

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Victim, Violent, Vulnerable: A Feminist Response to the Incel Radicalisation Scale

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Abstract: Following several deadly attacks in recent years, misogynist incels have piqued academic interest. However, attempts by terrorism scholars to understand incels' radicalisation, ideology, and mental health raise concerns. In this article, we illustrate these concerns with the example of the Incel Radicalisation Scale (IRS), which relies on survey data and claims to help identify, measure, and prevent radicalisation among incels. First, drawing on a growing feminist knowledge base on incels and male supremacy, masculinity, and violence, we question the definition of core concepts (radicalisation, violence, misogyny) and incels in the IRS. Second, we criticise the methods used for sampling and concept validation, including reliance on incels' self-representation and the dismissal of their harmful online activity. Third, we assess what these shortcomings mean for the IRS' conclusions regarding the violent potential of incels, and the role of mental health and misogyny for male supremacist incel movements. We argue such conclusions are prone to legitimising misogynist incel narratives of victimhood, and overlooking broader harms such as normalising misogynist violence and male and white supremacy. We therefore caution against using the IRS and emphasise the importance of having a comprehensive picture of incel radicalisation. Future studies must be more rigorous about addressing the problematic effects resulting from research designs of uncritical epistemologies in male supremacist research.

Keywords: Misogyny, incels, radicalisation, victimhood, terrorism, feminist analysis, violence

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Introduction

In recent years, several deadly attacks perpetrated by self-identified incels (involuntary celibates) have attracted media, public, and academic attention.¹ Incels are predominantly a subgroup of a growing (mostly) online network of misogynist websites and forums united around ideas of male supremacy, male entitlement, and anti-feminism, within the manosphere.² The manosphere is home to a variety of groups including Pick-Up Artists, Men's Rights Activists, Men Going Their Own Way, Redpillers, and Tradcons, united in the belief of zero-sum gender relations, where women's advancement and increased legal gender equality efforts, by feminist movements has resulted in the disruption of a supposed *natural* gender order granting women superfluous social, economic, political, and sexual power.³ Drawing from the 1999 film *The Matrix*, manosphere groups often refer to the acceptance of this belief as taking the red pill.⁴ Particular to incels is their belief in the blackpill,⁵ a nihilistic and misogynist ideology in which the realisation of being an incel means accepting the immutability of having the lowest social and sexual status, often manifesting as hatred and justification for violence.⁶ As scholars have highlighted, incels claim for themselves an "ultimate victimhood" where they position themselves as "subhuman" because of their lack of sexual or romantic interaction with women, attributed to their looks and feminism granting women more agency in choosing their romantic and sexual partners.⁷ Incels' victimhood has been identified as a kind of "weaponised subordination," where incels position themselves as subordinate "failed" men in order to degrade and justify their misogyny towards women.⁸

While (feminist) scholars in gender studies, media and communications, and criminology have long taken an interest in the discourses and violence emanating from the "manosphere," recent attacks invoking the communities have also piqued interest from terrorism and security scholars.⁹ Some of these newer works about incels have already raised concerns among feminist academics, including their potential to depoliticise and exceptionalise the misogynist and male supremacist structures underlying incel radicalisation and violence.¹⁰ In particular, some current studies uncritically accept, and thereby platform, incel's narratives of victimhood and grievances.¹¹

Some recent incel research has turned towards survey data to provide an empirical backdrop for the largely theoretical engagement by terrorism scholars so far. One article that stands out in this trend creates an Incel Radicalisation Scale (IRS), claiming to identify, measure, and help prevent radicalisation among incels.¹² However, as we show in this article, the nature of the data and the conclusions drawn from it raises both old and new concerns. Our perspective is based on our own research as scholars from political science, gender studies, and criminology, who have researched online male supremacist movements for the better part of ten years. Despite our different fields and focal points, we unite in a commitment to feminist theory and practice essential to understanding male supremacist movements, whose main identity

revolves around gender-based needs and grievances.¹³ We therefore use the remainder of this article to caution against using the IRS by highlighting what we consider to be its three most impactful shortcomings, and outline their potentially harmful conclusions.

