums. One of the most prevalent articles on the manosphere is Debbie Ging’s

article *Alphas, Betas, and Incels: Theorizing the Masculinities of the Manosphere* from 2017. Ging explains the manosphere as a toxic brand of antifeminism that has become increasingly visible across social media platforms and other online networks (Ging, *Alphas, Betas, and Incels: Theorizing the Masculinities of the Manosphere*, 2019). Ging goes on to explain how most of the groups within the manosphere adhere to the concept of the Red Pill (the pill that shows the willingness to learn unsettling and life changing truths in the Matrix). The life changing truth in the online communities is that feminism restricts men's rights and explaining how the idea of feminism is damaging to men. According to Ging the Red Pill philosophy seeks to liberate men from the feminist delusion to focus on men's rights in Western culture (Ging, *Alphas, Betas, and Incels: Theorizing the Masculinities of the Manosphere*, 2019). The manosphere term was first used on a Blogspot blog in 2009 according to Ging, and it was later popularized by Ian Ironwood, a porn marketer and pseudonymous author of the self-published book *The Manosphere: A New Hope for Masculinity* (Ging, *Alphas, Betas, and Incels: Theorizing the Masculinities of the Manosphere*, 2019). Essentially the concepts of the Red Pill and the Manosphere were popularized around the same time, according to Brianna McGurran the Red Pill has existed on Reddit since 2013 (McGurran, 2014). In other words, it is two concepts that have grown together from the beginning and have become intertwined.

The platform that is being described as the main hub of Red Pill philosophy is Reddit. Reddit functions as a mix between a social media platform like Facebook and a traditional forum where users create posts and the users then interact with each other in the comments section of that post. The difference between Reddit and traditional forums is that users can create "sub-reddits" which function as their own user-driven sub-forums. These sub-forums or sub-reddits can be dedicated to everything from Disney movies to historical discussions, but because of this wide range of user-generated content it has also been perfect for groups that are following the Red Pill philosophy to gather members and create their own "sphere" hence the manosphere. Reddit has often been blamed for enabling such groups by not censoring or removing users that adhere to such groups from the website, and much of the research done on the manosphere between 2017 and 2020 takes this approach. Reddit started banning or quarantining a lot of subreddits dedicated to men's rights, incels and other Red Pill adhering groups in 2019 and the culture of feminism bashing is not as prevalent on the platform as it was when these articles were written (Cai, Decker, & Zheng, 2019).

While the manosphere unite under the banner of the Red Pill philosophy, the groups that are found within it are vastly different and many of them strongly dislike and contradict each other. Ging theorizes the different masculinities within the manosphere as the alpha, beta and incel males (Ging, Alphas, Betas, and Incels: Theorizing the Masculinities of the Manosphere, 2019). The pure Red Pill followers see themselves as the alpha males – by rejecting the notion of feminism and placing themselves as the superior gender. The beta males would describe the alphas as jocks, frat boys or normies (Ging, Alphas, Betas, and Incels: Theorizing the Masculinities of the Manosphere, 2019). This is the contradiction within the manosphere – where the members while adhering to the same philosophy have a strong disregard for each other as well. However according to Ging the beta males do not aspire to become alphas, they rather embrace their status of being a beta with self-deprecating humor by naming themselves “betafags” and some would also call themselves incels. Where the self-proclaimed alpha males’ primary goal is to liberate other men from the feminist delusion – the betas and incels want an uprising to happen (Ging, Alphas, Betas, and Incels: Theorizing the Masculinities of the Manosphere, 2019). Incels are probably the most subcultural of the groups within the manosphere as they have created their own jargon, they have created subgroups within themselves and have many different identifiers separate them from other groups and even other incels (Ging, Alphas, Betas, and Incels: Theorizing the Masculinities of the Manosphere, 2019). According to Ging the betas and incels also claim to be subordinated and marginalized by both women and the alpha males – which is why incels disdain both alpha males, beta males with girlfriends and/or sexual partners and women in general.

### **3.2 Negative attitudes on incels in research**

As I explained in the introduction to the literature review, the main focus of research on incels bases itself around uncovering toxic, racist or otherwise misogynistic behavior within the incel community. Ging said that incels and betas feel subordinated and marginalized, but she also states that these claims are hard to sympathize with due to their “[...] *extreme expressions of misogyny and racism and frequent engagement in hacking and doxing are clearly indicative of a desire to establish male hegemony in the online spaces they inhabit, even if they may lack such claims to power in off-line contexts.*” (Ging, Alphas, Betas, and Incels: Theorizing the Masculinities of the Manosphere, 2019). This is the general understanding of incel claims of oppression – that it is hard to take seriously, and their claims are diminished to nothing. That is not to say that incels are

correct in their claim, and that they are being oppressed – however, it shows that researchers has a tendency to be interested in the toxic and misogynistic parts of incel behavior as opposed to trying to understand claims of oppression.

Jaki, De Smedt, Gwózdź, Panchal, Rossa and De Pauw wrote the article *“Online hatred of women in the Incels.me forum”* (Jaki, et al., 2019), this study looks at the frequency of words in 50,000 messages to uncover racist, misogynistic or otherwise toxic behavior. While the article fulfills what it sets out to do – displaying the frequency of misogynistic words on the incel.me, this article is a good example of what much of the research on incels looks like and how incel claims of oppression and subordination are ignored. While this article finds the frequency of words, it does not seek out the context of the words being used. E.g., the article states that *“Homosexuals are often despised and called faggots (“being a faggot is a mental disorder same with being trans”), and only once in the subsample of 100 threads does a user refer to himself as homosexual.”* (Jaki, et al., 2019). The findings themselves are not problematic – but making the assumption that incels are homophobic is. As Ging found in her article betas and incels often refer to themselves as betafags, but also simply as faggots. When not looking at the context for the posts and just scouring through frequency of words it is easy to make assumptions about incel attitudes. This is of course not saying that incels are not homophobic, but it displays that some authors seem to have a preconception of incels that overshadows context when researching. The article by Jaki, De Smedt, Gwózdź, Panchal, Rossa and De Pauw wrote also disregards the anonymity of incels on the website by blatantly posting the usernames of certain users, NESH states that the use of nicknames/pseudonyms are not always enough to make the poster anonymous as usernames are often used on other forums or webpages and are therefore traceable back to the poster again (NESH, 2018).

Another example is the article *“Incels online reframing sexual violence”* written by Carolyn Byerly where she claims that *“Mass murders, particularly shootings, have been on the rise over the past two decades, particularly in the United States; however, these have been mainly random, sporadic and mainly unrelated to each other before the incel phenomenon.”* (Byerly M., 2020). The assumption here is that the incel phenomenon has created a systematic mass murderers or at least that there has been an increase due to the existence of incels. Obviously, this statement is incredibly problematic, especially considering the sample size for this study is 70 news articles where many relate back to Elliot Rodger’s 2014 Isla Vista killings (Byerly M., 2020). The assumption found in this article can be seen as fearmongering, where it tries to imply that simply due to the



existence of incels that mass murders will be rising. It is important to consider that there have been mass murders that have happened where the perpetrator has been an incel like in the 2018 Toronto van attack. However, according to incel.wiki, the official incel Wikipedia they denounce such mass killings and try to remove any notion of calls to violence: *“As stated in many incels communities, the main policy of the respective admins is to delete any calls for murder or suicide, and to contact authorities if necessary.”*. The critiqued articles here contain the same pitfalls – and the consensus ends up being that all incels are toxic by nature and that there is no changing just that. Eysenbach and Till also recognize the importance in being familiar with a group when conducting internet research as finding that *“Among the concerns expressed was that often “the researcher isn’t familiar with newsgroup culture— problems akin to those occasionally experienced by anthropologists when they try to interpret the behaviour of cultures they really don’t understand.”* (Eysenbach & Till, 2001). This becomes more important when researching incels as their culture could be understood as obscure and hard to grasp if one is not familiar with internet culture beforehand. A lot of the language, pictures, and discussions incels use is primarily based on internet culture and is easy to misinterpret with no prior knowledge.

### **3.3 Non-negative attitudes towards incels in research**

Incels and the manosphere in general are topics that most people would have an opinion on. They relate to one of the most important dynamics of our everyday lives, namely the social relationship between men and women. By far one of the hardest research to find while writing this thesis has been research that holds a neutral understanding of incels. There are a few scattered positive articles and books on incels such as Lukas Castle’s *The Blackpill Theory: why incels are right & you are wrong* (Castle, 2019). One of Castle’s opening arguments is that *“Simply telling sexless men - incels - to “be better” just is not good enough. It simply does not make sense to treat this problem, which has unstudied psychological complexity, with his approach. We do not tell schizophrenics to “try harder”. We accept that they have a pathology and try to treat it clinically. We need to find an effective way to tackle a very complex issue, which we are only just beginning to collect information from. We also need to create a more useful rhetoric than the one currently used regarding incels.”* (Castle, 2019). The problem with Castle’s book is that it is never willing to criticize incels, and goes on to be a glorification of the problem. The “research” is void of sources on his claims like: *“Boys who do not develop preferred traits right away start to wonder how tall*

*they will become, when their muscles will grow, if and when they will experience their first kiss. As others start attaining these things, those who do not can develop these marginalised feelings. The feelings, in turn, can provoke considerable behavioural repercussions. [...] As incels fail to experience life's challenges as a form of confidence building, their serious problems begin,"* (Castle, 2019). Many parts of the book read as an incels attempt to defend incels and incel behaviour written by someone with no academic background as there are next to no sources with quite substantial claims about incels, the media and psychology.

Perhaps the most neutral research on incels is research related to data to find trends/migration in userbases and historical membership numbers of communities. *From Pick-Up Artists to Incels: A Data-Driven Sketch of the Manosphere* by Manoel Horta Ribeiro et. al. is one such study that looks at how the manosphere has evolved in the last decade, whether the manosphere has become more hateful/toxic over time and whether users migrate between them (Ribeiro, et al., 2020). They found that the manosphere has evolved into a diverse ecosystem of communities, however, groups like incels and MGTOW (Men going their own way) overshadow the growth of older communities such as Men's Rights Activists (Ribeiro, et al., 2020). They also find that incel communities that now have been removed such as on Reddit were much milder in how they expressed themselves, and that other incel communities such as incels.is or 4chan display a much more toxic and negative language (Ribeiro, et al., 2020).

Another neutral study on incels is conducted by Speckhard, Ellenberg, Morton and Ash. They seek out the incel forums to conduct a study based on 68 questions regarding violence, mental health, general questions about being an incel and demographic (Speckhard, Ellenberg, Morton, & Ash, 2021). The findings in this study is increasingly important with there being a lack of studies that hold a neutral viewpoint of incels throughout the study. The findings in the study are more interesting, where they find that most incels do not subscribe to the idea of violence and that they disagree with the murders conducted by the likes of Rodger and Minassian (Speckhard, Ellenberg, Morton, & Ash, 2021). The findings also show that 64,3% of incels suffer from substantial symptoms of depression, 59,6% of substantial symptoms of anxiety, 24,6% claim that they have strong symptoms of being on the autism spectrum and 47,8% claim that they have strong suicidal ideations. (Speckhard, Ellenberg, Morton, & Ash, 2021) Thus this becomes an important study to understand the mental state of incels, but also for understanding the differences of the research conducted on incels as this does not subscribe to the same idea of incels as e.g. Jaki, De Smedt, Gwóźdz, Panchal, Rossa and De Pauwwrote.

## 4 Methodology

There are many ways you could go in and research incels, however, I found that I wanted to understand the attitudes of the pre-existing research on incels. Plenty of research papers on the manosphere were written in between 2020 and 2021 and while looking for data for the initial plan of my thesis I noticed that many of them appeared negative towards incels from the title alone. I decided to focus on the attitudes found within the research on incels, whether it was truly negative as they appeared or not. The question was how to do it, and the method I landed on was a meta study of research on incels.

### 4.1 Meta study vs. meta-analysis

There are many different ways to conduct a meta study, but the primary ones that have been theorized are meta-analysis which is often used in the medical field to compare raw scientific data and putting it into perspective, often looking for statistical differences and enabling the creation of new statistics and databases on a specific subject (Mikolajewicz & Komarova, 2019). As this thesis is neither quantitative nor in the medical field, this approach will not be relevant. However, the qualitative meta study is defined as *“meta-study ‘refers to investigations of the results and process of previous research’. It specifically consists of three components: meta-data analysis, meta-method, and meta-theory»* (Timulak, 2014). The component that I have chosen as the most relevant for this thesis is meta-data analysis, Timulak formulates meta-data analysis as *“Meta-data analysis is an analysis of texts of primary studies. Once the data are determined [...] they are analysed using the analytic frame- work that would fit the research question. The researchers may draw on the whole variety of existing qualitative analysis strategies”* (Timulak, 2014). The reason for only using one component for this thesis being that the two other components look at the methodology and theoretical background of other articles, something that I deem to not be as relevant to look at as the text as a whole, I will be considering these parts of the articles that are to be analyzed, but they will not be the primary focus of this thesis. The benefit of this component is that it allows the usage of any existing qualitative analysis strategies, this allows me to choose the most prevalent analysis strategy for this thesis.

## 4.2 Search and selection of data

Nicholas Mikolajewicz and Svetlana V. Komarova explain in their article *Meta-Analytic Methodology for Basic Research: A Practical Guide* that there are two different types of review one could do in a meta-analysis being a systematic review and a rapid review (Mikolajewicz & Komarova, 2019). While this article relates to meta-analysis I deem it to be a relevant guide to create search criteria and choosing how to review data for selection. A rapid review being *“Rapid reviews are a suitable alternative to systematic approaches if reviewers prefer to get a general idea of the state of the field without an extensive time investment. Search strategies are constructed by increasing search specificity, thus reducing the number of irrelevant studies identified by the search at the expense of search comprehensiveness”* (Mikolajewicz & Komarova, 2019). The strength of a rapid review is its flexibility to adapt to the needs of the reviewer, and it includes certain shortcuts such as narrowing the search criteria, imposing date restrictions on the search, being able to conduct the review with a single reviewer and omitting expert consultation. While these shortcuts will limit the pool of studies from the search, it will expedite the process of the review. Its weaknesses is that it might exclude relevant research because it is not included in the search criteria and according to Mikolajewicz and Komarova it might introduce selection bias (Mikolajewicz & Komarova, 2019).

The systematic review according to Mikolajewicz and Mikolajewicz is *“Systematic reviews involve comprehensive search strategies that enable reviewers to identify all relevant studies on a defined topic [...] Meta-analytic methods then permit reviewers to quantitatively appraise and synthesize outcomes across studies to obtain information on statistical significance and relevance. Systematic reviews of basic research data have the potential of producing information-rich databases which allow extensive secondary analysis. To comprehensively examine the pool of available information, search criteria must be sensitive enough not to miss relevant studies”* (Mikolajewicz & Komarova, 2019). While this is a very beneficial method to create databases for quantitative research using figures and statistics and allowing for secondary research, its pitfalls being that it typically takes more than one analyzer and a comprehensive amount of time to fulfill.

I have chosen the rapid review method for this thesis, as I am writing as a single person and also wish to discuss the material within the research as opposed to creating statistics and database out of it. To do so I have chosen two search databases with certain criteria to find articles. These being Google Scholar and Oria (A university search engine for research articles, books etc.). Certain

search criteria were also added to exclude irrelevant articles, where the three primary criteria added was that the articles had to be from the time period between 2018-2021 and that they had to include incels in the title. Where a lot of research bases itself around the manosphere more broadly and only use incels as a subgroup of the manosphere, I purely want to look at how researchers' attitudes is towards incels and excluding the manosphere as a broad term is the best way to exclude these articles. The third criteria for the articles are that they had to be written in English, while English is not my native language it creates greater availability for readers to cite and read the articles presented in this study. This is also beneficial in the sense that translations will not be misinterpreted. Mikolajewicz and Komarova recognize three critical steps in the screening and selection of articles, and these are the three steps that I have chosen to follow for the selection of data in this thesis: *"The critical steps in screening and selection are (1) removing duplicates, (2) screening for relevant studies by title and abstract, and (3) inspecting full texts to ensure they fulfill the eligibility criteria."* (Mikolajewicz & Komarova, 2019). These steps help ensure that the articles chosen are suitable and beneficial to the study. The first step done was downloading articles that fulfilled the search criteria, then screening the articles abstracts to see which articles focused more specifically on incels and not the manosphere as a broader term. Then they were read fully to ensure that they were relevant towards the thesis.

### **4.3 How will negative attitudes be uncovered?**

After having shown the texts chosen to be in this thesis, I will be choosing parts of the texts to present. These parts have to include certain criteria – they have to include the usage of words such as incels, toxic, violent, hate, antifeminist or a similar combination of incel and a negative connotation. This will help sift out parts that are not relevant to this thesis. However, I will present the parts these words are included in as to provide context to their usage, to then break it down to uncover potential negative attitudes held by the researcher. To help uncover these potential negative biases I have chosen to use argument analysis. Argument analysis according to Bratberg is used to *"Map the way arguments are built"* (Bratberg, 2021). According to Bratberg argument analysis bases itself in the text or speeches logos, or the ability of the text or speech to convince with an argument that is fair and logical. In Bratberg's book he describes Stephen Toulmin's model for analysis that was meant for all types of arguments. Toulmin presents three core elements that need to be present for a statement to qualify as an argument. The first one is the claim, what we

wish for the audience to believe. The second is datum, this is the reason and background of the claim, a piece of evidence of why the audience should find the claim trustworthy. While the claim can be something that is debatable, the datum should be something that is trustworthy and that everyone can agree with. However, the datum can only justify the claim if the connection between claim and datum is built on certain premises that everybody can agree with (Bratberg, 2021). The third component is the warrant, where the two previous components have to be explicit in the argument, the warrant can be implicit. The warrant is common ground that elaborates and justifies why the datum is sufficient to accept the claim. The warrant functions as a connection between the claim and the datum. The usage of warrant will be one of the most important in identifying whether a writer has negative attitudes towards incels, or if there is sufficient warrant to make the claims that are being claimed. Sufficient warrant in this thesis will thus be something that most people can agree upon e.g. that violence towards women is a bad thing or that illegal activities should be stopped. The pitfall of many of the articles read in the literature review had the pitfall of trying to use incels are bad as common ground, without having any other proper warrant, for a more neutral reader that might not have a previous understanding it is not a given that incels are bad, especially if the datum is not connected properly to the claim. Using Toulmin's framework will allow breaking down arguments into three essential elements, whether these arguments are based off of logic or a common ground that everyone can agree upon is debatable.

Toulmin also have three extension terms in his model for argumentation, namely qualifier, rebuttal and backing (Bratberg, 2021). The qualifier is linked to the speakers connection between claim and the datum, due to the claim sometimes being uncertain. A qualifier can be added to the argument to understand the certainty of the speaker when making the claim, it can limit the universality of the warrant. It is made up of words such as "most", "usually" or "sometimes".

E.g. *"Incels are usually misogynists."*

It can take what started as a strong assertive argument to an argument that seems uncertain and without much hold (Bratberg, 2021).

Rebuttal is taking precautions when making an argument, its expecting that a counter argument will be made towards the claim. It can example be focusing on that the claim is only valid if certain criteria are met, knowing that there are counter arguments that can be made towards the claim is the key with rebuttal. The speaker will show that they are sure of the potential counter arguments, and it might make the claim seem more nuanced.

The backing on the other hand is relevant when the receivers of the argument can not be expected to accept the warrant. It is a way to give the warrant more certainty. When the speaker ensures that the warrant is accepted by giving it backing, the speaker will have a stronger connection between claim and datum (Bratberg, 2021).

So how will this help me uncover potential biases in arguments in existing literature on incels?

Well, using Toulmin's model to break down arguments into separate parts it will be easier to analyze them individually to see if there is sufficient warrant to be making claims such as "incels are a misogynistic group". The three main components of Toulmin's mode claim, datum and warrant are the terms that I will primarily use in the analyzation of the collected data. I will also use qualifier as it is a good way of understanding the certainty of the claims that are made in the existing literature on incels. Where breaking down the argument will allow for assessing the quality of the argument, it will also allow for a better understanding of the arguments presented.

#### **4.4 Relevance to human rights and scope**

As aforementioned in the literature review much of the current academic work related to incels take the position that incels are primarily a toxic woman-hating community, I see this as a great limitation to the current understanding of incels. This thesis thus seeks out to uncover these attitudes towards incels, to advise a different strategy towards researching incels and not assuming that they are toxic by default. In a sense, this thesis is a larger literature review – it seeks out to understand the shortcomings of the preexisting research on incels. Where most studies focus on whether incels are misogynistic, blackpilled, or outwards displays of hate or violence, I see the need for more studies to focus on the psychological profiles of incels, studies that seek to help as opposed to uncover negative attitudes.

In terms of human rights, the right to health includes the right to mental health, and the UN Office of the High Commissioner lists this on their website:

*"The modern public mental health approach emerged on the global scene at the end of the twentieth century. It contained a critical mass of new evidence on the importance of mental health and the effectiveness of integrated approaches."* (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner, 2021). According to them there are also two important messages on the public mental health approach, namely that there is no good health without mental health and that good mental health is much more than just the absence of a mental impairment. Relating this back to incels

Speckhard, Ellenberg, Morton, and Ash conducted a study on an unnamed incel forum, they put out a survey which 312 members answered, with regard to the psychological symptoms they were asked to rate the intensity of these symptoms on a scale from one to five. The answers that were included here was rated either at a four of five intensity. 64,3% of incels that answered the study said that they were experiencing depressive symptoms, 59,6% said they were experiencing symptoms of anxiety and 47,8% said they were experiencing suicidal ideations (Speckhard, Ellenberg, Morton, & Ash, 2021). Following up on this, the Human Rights Council has had an increasing amount of focus on mental health in the last years, this shows when in 2016 73 nations issued a joint statement: *“The right to mental health is a subject of ever-increasing importance at the Human Rights Council. In March 2016, **73 States issued a joint statement** to highlight the centrality of mental health for the full realization of the right to health. It highlighted the importance of adopting a human rights perspective to ensure the respect for the inherent dignity of all human beings and the full enjoyment of human rights without discrimination.»*. With as many as 64% of incels showing depressive symptoms, and mental health concerns being focused more throughout the world, I believe that this thesis fits human rights perfectly in the sense that there is quite a large mental health concern when it comes to incels. At the same time incels consider themselves a marginalized group according to Ging (Ging, Alphas, Betas, and Incels: Theorizing the Masculinities of the Manosphere, 2019), however, she states that she struggles to take their claim of marginalization seriously where I believe it makes it further relevant to human rights. Seeing that if incels are a marginalized group, having potentially negative research papers written about them is not an ethical way of dealing with the claim. In combination with the mental health struggles of incels, which might worsen with the claims of marginalization I see this as a great fit for human rights.

## 4.5 Limitations

While I am a male in my mid-twenties and in that sense fit into the incel demographic, I am leaning far left on the political spectrum. I see myself as a feminist and I do definitely subscribe to feminist ideas. This is in some ways a limitation to keeping the thesis as neutral



as possible, while I wish to understand the negative attitudes on incels in research, I do not necessarily possess purely positive attitudes towards incels myself as a feminist. With this said, I have done my best to remove my own ideas and understanding of incels when reading and analyzing the articles.

Other limitations to the study are that studies on incels are primarily looking at their online presence, there are two factors to this. The first factor being that incels as a community is based online, there is no physical place where incels gather, so the research bases itself around what happens within the echo chamber that is the incel community, many incels also would prefer to stay anonymous as they believe that it is shameful to be considered an incel (Castle, 2019). The second factor is that most of the research on incels has been conducted in the years where the world has been mid pandemic, this has caused that a lot of research has now been based on online communities as reaching out to a community and asking for interviews have been put on pause due to the pandemic. I believe that research on incels might have a different outlook if they were to interview them in person, however, at the same time that is just my belief.

## 5 Lexicology

Having a chapter on lexicology of the terms that are being used by incels and thus also used by the authors researching incels is important to understand the different terms that will appear multiple times within this thesis. For words that primarily pertain to incels the incel wiki will be used as using incels own explanation of the words and their usage would be the most natural way of describing them, allowing them to fall within the context of how an incel would use the term as opposed to how a researcher has understood the way these terms are being used.

Misogyny is one of the terms most frequently used within this thesis as incels are frequently being accused of being misogynist, Samantha Wrisley explains misogyny quite simply: *“The word misogyny has since its earliest recording in 1656 meant ‘hate or contempt for women.’ The etymology of misogyny is straightforward: In Greek, miso means ‘hatred,’ and gune means ‘woman.’ A misogynist is a woman-hater.”* (Wrisley, 2021). Another phenomena that is linked to misogyny that also will appear in some of the quotes chosen for the data material is networked misogyny, Banet-Weiser and Miltner explain networked misogyny as a phenomena that appeared after #MasculinitySoFragile started trending on twitter and explain networked misogyny as violence and hostility towards women in online environments (Banet-Weiser & Miltner, 2015).

Incels as a term is also described on the incel wiki, where it is primarily being listed as a condition. This condition entails a certain kind of non-sexuality – according to the wiki incels are predominantly male sometimes called malecels, however, female involuntary celibates also exist which are called femcels. According to the incel wiki they distance themselves from the medias’ opinion on incels, where they describe themselves as neither being a political movement nor a community or subculture as incels do not share a belief system. (Incels.wiki, 2021). On the wiki it is claimed that the term incels mean different things to different people, where academics and self-identified incels the term is being used for someone who is involuntary celibate – however, for the normies or the mainstream communities the term is often used to refer to a hateful misogynistic person who is part of a misogynistic community. They claim that this often leads to normies to believe that incels use the term as an outward display of hate towards women, where incels claim to use the term in a more self-deprecating manner. (Incels.wiki, 2021). They claim that the life on an incel is plagued by an attempt to cope with the sexual frustrations that they face, whereas this sexual frustration is being exaggerated by a highly sexual social and mainstream media. On the

wiki they also see it important to distinguish between a one-night stand or seeing a prostitute as not being the solution to being an incel – as they wish for genuine companionship and a partner they can be with. The wiki also adds that the life of an incel is miserable and that many incels are socially disconnected where isolation and sexlessness takes over as the primary focus of incels (Incels.wiki, 2021). The incel wiki also states that contrary to popular belief incels are not solely white men, but have a varied demographic of men that are in their early to late 20s (Incels.wiki, 2021).

Chad is a word frequently used by incels to describe men who are seen as superior in terms of looks, as the incel.wiki describe a Chad he is tall, good looking, muscular, wealthy or has an otherwise high status. He tends to have intimidating masculine features such as pronounced cheekbones, square jaw and a thick neck. A Chad is not necessarily what incels strive to be, and being a Chad is not necessarily negative in the eyes of incels as they explain on the wiki that he does not “cockblock” other men (Incels.wiki, 2020).