First, drawing on a growing feminist knowledge base on incels and male supremacy, masculinity, and violence, we argue there are issues with how core concepts (radicalisation, violence, misogyny, and incels) are defined. We show how these conceptualisations lack systemic engagement with incel discourses and the patriarchal power structures they are built on and perpetuate, emphasised in the existing literature on male and white supremacism. Second, we criticise the methods used for sampling and concept validation, including reliance on incels' self-representation and the dismissal of their online activity as "unreal." Third, we assess what these conceptual and methodological shortcomings mean for the conclusions drawn in regard to the IRS, the violent potential of incels, and the role of mental health and misogyny for male supremacist incel movements.

We draw on Kate Manne's conceptualisation of misogyny as not just manifested within the psychology and internal attitudes of individual men, rather, misogyny is embedded within social norms, expectations, and impacts upon women's lives, under a system of patriarchal oppression.¹⁴ When women challenge the status quo, by not adhering to prescribed "feminine codes," and strive for or obtain "masculine-coded" achievements like authority, societal misogynistic structures dictate that women be put back in their place, through "subtly hostile, threatening, and punitive norm-enforcement mechanisms."¹⁵ Misogyny, therefore, is not about merely hating women and enacting physical violence upon women (although the latter is the tragic and inevitable progression of misogyny), it also involves other seemingly less extreme ways of subjugating women, which can include discursive means, oppressing women, and validating and normalising violence against women.

We conclude that the IRS article is based on several conceptual choices, which make its argument prone to overlooking broader harms emanating from incel ideology, and how this is situated within wider societal structures normalising misogynist violence and male and white supremacism. We consider this to be particularly problematic due to the IRS's seemingly quantifiable and policy-oriented character, which might lead to these shortcomings applied within policies and practice. These conclusions extend beyond this article, and echo other critiques,¹⁶ about how incel misogyny is often and increasingly minimised via the pathologising of a minority group of deviant individuals, whose pernicious attitudes toward women are attributed to their personality or mental illness. If the connection to structural misogyny and patriarchal systems of socialisation is disregarded, this ends up reinforcing assumptions of male supremacism – the belief in cisgender men's superiority and right to dominate and control others.¹⁷ Furthermore, viewing mental health as a primary factor for participation in incel spaces implies that ill mental health causes misogyny, or participation and identification

in incel spaces, whilst also stigmatising mental health issues. To avoid these fallacies, we emphasise the importance of having a comprehensive understanding of incel radicalisation that does not take incel's claims to "wounded male victimhood" at face value.

The Incel Radicalisation Scale

In 2022, the article "Predictors of Radical Intentions among Incels: A Survey of 54 Self-identified Incels" was published in the *Journal of Online Trust and Safety*. In the article, the authors set out to "explore the relationship between radicalisation, mental health and inceldom by directly asking incels about their experiences and attitudes."¹⁸ This is presented as part of an innovative turn towards primary data on incels, advocated by several recent articles.¹⁹ Aligned with these other works, the present article emphasises the potential of survey data to provide insights into "a potential mismatch between the mass public's widespread beliefs about Incels and Incels' own views of themselves as a group."²⁰ To implement this, the authors draw from survey data of 54 respondents, collected from individuals who reached out to the Incel Podcast, and "chose to connect with a Light Upon Light interventionist."²¹ The survey asked questions about respondents' mental health, radical intentions, and ideology. Responses are set in the context of several scales: an Activism/Radicalism Intentions Scale (AIS/RIS), an Incel Ideology scale (II), and the Incel Radicalisation Scale (IRS), pointing to "high intercorrelations" between them.²² Finally, the authors "predict" incel radicalisation by correlating the scores across the three scales and additional questions from the survey on so-called misconceptions about incels. They claim there is no correlation between radicalisation and incel ideology, suggesting that "an ideological commitment to the Black Pill ideas and to incels as a tight-knit community is not a useful predictor of illegal/violent intentions or radical attitudes."²³ Instead, the authors highlight the high prevalence of reported "mental health needs" among respondents as a worthwhile consideration for de-radicalisation measures. They further suggest that incels are less violent than is often assumed, with high scores of radical beliefs reserved to a "small minority" of respondents, "many of which reject violence."²⁴ They conclude that there is thus a mismatch with media reports' focus on incels as violent, and argue against "classifying incels as a terrorist group based on the action of a tiny minority among them."²⁵ They suggest that "The newly validated Incel Radicalisation Scale can be a useful measure for early detection of individuals vulnerable to radicalisation to violent incel action."²⁶