A Stacy on the other hand functions as the female counterpart to Chad where they claim that she is obsessed with jewelry, makeup and clothes. They also claim that she is an “entitled whore” who is rich on daddy’s funds. In other words, a Stacy has the same features as a Chad where she is typically good looking and wealthy. However, she has more negative connotations added towards her such as being dumb, a whore and that she will tease guys just for the attention. (Incels.wiki, 2020)

A normie is another word that is frequently used by incels, a normie is the average person. Someone with average looks, that is not too wealthy, they have an average social life and they do have sex. A normie is what incels would categorize as a beta male or female where Chad and Stacys fill the role of being the alphas of each gender. (Incels.wiki, 2021)

The blackpill is the most important term that incel use, as it describes the philosophy (or ideology) that most incels believe in. According to incels the blackpill has emerged from the redpill movement where accepting the harsh reality that society see men as disposable. The blackpill on the other hand was according to the incel wiki first used in a comment on a blog post in 2011 where user wrote *“We need to talk about taking the ‘black pill’, meaning to reconcile that there*

*are no personal solutions to systemic problems – which can only resolve over evolutionary time. And any solution will very much entail steep trade-offs, in that males can't have their cake and eat it too – a prosperous population of deferred ecological pressures (like we currently enjoy), without an expectation that this prosperity will increase the mating latitude of females (dramatically perturbing the breeding population, to the point of near evolutionary instability). One will always follow the other, as male consensus on these matters is practically impossible in terms of inter-sexual competition (as opposed to the broad accord females enjoy through an abundant wealth of sexual opportunities, courtesy of their reproductively limiting function).*" (Dalrock, 2011). Breaking this statement down it is essentially saying that female desire is inflexible and that human psychology when it comes to attractiveness is mostly based on genetics (Incels.wiki, 2021). Incels blame their inability to find a partner on the blackpill philosophy – they can not find a partner based on their genetics and bad looks as omega males – the lowest on the hierarchy in terms of wealth, sex and looks (Incels.wiki, 2021). Incels have solutions that they propose to rid society of the problems they see with genetics being the most important factor in finding a partner and the wiki lists some of solutions as: Forced monogamy and increased religion, socially arranged or enforced monogamy, lowering women's status in society. Where some incels go as far as to promote what they call "incelicide" – in other words promoting the mass killings of incels as they believe that the only solution to the black pill is to remove incels from existence. They believe that finding a partner based on genetics is so deeply ingrained within society that it would be impossible without at the same time removing incels from society. (Incels.wiki, 2021)

Femoid is the last term that feels relevant to include in the lexicology, according to the incel wiki a femoid is a derogatory term used within the incel community for a woman (Incels.wiki, 2021). Femoid stems from the contraction of the words female and android (robot) – they use this term to show the lack of feelings they believe that women possess. Sometimes femoid is shortened to foid. According to the wiki femoids often engage in snarky behaviour and when engaging with incels they will typically bully or ignore them unless they were to profit off of the interaction (Incels.wiki, 2021). The incel wiki also claim that women are childish in comparison to men and write: *"Men are frequently accused of childishness, when in truth it is women who are more childlike. Girls mature faster than boys, but this simply means they arrest in their development prematurely compared to men, not that they reach the same level of maturity earlier. For example, well into their 20s, women look exactly like teenage boys, but with boobs and long hair. Women*

*also cry on average just as much as young teens and they expect things being done for them and their minds being read, a passivity that has been noted by many throughout history. Women also generally evade any accountability and few people like to hold them accountable either because of how cute they look, resulting in them becoming hopelessly solipsistic, meaning they live in their own world.*" (Incels.wiki, 2021). However while the original statements found within the wiki seem to hold a predominately negative view on women, they also claim that women are great when in a relationship and that they are needed to have love and affection (Incels.wiki, 2021). One can see this as incels giving woman only one positive attribute, essentially viewing them as an object only used for love and compassion when in a relationship – as opposed to when they are not in one they are described as sex crazed and as purely focused on genetics. The wiki claims that women are hardwired to be hypergamous and that their sole interest is to date/marry someone above them relative to social status and attractiveness. Incels have two other derogatory terms used for women that are quite frequent in their jargon, namely Becky and roastie. A Becky is according to the wiki an average young woman that is inferior to a Stacy both in looks and social status, despite the fact incels claim that a Becky will still ignore 80% of men based off of their genetics. However, a Becky's ultimate goal is not to date Chad like unlike a Stacy but is rather to marry a normie – someone with average looks and social status like themselves. Despite this, a Becky is still not someone that would choose an incel as incels are lower on the social hierarchy than a normie viewing themselves as omega males (Incels.wiki, 2021). A roastie on the other hand is the ultimate derogatory term for a woman, a roastie is used to describe a woman incels see as a slut, a woman with a loose labia. The wiki claims that *"The reason for the term "roastie" is that after a woman has had a large number of sexual partners, her labia begins to become wider and longer, eventually resembling the inside of an Arby's roast beef sandwich."* (Incels.wiki, 2021). However, this just displays incels poor understanding of how the female body works, as doctors have reiterated multiple times that the female labia does not change due to having multiple sex partners or having sex in general (Cauterucci, 2016).

## 6 Presentation of data

The plan for this chapter is to break down the arguments selected using Toulmin's method of argument analysis. Starting with identifying the claim of the selected quotes, then identifying the datum and lastly the warrant. Some of the articles also have claims that have backing, rebuttal and a qualifier attached to them, and for the articles that do this will be identified as well. Some quotes will be split into multiple part as the claim might be in a different section than the datum or warrant as the material is gathered from longer research papers. Some of the quotes also have multiple claims within it, with quite differing claims – I will talk about these as different claims and try to identify the connected datum and warrant, where in some cases the warrant and datum might be the same for the different claims. Splitting this section into three parts felt logical as most of the research papers on incels target one of these categories: misogyny, violence or mental health. Typically, the articles that talk about misogyny will not talk about the mental health state of incels. There is some intertwined discourse between misogyny and violence as some authors speak of misogyny as online violence towards women, where other authors keep strictly to a more physical violence threat posed by incels. However, despite the fact that these subjects at times are intertwined, I have chosen to separate them as the articles typically roots themselves in one of the two categories. The data collected here was as mentioned collected through a rapid review, having searched incels in conjunction with a connected word such as antifeminist, toxic, misogynistic, violent or mental health. This resulted in finding a good chunk of different literature, however, much of the literature found despite adding different connecting words with incels had the same general understanding of incels.

### 6.1 Misogyny

Misogyny is one of the most important chapters when it comes to incels, most of the studies that revolve around incels typically either have misogyny in the title alongside incels or it is a core part of the article. Like stated in the introduction to this chapter, the articles about incels and misogyny primarily bases itself around incel misogyny in combination with violence or comparing the misogyny found in the incel community with other groups that can be categorized as misogynistic such as MRA (Men's rights activists), PUA (Pick-up artists) and the porn industry. Thus, it has been important to separate these groups from incels when writing this chapter as the authors sometimes interchange these groups to show similarities.

*“The reason why incels have such a negative attitude towards women is the perceived female “degeneracy”, i.e., an exclusive interest in (sex with) attractive men, who are also a target of incel hatred. Women are portrayed as being shallow, immoral, promiscuous, and responsible for the incels’ isolation. Users post pictures of women taken from the news and social media, upon which the women’s physical traits are derided, especially obesity (“I loathe fat women. Bunch of useless fucking hogs”). The users believe that men generally “date down”, while women are not willing to do so.” (Jaki, et al., 2019)*

This quote from Jaki et al. has multiple claims, despite the fact that it claims multiple things it shares the same datum and warrant. It first claims that the reason incels have a negative attitude towards women is their perception of women’s sexual life. It also claims that attractive men are the target of the incel’s hate. The next thing it claims is that women are being portrayed in a negative manner by incels and that women are the ones responsible for the incel condition. The datum that Jaki et al. shares is that users on incel forums are posting pictures of women from social media and them commending on their physical traits, especially when it comes to their weight. The final sentence introduces a new claim, and at the same time it introduces datum. That is that the users of the forum believe that men date down without providing any additional datum other than the claim. The warrant found in the claim is an implicit one, the warrant is that posting pictures of women to then comment on their physical appearance is something a misogynist would do. There are no qualifiers found in the argument made by Jaki et al. This can be understood as that the author is claiming this with absolute certainty and with certainty that the claim has enough warrant and is strongly backed enough from the datum to not include a qualifier.

The claim, datum and warrant found in Jaki et. al is not necessarily a strong one, despite the fact that the authors forward the claim with quite a lot of confidence in it, there is not necessarily enough datum or warrant to be making this claim. If their statements on incels is true, it assumes that the receiver of the claim has an inherent negative perception of incels to agree with the statement. If a receiver of the claim had a neutral understanding of incels, they might not be as prone to agree with the claim being made, however, if there were more warrant and datum backing up the statement a neutral receiver might be more prone to accepting the statement made about incels. It is also at the same time quite a “messy” statement, claiming multiple things, but reusing the same warrant and datum for most of the claims.

The next paragraph after this one in Jaki et al. reads:

*“Nevertheless, not all users hate all women. A discussion thread designed as a poll asks whether the forum users hate all women and shows that opinions are mixed: about 55% (33x) answer positively, while about 45% (28x) answer negatively (“No, I like my mom and grandma”).” (Jaki, et al., 2019)*

Here we find the qualifier that was missing from the last claim, using “not all” functions as a qualifier coming quite a bit after the original claims. Even though claiming that incels, in general have a negative attitude towards women, they here decide to somewhat retract the original statement by adding another piece of information. Using the qualifier in such a way takes the original claim from a quite aggressive claim to feeling like a softer blow (Bratberg, 2021). In some ways it feels like the feelings of the author spill out a bit in the original claim, it seems like the perception that they hold of incels is largely negative, where they later decided to attempt to conceal this perception by adding the statistic of not all incels hating women. The stranger thing is that when writing about the poll the answers reads that they like their mom and grandma, however the footnotes listed states that *“As self-reported comments in the poll suggest, 45% hate only some women, or no women at all.”* (Jaki, et al., 2019). Where the original presentation of data gives off the indication that they like their family members, the footnote adds the information that they might not dislike any women at all. To a certain extent it feels like this information is being withheld.

*“Incels are not only making claims about emerging technologies, but they are also making claims about how women act and how they should be treated. Regardless of how women used emerging technologies, incels situated them as repulsive, subhu- man, and/or Machiavellian. Indeed, incels situate these technologies as revealing women’s base nature as they enable sexual practices that are unrestrained by male interests, which threatens the social order by creating an ever-increasing number of incels. Incels essentializing discourse on masculinity is employed to both protect and justify misogyny in virtual spaces and beyond. Here, incels are participants in a larger environment of online misogyny, which endorses gender-based hatred while encouraging objectification , harassment, humiliation, and manipulation of women. Incels might blame emerging technologies for the incelldom, but their anger is firmly levied against women. Despite “taking the black pill” and accepting that “it’s over,” this anger indicates that incels cannot reconcile the dependence of their*



*masculine identity on heterosexual sex with their view that women are inferior.”* (Preston, Halpin, & Maguire, 2021)

Preston, Halpin and Maguire puts forwards a couple of claims within the quote – the first one being that incels are claiming that modern emerging technologies (e.g. Tinder and other dating apps) are bad, but also that incels are making claims about how women should act and be treated. They follow the original claim of incels disliking emerging dating technology that incels find the way that women use these technologies as repulsive and enable unnatural sexual practices. That they threaten the social order and thus creating more incels. The datum that is being presented for these claims are that the researchers did a systematic study of incels as an online community. However, there are problems with the datum – while they show how they conducted the study there is not a presentation of data present in the article, while Preston, Halpin and Maguire do include some comments from incel forums – they are the opinion of one user. E.g.:

*“Every girl wants Chad. And chads are like 1/10,000 [of the men in the world]. Each of us need to hit on 10,000 girls before we get a match. You can literally post the secret to creating a nuclear bomb, how to be invisible, or how to make a million dollars in a day, but roasties would rather watch Chad’s face [appear on their social media feeds] then any of that.”* (Preston, Halpin, & Maguire, 2021)

This hurts the warrant as well, as it is hard to accept the data as true. While one user might hold this opinion on dating apps – it is not necessary that a majority of the users agrees with this opinion. In combination with not including any qualifiers or rebuttals within their claim it makes the claim less digestible for the reader. The claims that come forth within the quote are not balanced either, it is not considering opposing views or discussions. Their method of analyzation of these findings is not necessarily strengthening their argument on incels either – where they have chosen analytic abduction which focuses on surprising findings. While it is easy to agree that the findings should not be uninteresting, they should neither be there as a “shock factor” to the reader. It makes it presented in such a way that incels will appear negative, perhaps showing the authors’ feelings about incels. It is of course important to show findings that are important to drive your argument forwards, but essentially forcing these arguments to existence is not healthy research. The goal of Preston, Halpin and Maguire is to see whether incels’ view on technology reinforces an essentialist view on gender – however if the findings are cherrypicked it will seem

that incels have a negative view on emerging dating technologies. This is not to say that these opinions are not held by incels – but when the datum is limited to showing a single quote from one user it is not telling of the story and hurts the claim that is being made. However, there is an understanding that showing multiple quotes directly off the website would make the findings easily identifiable. There should, however, be better ways to drive the claim to legitimacy by using different methods of data collection that does not make the findings so identifiable. For instance, in Jaki et al. where the method of data collection is developing a program in Python to scour the forums for the frequency of words and putting them together (Jaki, et al., 2019). The pitfall of Jaki et al. on the other hand related more to stating frequencies and not showing them. The reader of Preston, Halpin and Maguire is essentially left with a choice of either believing that there is evidence based off of the one quote or refuting the one quote and saying that there is not enough warrant to believe in the claim. While incels might be misogynistic and hold negative views on both women and dating apps – there should be a better way of driving that claim forward. When the reader can refuse to believe the claim on the basis on one comment from one user of a forum, it also allows the reader to make assumptions off the bias of the authors. Especially when starting off with the following quote: *“This article contributes to this literature by demonstrating how incels buttress the masculine order with a form of gendered technological determinism, which lays blame for their inability to establish sexual relationships on the impact that emerging technologies have on gender relations.”* (Preston, Halpin, & Maguire, 2021). As this quote appears in the introduction of the article, it creates the image that the authors were already sure of the result before looking at the forums. The result seems predetermined, and it undermines the coming claims about incel opinions on social media which again, they might not be wrong in incels having a negative outlook on social media.