These conclusions about violence, incel ideology, and radicalisation stand in contrast to findings from numerous works, involving not only analyses of online data (e.g. forums, videos, memes, etc.) but also direct interviews with self-identified current and former incels.²⁷ In the following sections, we outline how these conclusions are based on a particular, and in our view, problematically limited, understanding of key concepts and definitions of victimhood in incels' identity and ideology, the presented types of violence linked to or de-linked from extremism, and what constitutes vulnerability(ies) to radicalisation. These three aspects are at the centre of the

IRS article as captured in the three scales whose alignment works to prove its core argument. We, therefore, structure the rest of this response piece around them. By walking through their methodological, conceptual, and epistemological shortcomings in turn, we show that the article's core argument overlooks a variety of debates and insights from the existing literature on incels, masculinity, and violence (by feminist and non-feminist scholars). We conclude by linking these shortcomings to a broader trend in the reception of incels emerging among both preventing/countering violent extremism (P/CVE) practitioners and certain academic circles, and advocate for a reconsideration of these tendencies by emphasising their detrimental effects on efforts to counter both radicalisation in incel spaces and broader misogynist and male supremacist worldviews.

Victim: Incel Ideology and Identity

A central element of the article is the Incel Ideology scale, for which the authors asked twelve questions to their 54 incel respondents to measure their commitment to incel ideology.²⁸ We see several problems with how the article approaches incels (and their ideology), including methodological issues in terms of sampling and survey questions, a lack of engagement with broader knowledge bases on discrimination and victimhood, and literature on how incel ideology interlinks with misogyny.

Sampling

First, the 54 individuals surveyed self-selected to participate in the study based on chosen interactions with a podcast about incels and P/CVE interventionists.²⁹ While the authors acknowledge in their limitations section that this might mean that those surveyed may not be representative of the larger incel network, this data is still ultimately used to draw conclusions that incels should not be considered a terrorist group, and only "a small minority of incels" are "radical."³⁰ However, the authors themselves note that many incels initially contacted the podcast "express[ed] gratitude to the show for featuring honest, nonjudgmental conversations with people like themselves."³¹ This self-presentation stands somewhat at odds with the article's literature review, highlighting incels as a "reclusive population" distrustful and hesitant to outside intervention including "to seeking psychological treatment."³² Incels who engage with the media are often disparaged on incel forums with their legitimacy as incels questioned, emphasising that they might not be accurately representative of the larger incel community nor pose the threat (or not) that the authors are trying to determine. Another issue with the authors' conceptualisation of incels is the disregard for the internal divisions rampant across many misogynist incel forums. As past research on incels has evidenced, incels are not a monolith historically nor presently.³³ In fact, within and across various incel forums today there is much disagreement about who can claim the incel label and whether it is dependent upon relationship status or an ideology.³⁴ More so, gatekeeping and controversies about the definition of incel based on race, class, geographical location, sexual histories and other hierarchies can be

understood as a regular, important and ongoing part of discussions in incel spaces.³⁵ However, within the IRS article's questions ["Do you consider yourself an Incel (yes/no)," whether they "believe in Black Pill," and what they believe qualifies someone to "claim they are an incel"], there is no acknowledgement of these nuances and contradictions.³⁶ Additionally, it is unclear if the blackpill was defined for survey participants. This is concerning because, like the definition of incel, within incel forums there is debate about the nuances of the blackpill, and mixed emotional responses to acceptance of the blackpill.³⁷ The twelve questions used to measure incel ideology were composed of questions about support for the blackpill, and about what it means to be an Incel.³⁸ Respondents were asked to rank the questions about believing the blackpill, and it being refreshing, comforting, objective etc. on a scale from (1) not at all to (5) very much.³⁹ The responses then form the scale along which the commitment to incel ideology is ranked. However, given the above-mentioned debates, these responses to a vague reference to the blackpill as well as to incelism cannot be meaningfully interpreted as an ordinal scale, where multiple characteristics translate into increasing ideological convictions. In fact, there is no mention of specific incel forums or other spaces, making it difficult to understand how the individuals surveyed fit into the larger incelsphere.