*“Incels’ incessant misogyny and fixation on women, has both removed women’s individuality as human beings, but also created ‘the woman’ as an overarching sacred object charged up with collective energies. As the woman is ‘made sacred’ through ritual focus, she receives a prominent status within the collective consciousness and through a cultivation of narrative myths and storytelling, properties and attributes are assigned to her.”* (Rummelhoff, 2020)

Rummelhoff in her master thesis on incels makes two claims, the first that incels show incessant misogyny and a fixation on women, where the personality and individuality of women is not something that incels see any more. The second claim is that the woman has become an object in a sense, where incels share stories and myths about this object. This is an argument where the claim is clear, however, the datum and warrant are not. There are two strong claims being presented by Rummelhoff, where one would assume that the warrant assumes that it is common ground that incels are misogynistic. The datum to back up the claim is not to be found in this quote and is hard to find in the rest of the paragraph.

Two sentences later, Rummelhoff makes another claim:

*“As incels share their own tales about how women are “slave masters” and all non-incel men are brainwashed cucks to obey them, their reality becomes one of power, oppression and victimhood.”*  
(Rummelhoff, 2020)

Rummelhoff here makes another claim with no datum, the claim is again a quite strong one where it generalizes incels to say that they see women as slave masters, and that non-incel men or normies are brainwashed cucks (cuckholds). This assumes the same warrant that was described in the last claim. Considering the datum is the “truth” on which the claim is built, the reason for making the claim in the first place, it is quite strange that these claims are not followed by datum. It makes the arguments fall apart, however, while the datum typically is explicit – it might be implicit in these arguments. Rummelhoff wrote her thesis on the basis of incels.co and one could assume that the datum implicitly carries over to these claims from the basis of earlier discussed datum. However, this still weakens the claim as if the datum is not presented alongside it the argument still falls apart to a certain degree even if it is supposed to be implicit. Even if the datum was present in or after the claims, the warrant still assumes that the receiver of the argument holds a pre-existing view that incels are misogynistic to create a common ground of understanding between Rummelhoff and the reader. This creates the notion that Rummelhoff has a negative view of incels, however, she concludes her thesis with the following claim:

*“Instead of approaching the issue of incels as young men being drawn towards misogyny, they are young men being drawn towards other young men with whom they are able to create something shared, and misogyny happens to be a part of it. What is shared is less important than the collective action of sharing.”* (Rummelhoff, 2020)

The claim here can be read in different ways, in one sense Rummelhoff is claiming that these men are not being drawn to the misogynistic part of being an incel, but rather that they are being drawn to something that is shared, a community where hatred of women is a part of that community that creates a sense of belonging. However, the claim still reads as that incels as a group are still misogynistic. It might be wrong to call this quote a claim, as it nearly functions as a qualifier for the two other claims being made. It might not strengthen the two initial claims, but it does function to make Rummelhoff seem more nuanced and balanced in her understanding of incels. Where the initial claims made it seem that Rummelhoff herself had a negative attitude towards incels, the same way she described them having a negative attitude towards women, this qualifier or claim gives her original claims more validity in a sense where the author does not seem biased (Bratberg, 2021).

*“It is difficult to take beta male claims to subordinated and marginalized masculinity seriously. Their extreme expressions of misogyny and racism and frequent engagement in hacking and doxing are clearly indicative of a desire to establish male hegemony in the online spaces they inhabit, even if they may lack such claims to power in off-line contexts.”* (Ging, Alphas, Betas, and Incels: Theorizing the Masculinities of the Manosphere, 2019)

Ging’s Alphas, Betas, and Incels was one of the main motivators for this thesis, the article by Ging is primarily theorizing the different masculinities found within the manosphere. However, that does not stop Ging from making a good few claims about the communities she is theorizing. It is important to note that while Ging in this quote writes about betas, she interchanges between calling incels betas and vice versa in her text as incels used to often refer to themselves as beta males, where they have since moved on to calling themselves omega males (the lowest in the hierarchy) (Incels.wiki, 2021). Ging opens this quote with a claim of incels (or beta males) claiming that they are being marginalized, then proceeding to claim that they are frequently expressing extreme misogyny and racism and frequently engage in hacking. Ending with a last claim that they lack power in offline contexts. Ging’s claim is quite similar to Rummelhoff’s claim in the sense that there is no identifiable datum to back up her claims and that the warrant assumes that the reader shares a common ground where incels are both misogynistic. Despite the fact that the datum is not repeated along with this claim, the datum comes quite a few pages earlier than this claim. Where Ging writes:

*“Originating mainly but not exclusively from the geek and gamer category, strategies include the mass filing of fake rape reports, hacking women’s websites and Wikipedia pages, doxing (retrieval and online broadcasting of personally identifiable information), distributed denial of service attacks (attempts to incapacitate an online service by swarming it with traffic from multiple sources), using graphic porn as a weapon against women, and manipulating images. Cum tributes, known as “tribs,” involve videoing the act of ejaculating on the photos of women’s faces and uploading the video, often without consent.” (Ging, Alphas, Betas, and Incels: Theorizing the Masculinities of the Manosphere, 2019)*

This seems to fit the best as the datum for the previous claim, despite the fact that Ging is here focusing on the geek and gamer category, not sure whether she includes incels into these categories or if incels are one of the “not exclusively” groups mentioned in the datum. This datum also to a certain degree changes the warrant, as hacking and doxing are illegal activities and hold much stronger common ground that being included in these activities are wrong. However, this part mainly focuses on the geek and gamer group and whether incels are included in this is unsure. One of the main problems with Ging’s article is the interchanging of terms for the different groups, this weakens the arguments being presented as the reader could get unsure which of the groups the claim is about, at the same time it weakens the datum for the same reason. The warrant is also weakened in a sense due to the uncertainty of the specifics. However, unlike Rummelhoff who had a redeeming qualifier of neutrality, this is not to be found in Ging’s article. Where Ging’s opinion on incels seem wholly negative – where she struggles to take these groups claim of marginalization and subordination seriously and that they are incessantly misogynistic and racist. At the same time, if Ging did not interchange the groups that she is theorizing throughout her article it might have strengthened the claims that she is making greatly. It would have functioned as an efficient rebuttal from Toulmin’s model (Bratberg, 2021), where this counter argument against the claim might not have existed.

*“While most incels are not violent and do not advocate for women to be stripped of their rights, few would dissent from Rodger’s misogynistic portrayal of women as shallow, stupid, callous and untrustworthy, skilled only in the art of humiliating decent, gentlemanly men. Among incels women are frequently reviled in dehumanizing terminology as “femoids”, “cunts”, “holes”, “roasties”, “tramps”, “cum dumpsters”, “hogs”, and “bitches”. Some incels fantasize over the thought of inflicting a terrible punishment on women for their perceived sins. Nearly all agree that*

*a fate worse than not being able to have sex with women is being subject to their control. Indeed, “Cucks” are viewed in a wholly negative light.” (Cottee, 2020)*

Cottee in this quote makes two claims – the first being that most incels do not subscribe to the idea of stripping women of their rights like it is being claimed in other similar articles – however, there is no datum provided to support this claim. The warrant being that incels are a large group, and assuming that a vocal minority speaks for the entire group would be incorrect. In this sense there is strong warrant to make the claim – but with no present datum it is hard to accept the claim without any further datum provided towards it. There is also a qualifier present in this claim when Cottee says that “most” incels are not violent and do not advocate for women to be stripped of their rights. This actually strengthens the claim despite the fact that there is no datum provided, as he acknowledges that there is a part of incels that do display outward violence and support the restriction of women’s rights – but the majority does not. The second claim that Cottee makes is that most Incels would agree with Elliot Rodger’s portrayal of women, which is: *“I concluded that women are flawed. There is something mentally wrong with the way their brains are wired, as if they haven’t evolved from animal-like thinking. They are incapable of reason or thinking rationally. They are like animals, completely controlled by their primal, depraved emotions and impulses. That is why they are attracted to barbaric, wild, beast-like men. They are beasts themselves. Beasts should not be able to have any rights in a civilized society.”* (Cottee, 2020). The datum provided for making the claim that incels agree with Rodger’s line of thinking is not present in a sense, where Cottee adds how women are talked about within the incel community – there are no sources indicating that this is actually the truth. However, when writing the lexicology part on femoids the way that the Incel Wiki described women was much similar to how Cottee describes incels description of women on the forums (Incels.wiki, 2021). The datum not being present immediately for the reader is detrimental to the claim however, when not listing any datum or source material that this claim is taken from in the article it creates an expectancy for the reader to either have immediate knowledge of the incel community and the way that they operate within the in-group, or it assumes that the reader will accept the claim based off of warrant and face value. One of the issues with forwarding claims such as these in regards to incels is that incels are a relatively unknown group to the vast majority of the public. Thus, either assuming that the reader of the claim is familiar to incels and how they operate is not really feasible – it weakens the readers understanding of the claim and the warrant if they are not familiar with incels. Here too it is important to note that Cottee uses a qualifier, where he says “few would dissent”, again using the

qualifier as a rebuttal of sorts due to the fact that he does not claim that all incels subscribe to the same idea of misogyny that Elliot Rodger did – but that most incels do. However, again there is the problem of verifying this information through datum.

*“Incels attribute their lack of success in developing sexual relationships with women to biological determinism, believing that women solely choose men who are physically attractive and that some men, such as incels, are thus genetically predetermined to never find a mate. Self-described incels are allegedly ‘victims’ of this social dynamic and increasingly blame women’s agency, escalating into violent misogyny where women are frequently targets. This process is referred to as embracing the ‘black pill’ ideology in the incel community.” (Leidig, 2021)*

Leidig’s article as a whole is about how terrorism studies miss the mark when it comes to incels, where this quote is taken from the “Understanding incels”-chapter, Leidig open with a claim that incels are doomed not to find a partner as genetically they are inferior, as women only date men who are physically attractive. She follows this with another claim that self-described incels claim victimhood because of this social dynamic and that this escalates into violent misogyny. Leidig’s quote shares many of the problem of the aforementioned studies where it does not follow up with any datum for the claim. Despite the fact that the claim is being made quite early on in the article, I struggle to find any datum to back up her claims, neither indirectly in terms of sources or first-hand data. Leidig’s claims are also some of the stronger claims that I have included, due to the fact that she claims that incels seeing themselves as victims of the fact that women go for physical attractiveness leads to violent misogyny. If one were to reach, one could assume that Leidig has enough proof of expertise through secondary sources listed later in the article, however, not listing the datum existing on the claim that is being made is detrimental to the quality of the claim – for one it assumes that the reader of the claim will either A) Continue the search for the datum themselves or B) Accept the claim solely on the terms of the warrant. This brings us over to the next question – what is the warrant to accept both the claim and “proof of expertise” datum that is being presented? Frankly, it is hard to find – if there is secondary datum which is the assumption due to the proof of expertise, it does not present immediate warrant to the reader either. Leidig does not particularly give any good reason for the reader to agree with her claim as there is placed a certain expectancy for the reader to look for datum and warrant on the outside by themselves or

that they accept the claim at face value, where the warrant could be interpreted as that violent misogyny is bad, which it is of course – however when given no datum to the fact that incels align with violent misogynists it weakens the warrant further. The main reason one could have for taking Leidig’s claim at face value is that one already holds the opinion that incels are bad. It seems that Leidig is writing from a standpoint where she has a negative opinion about incels, thus feeling that she needs to add no additional datum to the statement.

## 6.2 Violence

It is important to note before starting this chapter that a lot of the claims made by the different authors in this part share both the same datum and warrant. Namely the 2014 Isla Vista killings perpetrated by Elliot Rodger and the 2018 Toronto van attack perpetrated by Alek Minassian. The warrant is difenetically there, due to the fact that there are clear common ground for accepting that killing is wrong. The datum is primarily these two cases however, where there is dispute is whether the perpetrators of these attacks can be categorized as incels.

“To date, violence committed by males calling themselves incels or in sympathy with incel ideology has claimed the lives of nearly 50 victims. Although the half dozen or so incidents that account for this death toll reveal little-to-no coordination among the perpetrators, the homicidal intent that underpins this movement is undeniable, averaging almost eight fatalities per incident.” (Hoffman, Ware, & Shapiro, 2020)

Hoffman, Ware and Shapiro make the claim that the incel ideology has claimed the lives of nearly fifty victims. They do not list the datum of what these incidents are, but it is safe to assume that the main ones that they are referring to are the Isle Vista killings and the Toronto van attack. The warrant is that killing is wrong, especially on the basis of incel extremism as many of these attacks have seemed to target women in specific. Hoffman, Ware and Shapiro make another claim in this quote, the claim that the homicidal intent of incels is undeniable. This is the claim that should draw the most focus because the datum is not necessarily sufficient to make such a claim. If we take the Toronto van attack as an example it was revealed in 2020 that Alek Minassian might not have been motivated by incel extremism, but by fear of a new job and a stressful life (Caset, 2020). Where Minassian originally explained to police in an interview that the attacks were retribution



for years of rejection from women, he later changed his explanation of motive for the killings (Caset, 2020). The motive explained by Minassian now was that he was experiencing extreme anxiety over starting a new job and that he wanted people to believe that he was following a cause rather than murdering people over extreme anxiety (Caset, 2020). This in itself is also of course debatable as there is not an agreement in place from experts on the case, where some agree with Minassian's new explanation for the attacks, others believe that Minassian was obsessed with Elliot Rodger and was actively trying to target women during the attack (Caset, 2020). Despite the fact this datum weakens the original claim by Hoffman, Ware and Shapiro to an extent as Minassian's attack was the most lethal attack perpetrated by incels. Another important thing to note is that the incel community is growing rapidly (Papadamou, et al., 2020), it is a controversial claim to make that the group is inherently violent when considering the growth and size of the incel community. Essentially one could compare it to saying that Americans are a violent people due to armed violence happening in the United States. This is of course not to say that this is the case but claiming that the incel community as a whole have an undeniable homicidal intent is pretty extreme. The original claim in the quote from Hoffman, Ware and Shapiro has a qualifier however, that is that it separates self-proclaimed incels and others that have been motivated by incel ideology – this qualifier does not particularly change their claim but makes an important separation between the two groups. Many of the attacks that are considered to lead back to the incel community are not made by people who have proclaimed themselves incels or have talked about being an incel in general. It is rather that they have explained that the motives behind the attacks are rejection from women or similar. One could argue that Alek Minassian belongs in this category, however, Minassian posted on social media before the attack that the incel uprising was about to begin – essentially leading with the Toronto van attack being the start of this uprising (Caset, 2020). Hoffman, Ware and Shapiro also makes another claim where they draw parallels between jihadists and incels:

*“Secondly, like jihadists, violent incels have developed a culture of martyrdom, in which past murderers are venerated as heroes to admiring future generations. The community's most important martyr, Elliot Rodger, is hailed as a hero on incel forums—his description of himself as a “supreme gentleman” has become an oft-repeated mantra among incels, as Alek Minassian's Facebook post attests.”* (Hoffman, Ware, & Shapiro, 2020)

This is a common theme in a lot of the studies relating to violence and incels, claiming that incels see the perpetrators of the attacks as martyrs. The datum that Hoffman, Ware and Shapiro uses is

the post of Alek Minassian before the Toronto van attacks where he praises Elliot Rodger as the supreme gentleman, a nickname that Elliot Rodger coined for himself. The warrant for this claim can be identified that praising killers for their actions is wrong, again something that is very hard to disagree with. However, as explained earlier is that what weakens the datum of this claim is that Alek Minassian during the trial changed his explanation – where he thought that killing for a cause would seem more noble than killing due to extreme anxiety (Caset, 2020). The important thing to note here is that Hoffman, Ware and Shapiro’s article was written prior to this new information coming out – but making a claim based on insufficient datum is not exactly strengthening the claim. It could seem like they were jumping the gun making this claim when not all information was present yet.

The next quote here by Hoffman, Ware and Shapiro however focuses on the same thing as the last quote – but they are not focusing on Minassian and his fascination with Elliot Rodger, but rather the broader incel community’s opinion on the attackers.

*“Perpetrators of incel violence are often widely praised in forums after these violent incidents and heralded as “saints” and “heroes.” On other occasions, particularly when planned assaults have not gone according to plan, these failures are ridiculed for their low death tolls—the last straw in an apparently pathetic incel’s miserable life. For instance, in one incels.co thread commemorating the one-year anniversary of the attack committed by “St. Yogacel”—Scott Beierle—in Tallahassee, commenters varied in their responses to the murders. One poster praised Beierle, celebrating “a true gentleman and hero;” another mocked him, complaining that “the guy was in the military and only got 2 kills [ ... ] i thought his trainin would make him plan to be as deadly as possible.””*

(Hoffman, Ware, & Shapiro, 2020)

In this quote we can identify two different claims – the first being that perpetrators of attacks are widely praised and that within the incel community they are seen as heroes. E.g., how Alek Minassian praised Elliot Rodger before the attacks like we discussed with the last quote. However, Hoffman, Ware and Shapiro also presents another claim being that incel attacks that either do not go according to plan or where the death toll is low are ridiculed within the incel community. The datum for these two claims come from the same thread posted on incel.co where they claim that one user praises “St. Yogacel” as a true gentleman and a hero and another poster ridicules him for being in the military and only got two kills to show for it. The claim and datum could be understood as showing the duality of incels – where at the same time it does not. The two

selected posts still favor violence against women and could have been carefully selected to fit the agenda of the authors. The warrant of the claim still reverts back to the common ground that praising martyrs of extremist communities is a bad thing. In this part they also include a qualifier to the claim being that incels “often” widely the perpetrators of these violent acts – this brings some insecurity to the claim in combination with the datum only presenting us with to cases to go off of. If this is something that happens often within the incel community it should be more widespread and easier to find data supporting their original claim – this relates both to the second quote mentioning Alex Minassian as the main datum for incels praising Elliot Rodger and the third quote where only two forum posters are used. This is not to say that these men are not seen as martyrs within the incel community, but that it could have been a stronger argument with the inclusion of more datum or a rebuttal for why there is not more datum provided in the argument.

*“We find indicators in the data that identify the incel ideology as violent extremism, since the idea was widespread in the forum that the situation can only be improved by harming one of the out-groups (attractive men or women). This becomes evident in the frequent claims to abolish women’s rights (see section 4.2), but even more in utterances that can be interpreted as direct incitement to violence against women (“Disobedient wives should be beaten”). One particular topic that frequently comes up is rape, which is encouraged. Other cases even show incitement to kill women. Some users want to see all women dead (“I want them all to die”), writing minutely detailed instructions of how they should be raped or killed. Incitement also includes appeals to kill people in the course of the Beta Uprising using lengthy descriptions, for example titled “How a crazy school shooter is made, and how women play a part in this whole”, that explain how the perceived discrimination that incels experience leads to becoming a mass shooter.” (Jaki, et al., 2019)*

This quote by Jaki et al. presents the datum first being that there is an indication found in the data that the incel ideology holds a strong connection to violent extremism. The second part I identify as the claim – that incels see the solution for the incel “condition” is outwards violent acts towards the out group which Jaki et al. identifies as attractive women and men. They back this up with presenting additional datum from a previous chapter where they show posts that claim that *“Women HAVE to go back to being property again”* (Jaki, et al., 2019). The warrant for the claim being that violence towards women is wrong and that women’s rights are important, the warrant for the claim is common ground and an incredibly important message. In the next part of the

quote, they make another claim – that rape is being encouraged within the incel community and that other cases show encouragement of killing women. With the datum for the second part of that claim coming from “some posters” that claim that they want all women to die. They also use a qualifier here saying that only some posters claim that they want all women to die, this does not necessarily weaken the argument as we showed earlier Jaki et al. also found that not all incels hate women, and it would have been strange to suddenly claim that all posters wanted women dead. It balances the argument, making it more believable that some of the posters genuinely want women to die. The more problematic part of that claim is that they claim that rape is encouraged, this is not backed up by any datum as far as I found within the article. Jaki et al. identify that rape is a commonly used word within the forums being ranked 185<sup>th</sup> of the words they use (Jaki, et al., 2019). However, this does not really tell us anything about the context that the word is being used with a mere statistic. E.g., the word ugly is ranked 36<sup>th</sup> and they show in the data material the context of the word women where ugly is used in sentences like “women must be ugly” frequently (Jaki, et al., 2019), however, there is no context where rape is used in combination with women. At least it is not frequent enough to appear within the data set. This leaves the reader of the argument in a tricky position as there is no datum to convince the reader of the claim being true – one could take the argument at face value because there is warrant for making such a claim considering that rape is the 185<sup>th</sup> most used word on the forums. However, if there is no context provided along with the word it might for that matter be connected to the word bad which is ranked 62<sup>nd</sup>. (Jaki, et al., 2019). For the reader it might seem that Jaki et al. is making the claim that rape is encouraged based off of their own understanding on incels considering the datum is not present. This would show that there are negative attitudes found within their article where they have a pre-determined bias against incels. However, providing proper datum for the other claims such as incels inciting women violence towards women and the removal of women’s rights make the claim of rape being encouraged more believable – as the stretch for a group to incite violence against women to encouraging rape is not necessarily that far from each other. Yet again they sort of debunk this by posting the frequency of usage of “violent” words such as rape, kill and shoot – Kill is the most frequent word of the three being used in in between 1 and 2% of messages, rape is used in 0.5% to 1% of the messages and shoot is used in 0.1% to 0.4% of the messages (Jaki, et al., 2019). The reason the claim suffers from this is that 47,8% of incels said they were experiencing suicidal ideations according to Speckhard, Ellenberg, Morton and Ash (Speckhard, Ellenberg, Morton, & Ash, 2021). Words like kill or shoot could have

been used in messages about suicide and not related to women – however this is most likely not the case when it comes to rape. I think the primary downfall of the arguments found within Jaki et al. is that they often lack the context of which the datum is being taken from – the claim suffers when the datum is ambiguous as the reader of the argument is left to decipher the context of the datum. Despite this the warrant in the claims found in Jaki et al. stands incredibly strong – where there is moral common ground to accept that incels are violent misogynists on the basis of the messages found within Jaki et al.

*“Aside from attention, incels also saw violence as a justifiable form of revenge, both against the collective (incels as a group getting revenge on Stacys and normies) and on specific individuals (individual incels achieving retribution against their bullies or specific women who rejected them). We note that these narratives mirror those found in the literature on terrorist groups, where both individual and collective desires for revenge culminate in violence (Brym & Araj, 2006). Somewhat surprisingly, incels directed most of their desire for revenge not onto Chads or Stacys but onto normies. This larger portion of the general population includes anyone who does not subscribe to the incel ideology, even those who do not directly hurt incels’ sexual chances. Hence, it appears that for many incels, most of society is the enemy, as opposed to only specific societal factions. This rhetoric might also account for the seemingly indiscriminate nature of attacks by individuals such as Minassian and Rodger. Hurting “innocent passerby” is justified with the notion that these individuals are in fact not innocent, as they stand by and do nothing while incels are being wronged. This discourse also corresponds with that of many terrorist groups wherein all members of an outgroup are legitimate targets, rather than merely those who directly harm them.” (O’Donnell & Shor, 2021)*

This quote from O’Donnell and Shor includes two main claims – the first being that incels see violence as a justifiable form of revenge against out groups. The second claims that incels would rather see commit the violent revenge on normies as opposed to Chad or Stacys. The datum for these claims comes earlier in the article where they present comments from users of an incel forum in the days following the Toronto van attack in 2018. Where they analyzed data from 194 threads relating to discussion of the attack. The warrant for making the claims that incels seek revenge and that the revenge is on normies are based off of the datum – something that is hard to dispute. Yet the datum is questionable in a sense, in the datum they claim that 5% of the comments within the forum threads explicitly distanced themselves from violence – however,

they do not list the percentage who aligned themselves or agreed with violent attacks. As for the second claim they make I struggle to find datum within the article for this claim – one could assume that it is provided in the sense that both Elliot Rodger and Alek Minassian targeted people seemingly at random and hence, they targeted normies – but this could be considered reaching for datum that is not present. The claims are not unfounded of course, but as the problem has been with many of the other claims that have been made thus far there is usually not presented sufficient data along with the claim – to the point where it feels like it is expected for the reader to agree with the claims made on incels on the basis of datum that has been cherry-picked to align with the writers’ argument. The authors of the arguments might not have sufficient warrant that their data holds true – it leaves the argument in this weird place where the readers’ preconceptions about incels is what determines if you accept the claim or not.

*“An important implication from these findings is that news stories about Incel violence such as Jake Davison do not represent the larger Incel community, which tends to be mostly peaceful. Because of how reclusive Incels tend to be, the general public typically gains information about Incels only through news stories about Incel killers. Salient and frightening, these stories can color public perceptions about the Incel community through availability heuristic (Keller, 2006), making them seem as a highly violent and dangerous group. However, the findings from this study paint a very different picture. Most Incels in this study (79%) rejected violence. Most reported a history of bullying and/or persecution.”* (Moskalenko, González, Kates, & Morton, 2021)

This article by Moskalenko, González and Morton is quite different from the other articles that have been looked at thus far, where the claim is that the incel community tends to be mostly peaceful. The datum that is used is conducted in a study by Light upon Light directly on the incel forums – with a larger questionnaire of 68 questions using the Likert scale (Moskalenko, González, Kates, & Morton, 2021). Thus it is hard to dispute the datum and the claim seems quite strong. The warrant is that not all incels are inherently pro-violence like some of the other articles we have looked at thus far seem to imply. In Moskalenko, González and Morton’s article they also discuss the idealization of Elliot Rodgers and Alek Minassian, where they find that:

*“Three questions (scored on a five-point Likert scale, with 1=“not at all”, and 5=“very much”) asked about attitudes toward Incel violence. “I admire Elliot Rodger for his Santa Barbara attack,” (M=1.83; SD=1.25). “I admire Alek Minassian for his Toronto attack” (M=1.73;*

*SD=1.21). "I admire Chris Harper Messer for his Portland attack" (M=1.66; SD=1.70).»*

(Moskalenko, González, Kates, & Morton, 2021)

They find that the incels that answered the questionnaire generally do not agree with the violent attacks, however, there are some outliers as we can see in the results. Another important claim that they present in the first quote is that news stories about incel violence do not represent the incel community as a large. Again, this separates this article from the other articles looked at thus far. Where one could say that this study has the strongest datum and warrant for making such a claim it is still an outlier as it is one of the few studies that actually claim that incels as a group is neither inherently misogynistic or violent and that they do not support or idolize the violent acts of Minassian and Rogers. While Jaki et al. also uses qualitative data collection in the same sense that is used in the questionnaire by Light upon Light – they look for the frequency of words used in threads made on incel forums, where one could happen to find frequencies from purely a vocal minority that support violence as found in O’Donnell and Shor incels who rejected the violence committed by Minassian and Rogers were ridiculed in the posts (O’Donnell & Shor, 2021). This could be understood as an extreme vocal minority silencing the more reclusive incels on the forums – while at the same time it is not necessary that the more extreme incels took the questionnaire by Light upon Light as it only had 312 participants on a forum with 12000 members (at the time of the questionnaire being on the forum) (Archive.org, 2020). At the same time there is datum in the fact that there has not been that many incel attacks – at least in comparison to the number of members the different forums have had in comparison to the attacks that have been perpetrated. However, while saying this there have obviously been more attacks than there should have been as that number should have been zero.

The reason this article stands out as one of the more important articles on incels is that it does a couple of things differently from the other articles looked at thus far – first off it provides sufficient datum to the claim which is again has proper warrant for making the claim. Secondly, it also takes a different stance on incels than the other articles.