Identity

On page 1 of the IRS article, incels are defined as "an online subculture of primarily men who believe that they are prevented by the society from fulfilling their desire to have sex, date, or establish relationships with women."⁴⁰ The authors also identify that incels "tend to blame their disenfranchisement on *lookism*, or women's choice of sexual partners based solely on physical features" and the influence of "biological determinism" in incel forums.⁴¹ While much of this definition mirrors other research on incels and their beliefs (i.e., the prevalence of biological determinism, blaming women, and lookism), it does fail to comprehensively engage with how these elements fit into a broader context, and in doing so reproduces incel definitions as factual without critically interrogating them. This neglects how the incel use of terms like "lookism" relates to a biologically deterministic worldview reliant on the naturalisation of sexist and dehumanising gender stereotypes. Notably, this worldview depends on cherry-picked readings of evolutionary psychology and biological theories, theories which scholars have highlighted are outdated, falsified, and sexist.⁴² For example, philosopher Mari Ruti highlights that evolutionary psychology's "standard narrative" relies on "gender profiling," where gender stereotypes are naturalised and "validated" through methodologically suspect studies, that in turn promote "scientific sexism," harmful and dehumanising to men and particularly to women.⁴³

The authors do not critically engage with these aspects, but instead seem to endorse incels' definition of "lookism" as correct, noting that, there is "some evidence that it does factor into day-to-day interactions rather than being a figment of Incel's imagination."⁴⁴ However, rather than just applying the term "lookism" as a phenomenon affecting men, this concept could be understood in the context of the "politics of desire," which acknowledges that racism,

heteronormativity, ableism and class “do extend into the sphere of romance and sex” and impact people of all genders.⁴⁵ This deeper engagement would serve not to give credence to incels’ victimhood narrative, in which they alone are affected, but allow for a comprehensive understanding of the structures of sexual relations and their entanglements with broader societal hierarchies.

Ideology

In line with this singular focus on victimisation of men reproducing incel narratives, the IRS conceptualisation of incels ignores the centrality of misogyny, which many other researchers on incels emphasise is a key component of incel ideology.⁴⁶ As Jilly Boyce Kay argues “inceldom depends upon a logic in which men are the victims of women’s cruelty and shallowness” and that incels “rigorously polic[e]” victimhood along the lines of gender, as any sense that women might also face “sexual rejection and gendered cruelty threatens the basis of this claim.”⁴⁷ Incel’s sense of victimhood is at least partially grounded in an aggrieved male sexual entitlement, where they express anger and occasionally physical violence in response to their belief that they are denied access to women as sexual and romantic partners.⁴⁸ Misogyny then is deeply entangled in incels’ entitlement to women’s bodies and, therefore, their own sense of victimhood, which is rooted in that sexual entitlement. While the authors cite studies outlining misogyny as a central aspect of incel ideology and incel killer’s hating, dehumanising, and feeling entitled to women in their literature review, misogyny and hate as core elements of incel ideology are absent from their operationalisation of incel ideology. We view this as a concerning omission as the authors of the IRS article seek to measure violence, and as other scholars including Caron Gentry and Kate Manne have highlighted, how misogyny is linked to violence. However, *misogynistic* violence is often overlooked or made apolitical.⁴⁹ The term misogyny in the article only appears in the results and findings of the survey in the response to the open-ended question: “What do you think is the biggest misconception about incels?”⁵⁰