## 6.3 Mental health

Prefacing this chapter seems important – as finding articles that discuss both violence and misogyny when discussing incels have been no trouble at all – there are much fewer articles that discuss incels and their mental health. Most articles seem to connect the incel ideology and condition to violence but ignoring whether there are mental health concerns found within the incel community. As discussed in the chapter about this thesis relevance to human rights, this chapter felt increasingly important to include despite the lack of articles on the topic. Another change between this chapter and the others written thus far is that in the articles found on incels and mental health the authors of the articles seem to have made more interactional research on their own – this then including questionnaires, interviews and other forms of research with interaction between researcher and incels.

*“Understanding this relationship between incel ideology and mainstream gender norms has practical implications for policymakers and practitioners, as it means catering responses in an appropriate manner to address this threat. Part of this means supporting mental health and social services, but not as a solution for misogynistic violence; not all incels have suicidal impulses, and aggrieved male sexual entitlement is not a mental health issue but rather an ideological one.”*  
(Leidig, 2021)

Leidig here makes a claim that incels aggrieved sexual entitlement does not stem from mental health issues, but rather stems from an incel ideology. There is no datum for this claim that appears early on in the article – and the warrant that Leidig has for making this claim seems to be based off that not all incels have suicidal impulses. Yet that mental health issues is part of the misogynistic violence seen by incels – despite the fact that there is an incredible amount of incels that struggle with other mental health issues other than suicidal tendencies as seen in Speckhard, Ellenberg and Ash’s study on incel mental health (Speckhard, Ellenberg, Morton, & Ash, 2021). There seems to be more of a focus on incels posing a threat based off their misogynistic behavior online as opposed to seeing that there are mental health struggles within the incel community – where Leidig seems to think that there needs to be implemented a better mental health and social services to help incels it at the same time seems that there is a belief from the author’s side that this is not sufficient to help with the ongoing problems of incels. It feels like Leidig is more willing to present her personal opinions on incels as opposed to one based in fact, especially considering that there is no datum for her claims. Claims like these can be detrimental for trying to solve what



seems to be a problem within society – as opposed to finding solutions for incels, it ends up demonizing them further. Where other authors have described incels feeling of not belonging in society and them themselves being the outgroup (Despite the fact that Ging claims that she finds it difficult to take this claim seriously (Ging, Alphas, Betas, and Incels: Theorizing the Masculinities of the Manosphere, 2019)). When an author forwards a claim that is so negative with neither the datum or warrant to make the claim it can have undesirable effects on the community that these claims are about. If incels feel like they are being marginalized to begin with – claims such as these are most likely not helping with the feeling of marginalization. This is not to say that incels are a marginalized group – yet it adds warrant to their claim of marginalization which one could assume is not the intent of the author. Leidig writes from the standpoint that terrorism studies miss the mark when it comes to incels however, she ends up describing them much the same way that the other articles that have been selected for this thesis does. The core opinion of incels seem to have remained the same throughout most of the articles – where the authors believe that incels are either A) inherently misogynistic or B) They flock to the misogyny that is found within the community and end up radicalizing each other. This understanding of incels is not necessarily wrong, yet making claims based on them without the warrant or datum to do so is questionable. Especially when trying to provide a new understanding of incels and the violence tendencies found within the group.

*“Incel culture is saturated in mental health discourse. However, the disciplinary contexts of studies in terrorism and violence that have come to recently consider the incel are not interested in the evidence of poor mental health, suicide rates, and autism diagnoses that appear prevalent in incel communities, preferring to focus on direct relations between misogyny and violence, including fantasy violence. While incel culture is deeply rooted in misogynist rhetoric, online and off, that does not remove incels from mental health realities.” (Sharkey, 2021)*

Sharkey is the first author to not have a claim made about incels, but rather the research articles previously written about them – specifically the ones written from the disciplinary contexts of terrorism and violence. She claims that in these studies incels are only seen in regard to the direct link between misogyny and violence as opposed to the mental health problems that are found within the incel community. As discussed in the chapter 4.4 the mental health concerns that incels experience are quite high. It is however important to note that Sharkey neither presents any datum about her claim that recent studies focus on the link between misogyny and violence and

not mental health – it assumes that the reader of the claim is familiar with these articles. This does weaken the argument, if this was the reader’s first encounter with incels they have to accept Sharkey’s argument at face value, creating an assumption that Sharkey speaks the truth. This does not mean that the datum is not true, but it leaves the reader to find out for themselves – which is not necessarily the best strategy when trying to drive a claim forward. The warrant Sharkey has for making this claim is also there – as the datum clearly exists as shown in the two previous chapters. Sharkey makes another claim in the last part of the quote where she claims that incel culture is deeply rooted in misogynist rhetoric both offline and online – the argument is not very different from much of the other literature that we have gone through on incels – it bases itself off of the datum found on incel forums and other incel-related media. However, Sharkey adds that this is true both offline and online – where many of the previous studies have claimed that incel do not really leave the safety of their online echo chambers (Ging, Alphas, Betas, and Incels: Theorizing the Masculinities of the Manosphere, 2019). This hurts the legitimization of her claim as it could be understood as a lack of knowledge on incels and their behavior. On the other hand, she might be referring to the offline presence in the sense of the incel attacks that have happened in the last years. However, not explicitly stating this does leave this part of the claim up for interpretation of the reader. Sharkey continues explaining the mental health problems within the incel community with the following quote:

*“One of the reasons incel culture matters can be found in the evident public problem of young men’s mental health, which incels embrace as evidence of the social harm done to them by the impact of feminism. Incels Wiki includes an entry on ‘mentalincels’: ‘someone whose incelism can be attributed to some psychological factor. It is an umbrella term that encompasses several mental health issues including depression’ [...]. The same page also describes ‘depressionincels’ and ‘autismincels’. This again complicates the easy categorization of incels as men who hate women, but is also helpful for understanding the incel as a boy figure. The apparently excessive feelings incels display – feelings of loneliness, sadness, rejection, and frustration – are all interpreted as immature because they are associated with teenagers, especially when deemed excessive.” (Sharkey, 2021)*

This is an important follow up to claim that incels are not removed from the mental health reality. Here she provides two forms of datum – first off, she presents the datum of young men’s mental health issues more broadly and secondly, she refers back to the Incels’ own wiki when speaking about the mental health issues that incels face. It also further legitimizes her first claim of newer studies being primarily focused on the violence and misogyny of incels. Mental health is important

to incels – but here in the context of blaming the impact of feminism for the mental health state of many incels. From the articles we have looked at thus far they do not consider the mental impact rejection, loneliness and depression might have on incels – and why it might be easier for incels to blame the source of rejection rather than look at why they are being rejected, this again falls in line with their interpretation of being immature young men (Sharkey, 2021). Ging’s article is the perfect example of acknowledging and ignoring this part at the same time – where she acknowledges that incels have feelings of being marginalized and that they feel victimized she claims that she finds this hard to believe (Ging, Alphas, Betas, and Incels: Theorizing the Masculinities of the Manosphere, 2019). Sharkey might have one of the most important claims, but at the same time she displays strong datum and warrant for the claim – many of the other articles we have looked at thus far seem to base their claims off of some threads on an incel forum, where Sharkey bases hers on the articles written about these. This makes the datum more easily verifiable for the reader, despite the fact that preferably she would show examples of the datum when presenting her claim.

*“The Incel subculture is characterized by intense self-loathing [...] social awkwardness, self-perceived deficiencies, and alienation»* (Moskalenko, González, Kates, & Morton, 2021)

Starting off with the claim coming from Moskalenko, González, Kates and Morton is that the incel community is characterized by their intense self-loathing. It is a strong claim that aligns itself with many of the other articles looked at thus far, where they present the datum of the claim in a later sentence:

*“Community members’ mutual support in their hopelessness and helplessness (frequently turns into a glorification of suicide, which is encouraged as “a form of sacrificial violence and/or martyrdom” Rope(hanging oneself), LDAR(lay down and rot), suifuel(suicide fuel) or “it’s over,” and “it never began” are popular responses to and tags for posts that Incels believe are examples of the Black Pill.”* (Moskalenko, González, Kates, & Morton, 2021)

The datum presented is based off of the incels community’s own website, the tags that they describe are markers for the threads posted on the forum so a member that would only be interested in reading suifuel-threads have that option by selecting that tag. The datum to support the original claim is strong as it can be found both on the incel forums, but also traces of the claim can be found in previous literature written about incels. What could be done to solidify the datum

is to include it along with the claim – and it is not presented later in the article either. The warrant for presenting the claim is based in the mental health state of incels and further solidifies the datum presented, as referring back to Speckhard, Ellenberg and Ash we find that the mental health state of incels is not sufficient to say the least. However Moskalenko, González and Morton adds some new information about the survey found in Speckhard, Ellenberg and Ash – where Speckhard et al. looked at the most severe case of depression. Moskalenko et al. looks at the broader answers in the survey, where 95% of the participants experienced some depression and 94% some anxiety. Along with looking at depression and anxiety tendencies within the community they also compare incels mental health to mental health of American adults more broadly with this quote:

*“One of the study’s findings is the remarkably high rates of mental health problems observed among Incels. In both self-report measures and on questions of diagnosed psychopathology, Incels reported troublingly high rates of anxiety, depression, and autism-spectrum disorders. When compared with nationally representative surveys of American adults, Incels were consistently higher on all these measures. Moreover, those Incels who have received a formal diagnosis of psychopathology rarely have found relief through mental health services. This is also in contrast to the majority of American adults who have used psychotherapy and found it helpful.” (Moskalenko, González, Kates, & Morton, 2021)*

This is an important comment on incel mental health, as it shows two things – that the frequency of mental illness within the incel community is much greater than American mental health. Secondly, it shows that incels are much less likely to find psychotherapy helpful. The only problem is that Moskalenko, González and Morton do not suggest a different way to help incels than psychotherapy. However, there do exist some pitfalls within their findings relating to the original study conducted on incel mental health. There are simply not that many participants within the study, 312 participants in a forum with over 15,000 members. It equates to roughly 2% of the original userbase. Despite the fact that it is a low percentage of the users who answered the study it shows a good indication for the frequency of mental health issues found within the incel community.

## 7 Discussion of data

The data found differed very much in the claims forwarded by the authors, creating for an important discussion in the differences in the data material. It feels relevant for this chapter to keep a similar structure to what was had in the presentation and analyzation of the data material. Thus, this chapter will also include three different sections related to incels – with the already established overarching themes misogyny, violence and mental health.

### 7.1 The different claims about misogyny in the incel community

Misogyny is one of the themes where researchers agree the most when it comes to incels – there is a common understanding that incels are misogynistic when conversing together on their forums. Jaki et. al is one of the most prominent authors here where they present data material relating to the frequency of the words that can be related to misogyny and connecting them together with women (Jaki, et al., 2019). Other authors like Rummelhoff and Ging have spent time on the incel forums while writing their research papers and have experienced how incels talk together on the forums. However, there are still differences in the way that they portray incels and their attitudes when it comes to misogyny.

Starting off with the article from Jaki et al. one of the main problems with the aticle is the understanding of incels posed by Jaki, De Smedt, Gwóźdź, Panchal, Rossa and De Pauwwrote as while they are looking for frequency of words using machine learning technology in combination with a subsample of qualitative research finding quotes directly from the incel forum boards it would be important to have a good understanding of incels beforehand. The goal of the paper from Jaki, De Smedt, Gwóźdź, Panchal, Rossa and De Pauwwrote is to “[...]we analyze the discourse in the Incels.me forum to shed more light on the nature of the incel movement and its affinity to violent extremism” (Jaki, et al., 2019). This leads me as the reader to believe one or two things – either that the authors themselves have little knowledge of incels prior to conducting the research as the main focus is to shed light on the incel community and the nature of the movement. However, whether shedding light on the movement is to benefit additional research or whether it is for the general public is unclear. Yet it comes across as that the authors do not

necessarily have a good understanding of incels themselves. This become prominent a couple of times within the article. The first one being: *“Homosexuals are often despised and called faggots (‘being a faggot is a mental disorder same with being trans’), and only once in the subsample of 100 threads does a user refer to himself as homosexual.”* (Jaki, et al., 2019). There are a couple of problems with this quote – the first one is that it belongs to the qualitative data analysis that they did after looking at the frequency of words used. The thing is that it feels like the authors do not understand the context of such words as Ging denotes that incels will describe themselves as betafags or simply faggots (Ging, Alphas, Betas, and Incels: Theorizing the Masculinities of the Manosphere, 2019). In later years incels have gone on to call themselves omega males instead, as they are lower on the social hierarchy than what betas are (Incels.wiki, 2021). The second problem with this is that the word is not a very frequently used word on the forum, ranking as the 227<sup>th</sup> word in frequency, but again this does not display whether the word is used as a self-deprecating term or if it is used in a homophobic sense. This is a recurring theme within Jaki et al. where the claims being made about the incel community is not necessarily understood in the proper context – where they argue that words such as ugly, shit and bad are used primarily when it comes to women, there is no proof of this actually being the case which is some of the issue when looking at the frequency of the words. They end up without context, and without a proper understanding of the incel community when writing an article such as this it makes it seem like the author is driving forward a negative attitude on incels that is not necessarily founded in truth or backed by data. Jaki, De Smedt, Gwózdź, Panchal, Rossa and De Pauw wrote are also interested in uncovering racism found within the incel community – here they present a more balanced view where they find that the primary userbase of incels are not white. At the same time it is hard to understand why racism is something that they are working to uncover when it is not a central part of the incel forums. As Sugura notes in her research on incels: *“A misconception of incels is that they are predominantly all angry white Western young men. In a survey conducted of incels by incels on the incel.co site around half of the members stated that they were white. However, there is an increased focus on white young male incels, mainly originating from North America and Europe in the media and academia, perhaps in part due to those who have engaged in violent attacks (though it is noted that Elliot Rodger was Asian American and Alek Minassian is Armenian, although they could be described as ‘white present-ing’).”* (Sugiura, 2021). It feels that Jaki, De Smedt, Gwózdź, Panchal, Rossa and De Pauw wrote are writing from the same camp as the ones that believing incels are predominately white – despite the fact that they find that incels are not in

their study. This creates a weird balance, where writing about racism on the background that the “typical” incel is a white American or Western European that have outward displays of racism within the forums. This supports the idea that the authors have not understood the incel userbase prior to writing about them – where they have an assumption that incels are white and that racist undertones will be discovered. They also compare incels to white supremacists as the misogyny and racism are something you find within both groups – this again hurts the articles credibility. If it is the case that the authors are writing the article without a good understanding of the incel community to begin with, they do make it seem like they hold a negative opinion on incels from the get-go. Where the Incel Wiki states that *“The term “incel” often means different things to different people, leading to confusion. Among academics and self-identified incels, the word refers to the literal circumstance of being celibate against one's will. However, to mainstream communities, “incel” often refers to a hateful misogynist and/or an involuntarily celibate person who is part of an online community of hateful misogynists.[6] This often leads normies to believe that self-identified incels use the term as an outward display of hate, whereas actual self-identified incels often use the term in a self-deprecating or self-defeating manner.”* (Incels.wiki, 2021). If we were to use the Incel Wiki as the basis of understanding on incels, Jaki, De Smedt, Gwózdź, Panchal, Rossa and De Pauw wrote would fall into the category of the public that does not understand the concept – where incel is synonymous with misogyny. This is not necessarily the case, yet there are many factors pointing towards that the authors have misunderstood incel culture.

Ging on the other hand does seem to understand the manosphere quite well, yet she is not willing to look for the solutions for groups like incels as she states in the quote that was presented in the data presentation: *“It is difficult to take beta male claims to subordinated and marginalized masculinity seriously. Their extreme expressions of misogyny and racism and frequent engagement in hacking and doxing are clearly indicative of a desire to establish male hegemony in the online spaces they inhabit, even if they may lack such claims to power in off-line contexts.”* (Ging, Alphas, Betas, and Incels: Theorizing the Masculinities of the Manosphere, 2019). Where Jaki, De Smedt, Gwózdź, Panchal, Rossa and De Pauw wrote might seem to lack a good understanding of incels and their community, Ging takes the route of not taking their claims seriously. This poses another problem as it is a clear negative view from the author on incels. The reason this is problematic is that if incels were a marginalized group that needed help in some sense, authors like Ging undermine these cries for help. As we looked at in the mental health section of the data

presentation, incels broadly struggle with mental health problems and articles like Ging's are not helpful for finding better mental help solutions to a vulnerable group of young men that are struggling mentally. I am not claiming that incels are marginalized nor that they are subordinated, but it is important not to throw claims such as these under the bus and rather look at them either through an academical lens or through public research on incels. Ging seems more focused on presenting the misogyny found within these groups as opposed to looking at what these groups claim themselves, despite the fact that she acknowledges that there are cries for help within the community. It is detrimental to research on further research on incels if all articles were to look at incels purely from the standpoint of seeing them as misogynistic and/or violent. This does of course not only relate to incels, but other groups found on the internet and worldwide in general. Especially with groups such as incels where their sole communication are on online forum boards, there is a discrepancy between the amount of members on the forums and the users who actually post in threads. Jaki et al. even acknowledge this in their study where they write *"About 10% of the users are responsible for the majority of the hate speech. The most aggressive user posted nearly 500 hateful messages in as many threads in a 6-month period."* (Jaki, et al., 2019). With the same logic one could argue that all Americans are criminals as there is a decent percentage of Americans with a criminal record. The difference is when writing about groups such as incels that are typically distanced from the mainstream they end up being an easy target of such generalizations – this ends up being a common theme within many of the articles relating to incels and misogyny. However, the problem lies not solely with Ging and her article. There are many articles that follow suit in the assumption that incels are negative – like with Leidig's quote where she stated *"Incels attribute their lack of success in developing sexual relationships with women to biological determinism, believing that women solely choose men who are physically attractive and that some men, such as incels, are thus genetically predetermined to never find a mate. Self-described incels are allegedly 'victims' of this social dynamic and increasingly blame women's agency, escalating into violent misogyny where women are frequently targets. This process is referred to as embracing the 'black pill' ideology in the incel community."* (Leidig, 2021). Here we end up finding the same rhetoric that Ging used in her quote, where incels are alleged "victims" of a social dynamic. To reiterate I am not saying that these quotes are wrong, but they can end up hurting further research on incels as further research often leans itself on the research that has already been established on a field such as incels. If there are only negative voices within research on incels it creates an imbalance where neutral studies are less likely to exist as the literature that



one can read on the topic is mainly negative in its attitude. Despite the fact I do not think that these authors are trying to harm further research on incels, or limit it to be negative for that matter, yet if there are no opposing voices one would end up with a one-sided view and understanding of incels. Even one that might not be entirely correct such as with Jaki et al. As showed in the analyzation of data many of these articles have the same flaw as well – the claims that they make about incels are often without any datum attached to them. This is perhaps the biggest pitfall of these articles as it allows research that might not be of the utmost quality to lead the field on incels as it is still a field that has not been extensively researched. If newer studies have to base themselves off of these studies without proper data material (This is especially apparent in Leidig’s article) the poor quality of the arguments will often follow. However, these qualities do not pertain to all the research on incels that is focused on the misogyny found within this community, Rummelhoff in her article offered a different explanation for misogyny as opposed to that incels are inherently misogynistic: *“Instead of approaching the issue of incels as young men being drawn towards misogyny, they are young men being drawn towards other young men with whom they are able to create something shared, and misogyny happens to be a part of it. What is shared is less important than the collective action of sharing.”* (Rummelhoff, 2020). Views like Rummelhoff’s are more helpful to both existing studies on incels and further studies as it proposes a new way of thinking about the misogyny found within the group. If incels start out as vulnerable young men that are being drawn towards a community of other young men where misogyny is a part of it – it allows for suggestions of solutions for incels or at least the recruitment of new members. Rummelhoff essentially claims that incels seek out the incel community based off of loneliness – something that can be fixed. However, Rummelhoff’s was one of many articles that presented a view like this – offering a different understanding of incels misogyny. One could argue that this means that Rummelhoff is wrong in her assessment as there are more sources claiming otherwise – that incels are inherently misogynistic. Despite the fact that you could argue that is the case, I do not believe that incels are inherently evil or misogynistic as Jaki et al. found that roughly 10% of the users stand for the hateful and misogynistic messages on the incel forums, taking this into account it is also 10% of the vocal minority of these forums. There might be more incels that are on the boards simply looking for a sense of belonging within the forums and finding comfort in reading messages from other young men without necessarily participating within the boards.

## 7.2 Are incels inherently violent?

As with misogyny there are not that many dissenting opinions on incels relation to violence – as there have been attacks that have been perpetrated by incel identifying perpetrators there seems to be some agreement that incels are inherently violent. Often on the basis of the outward displays of misogyny that are found on the forum boards. However, as opposed to incels and misogyny when it comes to incels and violence there are articles that suggest that incels are not inherently violent and that the vast majority of incels do not subscribe to violent ideas. This trend is not found within the data material for incels and misogyny, but the existence here will help drive forward arguments.

I have chosen to start off with a quote from Jaki, De Smedt, Gwózdź, Panchal, Rossa and De Pauw wrote as they are one of the few authors that have written about incels that have enough data material to show trends about incel behavior within the forums.

*“We find indicators in the data that identify the incel ideology as violent extremism, since the idea was widespread in the forum that the situation can only be improved by harming one of the out-groups (attractive men or women). This becomes evident in the frequent claims to abolish women’s rights (see section 4.2), but even more in utterances that can be interpreted as direct incitement to violence against women (“Disobedient wives should be beaten”). One particular topic that frequently comes up is rape, which is encouraged. Other cases even show incitement to kill women. Some users want to see all women dead (“I want them all to die”), writing minutely detailed instructions of how they should be raped or killed. Incitement also includes appeals to kill people in the course of the Beta Uprising using lengthy descriptions, for example titled “How a crazy school shooter is made, and how women play a part in this whole”, that explain how the perceived discrimination that incels experience leads to becoming a mass shooter.” (Jaki, et al., 2019)*

This quote was looked at in the presentation of data as well, but it has some important aspects that can be included here as well. Breaking the quote down once more it shows that there are indicators within the incel forums that show incel ideology as violent extremism – due to a widespread idea of harming the outgroup, removing women’s rights and statements on rape. In their statements on misogyny found within the incel community it was shortly mentioned that 10% of the members were responsible for the majority of the hateful messages, however,

whether this is true when it comes to incels and violence is not included. Whether all members participate in discussion of violence against the outgroup is unknown. Other authors such as Hoffman, Ware and Shapiro claim that incels homicidal intent is undeniable and that they have similarities with jihadists as they idolize violent acts perpetrated by other incels as shown here: *“Secondly, like jihadists, violent incels have developed a culture of martyrdom, in which past murderers are venerated as heroes to admiring future generations. The community’s most important martyr, Elliot Rodger, is hailed as a hero on incel forums—his description of himself as a “supreme gentleman” has become an oft-repeated mantra among incels, as Alek Minassian’s Facebook post attests.”* (Hoffman, Ware, & Shapiro, 2020). Hoffman, Ware and Shapiro are writing from the standpoint of assessing whether incels pose a threat and whether they are terrorists – this already speaks volumes of the starting point that the authors have for incels. Where a connection has already been made between incels and terrorists – I think it is safe to say that the attacks by Elliot Rodger and Alek Minassian can be categorized as terrorist attacks. Despite this I think it is tough to argue that incels as a community fit under the brand of being terrorists. Hoffman, Ware and Shapiro are not the only authors that write from the standpoint of studying incels as a terrorism group where authors like Leidig hold the same view (Leidig, 2021). The view that incels are violent and potential terrorists is probably one of the views that is most detrimental to further studies on incels – it brands incels as violent extremists basing itself off of attacks perpetrated by a few members of the incel community. The thing is that if research was to base itself around a few incidents within smaller communities like this – many smaller communities would be labeled as terrorism groups. One of the most problematic ideas found within Hoffman, Ware and Shapiro however is that the claims that they make are not backed up by any data material – other than the fact that there has been cases of incel attacks. To a reader it can make it seem like they are making an assumption based on these circumstances – it is also important to note that not all of the attacks that have been categorized as incel attacks are perpetrated by self-identifying incels but rather young men that fit into the incel ideology of having a lackluster or non-existent sex life and the inability to find a partner. In Alek Minassian’s Toronto van attack it is particularly problematic as information that came out during the court case showed that the attacks were not in fact perpetrated on the background of an incel rebellion like Minassian first claimed (Caset, 2020). Like I explained earlier this information came out after the article was written – but it shows that the article needs some reiteration before it is republished at the very least considering that the information stated within the article can be interpreted as being wrong.

Another important factor is whether all incels actually subscribe to violent ideas, or if all incels idolize the perpetrators of these attacks. In the study by Light upon Light as shown in Moskalkenko, González, Kates, & Morton they show that: *“Three questions (scored on a five-point Likert scale, with 1=“not at all”, and 5=“very much”) asked about attitudes toward Incel violence. “I admire Elliot Rodger for his Santa Barbara attack,” (M=1.83; SD=1.25). “I admire Alek Minassian for his Toronto attack” (M=1.73; SD=1.21). “I admire Chris Harper Messer for his Portland attack” (M=1.66; SD=1.70).»* (Moskalkenko, González, Kates, & Morton, 2021). Essentially most incels on the forum do not subscribe to the ideas of these attacks, where all of the question has a median answer of less than two on the Likert scale. There are a couple of different ways of interpreting this – one could still assume that authors like Hoffman, Ware and Shapiro are right in their assessment as most articles that relate to incels follow the same line of thinking. Namely, that incels can be categorized as a violent extremism group. The other way of thinking about it is the one posed by Moskalkenko, González, Kates, & Morton where incels are not inherently violent, and that they do not support the idea of violence that has been executed by a select few members of the incel community. If anything it shows that incels do not revere these perpetrators as heroes within the community, when most incels choose to distance themselves and disagree with the attacks that were carried out. The first original quote discussed by Moskalkenko, González, Kates, & Morton adds to this point when it states that: *“An important implication from these findings is that news stories about Incel violence such as Jake Davison do not represent the larger Incel community, which tends to be mostly peaceful. Because of how reclusive Incels tend to be, the general public typically gains information about Incels only through news stories about Incel killers. Salient and frightening, these stories can color public perceptions about the Incel community through availability heuristic (Keller, 2006), making them seem as a highly violent and dangerous group. However, the findings from this study paint a very different picture. Most Incels in this study (79%) rejected violence. Most reported a history of bullying and/or persecution.”* (Moskalkenko, González, Kates, & Morton, 2021). With 79% of incels rejecting violence there is little evidence that incels have an inherent homicidal intent like discussed in Hoffman, Ware and Shapiro. However, the first part of this quote is probably one of the most relevant for this chapter on violence. Where Moskalkenko, González, Kates, & Morton relates this to news stories that portray incel violence in a way that is not recognizable within the incel community. I believe that this can also be related to academic articles about incels such as the ones from Hoffman, Ware and Shapiro – they feel like pop research. Research that follows a theme that is popular at the