Here the authors create a Dispute Misogyny category for a section on the “perceived misconceptions about incels.”⁵¹ Responses to this open-ended question were coded as disputing misogyny if they mentioned misogyny, captured as “misogyny, bitterness towards women, hatred of women, objectification of women” as a “misconception.”⁵² Instead of misogyny, incel ideology stands to be largely defined through the blackpill defined in the article as “the idea that Incels cannot form sexual relationships with women because of inborn deficiencies (i.e., physical appearance, height, weight, and cognitive abilities) and their lack of social skills or status.”⁵³ The authors also reference the incel belief that there is a social hierarchy in terms of attractiveness, whereby incels see themselves on the bottom of the hierarchy due to their claimed unattractiveness, but also other relational and societal concepts often mentioned by incels, such as hypergamy and misandry. However, while this hierarchical worldview of the blackpill as well as its underlying societal constructs have been deconstructed as essentially misogynistic and resulting from patriarchal structures by scholars, the authors do not relate

them to misogynist worldviews.⁵⁴ Here the ideological connection to structural misogyny and patriarchal systems of socialisation is neglected.⁵⁵

Conclusion

Given the above considerations, we are doubtful that the IRS is a valid measure of commitment to incel ideology. As we have outlined, it at best bears the potential to capture which aspects of the different existing interpretations of inceldom are particularly relevant to the sampled individuals. At worst, however, the scale represents a limited and superficial reproduction of a particular interpretation of incels as *male* and *victim* without engaging with underlying worldviews about broader gender relations of male superiority and misogyny (rather than individual experience) established as central to produce the self-identification as “male victims,” which finds expression in the blackpill at the core of incel radicalisation.⁵⁶ Importantly, the reliance solely on survey data without engagement with the broader literature on incel ideology also disregards the possibility that the interpretation of inceldom conveyed by respondents reflects how incels might want to present themselves differently to researchers/outsideers than they do on forums. This disparity is not addressed because the authors explicitly do not engage with how incels perform their identity and victimhood online; at the same time, the wording of questions around *misconceptions* and *persecution* already assumes the sense of victimhood as central to the responses, yet does not inform the analysis. The lack of engagement with misogyny as a core element of incel ideology, nor a real grappling with incels’ conception of their own victimhood, a victimhood intimately tied to misogyny as incels blame women for their plight, results in the authors reproducing this victimhood rather than interrogating it.

Violent: Radical Intentions and Incel Violence

A main tenet of the article’s argument is that “strong adherence to Incel ideology did not predict radical attitudes or radical intentions.”⁵⁷ The article finds that the “Incel Ideology (II) scale was not correlated with the “Radical Intentions Scale,” and that the majority of incels in this sample (83 percent) rejected radical attitudes and intentions.”⁵⁸ The main argument made here is that incels are not as approving of violence as their reputation appears. While we agree that the common media depiction of incels as a homogeneous group of notorious and toxic killers is counterproductive at best and dangerous at worst,⁵⁹ we find several shortcomings in the article’s engagement with incel violence noteworthy: its limited engagement with violence beyond mass murder, its flawed methodological operationalisation of sexual violence (rape), and its lack of engagement with the importance of violence for incels’ online practices and identities proven by a variety of studies.⁶⁰

Violence as a Concept

First, the violence the article is concerned with seems to be mainly approached through incels’ responses on their willingness to commit rape and/or political violence, and their admiration

of incel mass killers. Notably, the authors coded open-ended responses as “disputing violence” if they mentioned opposing incels connection with “murder, terrorism, threat, dangerous.”⁶¹ Beyond this, the survey itself only explicitly references violence in the question “I would continue to support a person or an organisation that fights for incels’ political and legal rights even if they sometimes resort to violence.” In this question it is again unclear what kind of violence is referenced, yet it seems to refer to terrorist *activist* violence. There are other types of (misogynist) violence, however, shown to be important in the context of male supremacist ideologies (and political violence more broadly), including interpersonal and domestic abuse, as well as misogynist online violence and sexual cyber harassment.⁶² Yet, misogynist and interpersonal violence is often neglected from the scope of “terrorist” or “political” violence.⁶³ Misogynistic behaviour is about punishing women who act in ways subverting gendered expectations and violating patriarchal norms.⁶⁴ Inevitably, misogyny involves violence which manifests in various forms, from physical intimidation to sexual harassment, rape, and fatal violence. Specifically in the online realm, violent practices of misogynistic cyber harassment, ranging from active and passive verbal abuse through sexualised language and imagery to direct threats of physical violence often coupled with doxing, have been shown to result in the ostracising and silencing of women online.⁶⁵ The IRS article thus focuses on a narrow and inadequate conception of violence, overlooking the broader continuum of sexual and misogynist violence, which is routinely experienced both online and offline.⁶⁶