time, without having much substance to them. Shining a negative light on incels can seem to fit the paradigm of research at the time, not proposing solutions to a problem but rather painting incels as a violent extremism group. I find that this way of thinking of incels as very bleak – where there is no solution and at the same time you just accept that there is a terrorism group without considering the people that this group is made up of. In a sense the same statement functions for Jaki, De Smedt, Gwóźdź, Panchal, Rossa and De Pauw wrote where the findings seem to be interpreted in a way that regardless of what you find they portray the community negatively. If these articles reflect the preconceived attitudes held by the authors before the time of writing they are null and void for further research on incels – unless writing about the existing attitudes on incels. Considering most of the articles about incels are written by authors who come from the terrorism and counter-terrorism disciplines it seems to support the idea that the authors have some pre-conceived notions about incels. This comes forth as especially true when many of the authors do back their claims up with any datum, but the arguments are simply built on claim and warrant – and maybe including a qualifier or two. I do not believe that the articles seek out portraying incels negatively, but the lack of datum gives the indication that they are. If the study conducted by Light upon Light is not sufficient data to prove that incels are not inherently violent, the findings in Jaki et al. also seems to suggest the same thing, however, they interpret them differently (Jaki, et al., 2019). The important note to take away from Jaki et al. is that the “violent” words have a low frequency of use, and if we assume that 10% of the users are responsible for the majority of these messages – like they found that they were within the messages that contained misogynistic words. Then these findings are not generalizable to extend to the entire incel community. An important quote from Mustafaraj, Finn, Whitlock, & T. Metaxas show that the vocal minority seeks out to make their opinion seem like the one held by the silent majority in larger events: *“Our analysis suggests that in particular occasions (such as a toss-up political election), where stakes are high and public opinion can shift in the space of hours, the largest amount of user-generated data is authored by a group of dedicated users, the “vocal minority”, who go at great lengths to create the impression that they and their opinions are the majority. While this happens, the real majority remains silent and contributes to the conversation sporadically, mostly after an important event has concluded (for example, the results of the election are announced).”* (Mustafaraj, Finn, Whitlock, & T. Metaxas, 2011). This can be interpreted in the context of incels showing that a vocal minority might have been steering the discourse in the time after the Toronto van attacks to make it seem like this was the de facto

opinions held by incels. At the same time this might be true for the broader understanding of incels as well where some members of the community are actively trying to push forward a more violent and misogynistic opinion. The take that one could get from this is that further research on incels, especially from the terrorism and counter-terrorism disciplines should be aware of the vocal minority fallacy – when this is not explicitly stated within the articles written it hurts the credibility of the research conducted and the understanding of incels more broadly.

### **7.3 Is there a solution to the poor mental health of incels?**

Mental health in relation to incels feel increasingly important to discuss after having discussed the misogynistic attitudes and violent tendencies that many researchers claim to find within the incel community. The problem has been that the primary focus of research conducted on incels have revolved around the aforementioned themes despite the fact that incels struggle with their mental health. It is difficult to say why there has not been more research from the fields of psychology and health when these struggles have been clearly shown in studies by Light upon Light. The studies conducted on mental health in relation to incels are also the studies that do not portray incels as a violent, misogynistic and hateful group – but rather a group that society needs to offer help and guidance.

Starting off with the primarily negative comment of Leidig, while she acknowledges that incels have some mental health plights – she makes the claim that this does not affect all of them and that suicidal impulses and sexual entitlement is not to be confused with a mental health issue found in incels:

*“Understanding this relationship between incel ideology and mainstream gender norms has practical implications for policymakers and practitioners, as it means catering responses in an appropriate manner to address this threat. Part of this means supporting mental health and social services, but not as a solution for misogynistic violence; not all incels have suicidal impulses, and aggrieved male sexual entitlement is not a mental health issue but rather an ideological one.”*

(Leidig, 2021). There are a couple of different ways to understand Leidig’s statement here, where firstly she is right that not all incels do have suicidal impulses, but 47,8% of the incels that answered the Light upon Light study did experience strong suicidal ideations (Speckhard,

Ellenberg, Morton, & Ash, 2021). Leidig seems to understand that there are mental health problems within the incel community, but does not seem to have understood how they should be treated – she focuses on greater support to mental health and social services as a solution to the mental health plights that incels face – however in Speckhard, Ellenberg, Morton and Ash they find that conventional mental health and social services suit incels poorly as around 51% of incels have tried using conventional psychotherapy but claimed it did not help them. They then suggest a different method of help for incels, one that could be seen as controversial by other authors: *“Incels’ self-report that the forum offers a useful means of venting anger, creating community, and belonging, and sharing their grievance – a general mistrust of the mental health system and belief that mental health interventions and therapy are not useful – suggests that the forum might be an effective place to consider creative mental health and psychosocial interventions that came across in a positive, humanizing manner to counter hopelessness and despair.”* (Speckhard, Ellenberg, Morton, & Ash, 2021). Where other authors have either aligned themselves with referring incels to a more traditional mental care, Speckhard, Ellenberg, Morton and Ash suggest that the forums that incels use might be an effective and creative mental health sphere to counter the hopelessness and despair that many incels face. One of the main problems with this solution is that incels have moved platforms a multitude of times, either due to being banned off of larger websites like reddit or having their domains taken down without explanation. Thus, a more permanent solution has not existed yet, as incels have been a very much nomadic group on the internet on the account of external factors. However, there is a clear problem as found in Moskalkenko, González, Kates, & Morton: *“One of the study’s findings is the remarkably high rates of mental health problems observed among Incels. In both self-report measures and on questions of diagnosed psychopathology, Incels reported troublingly high rates of anxiety, depression, and autism-spectrum disorders. When compared with nationally representative surveys of American adults, Incels were consistently higher on all these measures. Moreover, those Incels who have received a formal diagnosis of psychopathology rarely have found relief through mental health services. This is also in contrast to the majority of American adults who have used psychotherapy and found it helpful.”* (Moskalkenko, González, Kates, & Morton, 2021). It is undeniable that incels face higher rates of mental health problems, but the way of treating them is uncertain – like suggested by Speckhard, Ellenberg, Morton and Ash one solution could be to “leave them alone” on the internet and let them use the forums as a self-help group that interact with each other, essentially group therapy with 15,000 members. Yet, at the same time one could argue that the

effects of mental health facilities and traditional psychotherapy is effective as it shows effects in most people that undergo psychotherapy. It leaves us in this weird limbo between recommending something that is proven to be useful for most or listening to a group that has great mental health challenges. The second problem that this poses is that for incels to be able to keep using the forums unchallenged this sort of group therapy for themselves, there needs to be an agreement that this is the solution for incels. With many of the authors of the articles that have been looked at in this thesis believe in discouraging the existence of incels by removing their platforms, this has found to not be the solution by Jaki, De Smedt, Gwózdź, Panchal, Rossa and De Pauw wrote (Jaki, et al., 2019). Where they found that the removal of the incel subreddit did not remove the group from the internet, they simply changed platforms. Going on to remove the current forums would likely lead to the same thing. Jaki, De Smedt, Gwózdź, Panchal, Rossa and De Pauw wrote then propose to closely monitor the forums that incels use using automatic detection techniques to find hateful and or incitements to violence on the webpage. However, I cannot imagine it being helpful to incels' mental health to have their platform constantly monitored. The other problem with that solution is that it takes for granted that incels are a de facto threat to society – something that might help radicalize incels further. It is hard to find a solution to agree with that would both benefit incels mental health, where at the same time preventing further attacks. The best solution seems to be to offer incels mental health care in the traditional sense but considering that many incels have tried and not found it helpful this at the same time is not the best solution. It is clear that there needs to be more research on incels and their mental health, along with offering up a better solution for how to treat it. I believe that the reason that there has been so little research on incels mental health stem from two primary reasons. The first being that conducting research in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic has been challenging, while incels is a group that primarily has an online presence the help that could be offered would still most likely be offered locally – and any qualitative study of in-person interviews have been tricky considering the pandemic. Secondly, I believe that much of the existing research has found it easier to staple incels as a violent and misogynistic group that is not concerned with their own mental health. While these studies acknowledge that incels have mental health problems, they are adamant about that not being the cause for the attacks and misogyny that are found within the group. I think Rummelhoff put it well when she said that incels might consist of a group of young men that are being drawn to other young men where misogyny happens to be a part of it (Rummelhoff, 2020).



However, to confirm whether this claim is true it would be helpful to have more in-depth interviews with incels to confirm whether these suspicions are true or not.

#### **7.4 Are viewing incels as a violent group sufficient?**

After having looked at several different articles taking different approaches on incels I think it is safe to say that most current research portrays incels as a violent and misogynistic group. As the disciplines the authors are writing from are ones mainly focused on terrorism and counter-terrorism it feels that they have a pre-conceived notion that incels are violent and pose a threat to society. On the other hand, you have the research done on incels from a mental health perspective which show a different side of incels – this is also rooted in the fact that finding data about incels have varied greatly between the two methods. Where the studies coming from the terrorism and counter-terrorism discipline have had a focus on either using machine learning algorithms to find frequencies in words used on the forums or getting qualitative data directly from the forums. The authors writing from a mental health perspective have had a greater focus on questionnaires and finding tendencies in the incel community through them. Speckhard, Ellenberg and Ash describes other studies this way: *“While this study provides a great deal of exploratory information regarding the background and makeup of individual incels, popular and academic interest in incels still lies primarily in the question of whether the group poses a significant public security threat. From the respondents’ perspective, incel groups are communities, movements, self-help groups, and groups defined by a shared circumstance, but 17 of the survey participants agreed with the statement that incel groups are “groups willing to endorse violence.”* (Speckhard, Ellenberg, Morton, & Ash, 2021). This is also complimented by a sentiment in Moskalkenko, González, Kates, & Morton *“Given these parameters, stigmatizing and further traumatizing this already vulnerable population would not seem prudent. Classifying Incels as terrorist group based on the action of a tiny minority among them might do more damage than it would help protect the society. Instead, P/CVE community (preventing and countering violent extremism) and mental health professionals should seek to design interventions that would address Incels’ unique psychological needs, which may include social deficits, a history of psychological trauma, and extreme isolation.”* (Moskalkenko, González, Kates, & Morton, 2021). The critique presented in Moskalkenko, González, Kates, & Morton aligns with my sentiment that portraying incels as a violent extremism group is detrimental to both incels and to further studies. It thus feels that incels were a pop-phenomena to write research articles about for a while, as the

concept was relatively new to the wider population and mainstream media. It filled a void in research on incels, but did not necessarily add quality research to supplement the existing one. However, this again assumes that these two articles are right in their claims – considering that they also found that there were some agreeability within the incel community with violent attacks and misogyny it is not necessarily the correct way of going forward. As in Moskalenko, González, Kates, & Morton also note *“At the same time, our data present evidence of a troubling minority of Incels who embrace the most violent manifestations of the Incel subculture, glorifying Incel killers and fantasizing about raping and inflicting violence themselves. We observed specific markers that characterize this sub-population, including a history of having been bullied and an autism-spectrum diagnosis. Although more research is needed to establish these findings’ reliability, they suggest a fruitful direction for security practitioners and mental health professionals to identify Incels who demonstrate these markers and to tailor targeted interventions to curb their potential for radicalization.”* (Moskalenko, González, Kates, & Morton, 2021). The research on incels have no doubt been a tricky one – as Moskalenko, González, Kates, & Morton note there are troubling attitudes found within the community – however, they are still the minority. Despite this, if this is the vocal minority discussed in previous chapters they might help to radicalize more members on the forums as they get used to reading messages about violence, misogyny and hate. A potential solution for “treating” incels might thus be a combination of what Jaki, De Smedt, Gwózdź, Panchal, Rossa and De Pauw wrote suggested with monitoring the forums, despite this functioning as an acceptance that incels are a threat to society and what Moskalenko, González, Kates, & Morton suggest where P/CVE communities and mental health professionals should seek to design interventions that fit incels.

## 8 Conclusion

To conclude I do not think that incels are inherently evil, violent or misogynistic or that they show outwards display of violence and misogyny based on hatred. However, there seems to be an agreement within much of the literature that these are the traits that should be attributed to incels. My goal for this thesis was to answer what attitudes existed in the research on incels and I would answer that I found a mixed bag of attitudes. Where most of the research papers that come from the terrorism and counter terrorism disciplines sought out to point out incels as an emerging terrorism group that society should fear in some way, there were also disagreements with that notion from those writing from a mental health perspective. Regardless I do believe that the attitudes found within the research papers that I have looked at are detrimental towards further studies as they are primarily negative and seem to have a preconceived notion on what an incel is. They seem to make claims based off of feelings or the vocal minorities opinions – perhaps not having the best understanding of neither incels nor how online communities work more broadly. Seeing incels as a group that has already been radicalized by their ideology is not sufficient in research on incels as shown in this thesis. I believe that incels are primarily young men who struggle to cope with mental health problems and thus lash out at the group that they believe is the basis of those problems – that everything would be solved with a partner. There are some clear suggestions on what further research on incels should focus on, and the qualities that should be possessed by someone doing this research. I would advise someone that has a good general understanding of how online communities function, regardless of what discipline they are writing about incels from do the research. At the same time, it is important to consider such concepts as the vocal minority when writing about incels. As has been displayed in the mental health section of this thesis there is a clear lack of understanding of the mental illness that incels face, meaning that there might be a need for a stronger focus on mental health within human rights as well. Where the UN and its members have focused more on mental health in the early 2000s it feels like this focus has not been sufficient or perhaps not understanding enough of how communities also base themselves online. I think there is a clear need for a restructuring when writing about online communities, as the starting point of different researchers vary too greatly to form fruitful opinions that new research can base itself around, at least the research related to incels. In

particular there needs to be more studies that focus on doing qualitative research on incels through interviews, questionnaires or other researcher – research object engaged research. Researching word trends and frequencies is not sufficient in community that is as small as incels is. I also believe that it would be beneficial to let incels keep their platform, as noted in some of the studies we have looked at in this thesis incels understand their platform as one that functions as both a social platform but also a self-help and group therapy platform. A platform that allows them to be crude when they vent, but also feel a sense of belonging to. One of the greatest obstacles when researching incels is that they are so widespread in their opinions, there is no common denominator for how incels feel – where they might share traits between themselves, there is no one thing to connect them other than their involuntary celibacy.

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