Rape

Violence is also considered with some brief mentions of rape. Specifically, respondents’ “willingness to rape” was measured with the question “I would rape if I thought I would get away with it.”⁶⁷ Previous studies show that few men in the general population will answer such questions affirmatively.⁶⁸ However, this changes when the question is altered to describe acts of sexual violence, omitting the word *rape*.⁶⁹ In manosphere communities, including incels, rape as a criminal offence is often contested and/or minimised, and the belief that most women lie about rape is an accepted common mythology, meaning that men might indeed condone or even commit rape but claim it to be consensual sex.⁷⁰ This is similar to how incels consider themselves as not misogynistic while engaging in misogynistic practices. For example, the authors find that “the majority of Incels (28 [participants], 52%) saw Incels as less violent/misogynistic than they are perceived. Only a small minority (3 [participants], 6%) believed Incels to be more dangerous than perceived.”⁷¹ While this self-assessment may be true for those surveyed, it is important to note that incels regularly talk about (and celebrate) rape and sexual violence on their forums.⁷²

Even within the survey responses in the IRS article, there are references to violence and misogyny. Specifically, the authors created a “dispute innocuousness” category to capture some responses stating that the biggest misconception was that incels were harmless. Some of these responses included “People underestimate us, we will continue to kill until we get our

government assigned girlfriends” and “People underestimate us, they will regret it when the Incel revolution starts.” While the authors do acknowledge that the “dispute innocuousness” category is concerning, they interpret these responses as appearing only among a radical few, stating the “more support for incel killers and willingness to rape, the more likely a participant was to say that Incels were more dangerous than the public perceives them.”⁷³ This finding is, however, not theorised in a broader sense but rather positioned as a contrast to a larger group of respondents that “dispute” violence and misogyny.

Violence as Practice

The study concludes that “the majority of Incels reject violence as a course of action for themselves and denounce violence of the three notorious Incel killers.”⁷⁴ In the third scale (Radicalisation Scale - IRS), the authors find that,

...the majority of participants (64%; 35 individuals) had an average score of 1 (not at all) on the IRS scale, indicating that they fully rejected Incel violence. Only nine individuals in our sample (17%) scored above 2.5, the scale’s midpoint. In other words, the majority of Incels in this sample (83%) rejected radical attitudes and intentions.⁷⁵

In their literature review, the authors claim that hateful content produced by a small subset is “consistent with existing research on incel online activity,” citing two studies - Baele and colleagues, and Jaki and colleagues.⁷⁶ However, that is not what either study finds. In fact, Baele and colleagues found that, after the 2018 Toronto van attack, “messages explicitly endorsing or calling for violence remained extremely frequent, confirming the widespread support for violence produced by this worldview.”⁷⁷ Meanwhile, Jaki and colleagues analysed hate speech rather than support for violence.⁷⁸ They found that although “about 10% of the users are responsible for the majority of the hate speech”, that “about half of the users in our dataset posted hateful messages at one time or another.”⁷⁹ These findings are further confirmed in other qualitative and quantitative analyses of incel spaces, showing an “overwhelming support among self-proclaimed incels for attacks and violence more generally” as well as a common practice of self-identified incels to commit other forms of violence such as doxing, image-based sexual abuse, harassment, and stalking.⁸⁰ This is not to say that these forms of violence are exclusive to incels, but that various forms of violence have arisen from and are encouraged in incel spaces. The authors of the IRS article fail to assess the differences between their survey results and the everyday reality of the forums. Even if it is indeed only a small subset of forum users producing the content (making their respondents merely observers of such content), the authors do not explain why individuals who claim they do not endorse violence continue to participate in spaces where support of violence is commonplace, and where there is often active denial of broader societal misogyny and (male) violence against women and girls.⁸¹ In fact, posts perceived as being too “blue pill” (anything viewed as counter to the blackpill, including advice like “work on your personality,” or “don’t be misogynist” as a way to stop being an incel) are often banned from misogynist incel forums or ostracised by other members of

these forums.⁸² This shows how normalised both misogynist and violent statements are in incel discourse and online “culture,” which does not, however, find entrance into the overall arguments the article makes about violence. Glossing over these broader perspectives on violence in the IRS article, the authors use their data to conclude that “given these parameters, there is little warrant for classifying Incels as a terrorist group based on the action of a tiny minority among them,”⁸³ which is particularly odd given that they compare incels with other radical groups, pointing out “only a tiny minority of those who held radical Jihadist ideas engaged in radical action.”⁸⁴ However, even if we were to accept both the idea that violence can be measured sufficiently through the survey questions and the idea of a threshold of violent membership as an indicator of ‘terrorist’ ideology, it is unclear where the authors would set such a threshold. Methodologically speaking, while nine individuals is a small subset of the population, if this percentage was extrapolated to the membership of the largest incel forum alone, 17 percent of their membership is roughly 3,566 individuals.⁸⁵ This also does not do justice to the fact that even the small handful of incels who have committed mass murder over the last couple of years have taken many lives.⁸⁶

Conclusion

The difference between the survey results that indicate rejection of violence and the day-to-day activity of normalised violent misogynistic language and related practices of cyberharassment and abuse within incel forums (as well as some of the survey results that endorse violence), while potentially explainable through extreme differences in the definitions about what *rape*, *violence*, and *misogyny* entail, is not theorised, explained and, subsequently reconciled in the article. Thus, we find three important shortcomings with how the article engages with violent intentions: first, on a conceptual level, we find the reduction of violence to physical political violence in the incel context problematic since it disregards other types of misogynist violence significant in contexts of gender as well as online spaces, both of which are relevant to engagement with incels. Second, on a methodological level, we are sceptical of the measure of “rape willingness,” which does not engage with the methodological and definitional problems that come with assessing these types of gender-based violence. Lastly, and related to the previous points about both violence and ideology, we contest the idea that incel perspectives of violence can be considered as objective measures. Understandings of incel ideology based on self-description to researchers should be coupled with an analysis of their online practices. Relying on self-description without analysing a group’s practices is something that has not been applied to other extreme groups—for example, the Taliban say they support women, but this is not accepted as the absolute reality of this group.

In fact, the discrepancy between the assessments of the IRS article as well as other survey-based research and studies that engage with the online performance of inceldom, should not come as a surprise given that the very violence of their online and anonymously performed identity and ideology produces a need to justify and present themselves (vis-a-vis outsiders) as

continuously non-violent. As Andersen puts it:

*Incels set up boundaries between themselves and violent actors by asserting they are participants in online spaces or groups unrelated to the incelsphere, and framing them as “actual” harmful others...Boundary work thus protects the purity of the online incel milieu from contamination by harmful others.*⁸⁷

One could thus argue that rather than representing the actual purity of incels as portrayed by the authors, the study can serve as an example of the centrality of such purity/boundary work for incels' very identity.

Vulnerable: Radicalisation and Mental Health

Much of the study's understanding of radicalisation, including the survey questions posed to measure it, is based on a particular understanding of radicalisation and (self-) assessed vulnerability to radicalise. We are concerned about the assumptions underlying both the conceptualisation and measurements in the article about how radicalisation is set in relation to activism, institutional mistrust, and mental health.

Activism

There is a common tendency in the traditionally rather state-centric and policy-driven field of terrorism research to only consider direct acts of violence as problematic and relevant to the analysis and prevention of political violence.⁸⁸ In the article, instead of violence, the authors find that the “only significant predictor of Incel Ideology was Activist Intentions,” which they interpret as meaning that “among participants in this study, a greater commitment to Incel ideology corresponded to a greater commitment to only legal/nonviolent action to advance Incels' interests.”⁸⁹ This non-violent aspect of incel *activism* is considered mainly through a focus on support for and involvement with “organisations fighting for incels' political and legal rights, for example through demonstrations, petitions, flyers etc.”⁹⁰ This perspective draws largely on a view of social movement activism as offline, in-person, and somewhat centralised in organisational units. This conception of *activist* inceldom implicitly repeats a common misunderstanding of social movement activism and its goals as at least somewhat peaceful and essentially liberating, implying that it is not harmful to others.⁹¹

In addition, none of these assumptions correspond to how most manosphere male supremacist groups—and incels in particular – organise. For example, while Men's Rights Activists (MRAs), have indeed occasionally combined their online activities in virtual communities with offline protests and advocacy work, this type of activism does not resonate with most incels (nor the blackpill ideology), who purports that efforts to work through existing political and social institutions are futile.⁹² Rather, their online activities are more focused on providing alternative spaces for the exchange of their views, often based on violent discursive practices. Aside from the means of advocating for incels' rights, when looking at incel violence the article does not

specify how non-violent the political or legal rights that incels might want to advance can indeed be, given that much of their goals are explicitly promoting the oppression of women's rights.

Mobilisation

The perspective on organisationally driven radicalisation, as well as successful radicalisation as equivalent to the usage of violence, is reflected in the previous comparison with Jihadist groups. However, far-right groups and their forms of recruitment and mobilisation may be a more appropriate comparison for incel spaces, given not only important overlaps in their misogynist ideology but also in their online practices, drawing extensively on pop-cultural references, dog whistles, and pseudoscientific evidence to construct an alternative view of the world.⁹³ Researchers have found important differences between Islamist and far-right online content, highlighting that “[o]rganisations like Islamic State use social media to recruit participants while the vast majority of far-right interactions take place on social media platforms, using aesthetics deeply influenced by internet youth cultures.”⁹⁴ One aspect of these interactions that has received much attention in incel as well as far-right extremist spaces is a trend to engage in *trolling* or *shitposting*. Shitposting is the practice of posting deliberately provocative or off-topic comments to provoke others, distract from the main conversation, or to obscure the sincerity of the *shitposter*. Scholars note that such practices, along with the use of irony and trolling by far-right users often seek to mask true intentions, to spread and normalise hateful views (while rejecting accusations of bigotry), and spur recruitment.⁹⁵ In the IRS article, both the potential of shitposting to mask dangerous content as well as the difficulty this presents for researchers to assess incel online rhetoric is noted. They suggest that survey-based responses can help overcome this difficulty by presenting “self-reported violent intentions.”⁹⁶

However, while shitposting is indeed complex and multilayered, as a part of the online culture as well as means of mobilisation it has to be taken into account. As Witt puts it, “serious or not, the products of these discourses are very real.”⁹⁷ Indeed, countering the assumption that only the uptake of direct means of violence is to be problematised, researchers have argued that even though the consumption of media does not lead to the majority of its viewers becoming radicalised into violence, the adoption of radical beliefs “may have other deleterious impacts, such as increasing support for authoritarian ideas, diminishing trust in public institutions, or decreasing support for prosocial public health efforts.”⁹⁸ These aspects resonate much more with incels, one of whose central claims is that their forums create ‘alternative spaces’ to what they perceive as a malevolent mainstream of real-life events. Research has highlighted how these alternative spaces of the far-right are often used to reinterpret social events, to foster a discriminatory and non-democratic worldview and how their growth – and successful use of online and offline media – has led to a movement of such ideas into the mainstream.⁹⁹

Mental Health

Instead of taking the violent discourse and practices in incel forums into consideration as both the root cause and effect of radicalisation, the article advocates a strong emphasis on mental health and autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in incel communities. The authors are careful not to claim a causal relationship between mental illness and participation in incel forums or violence.¹⁰⁰ However, in another (closely related) paper on the subject of incels, Moskalenko and colleagues¹⁰¹ find that radical incels who embrace “violent manifestations of the incel subculture” are “qualitatively different from the non-radical majority,” arguing that “radicalised incels are more likely to be on the neuro-divergent spectrum and more likely to have been bullied than non-radicalised incels.”¹⁰² This study supports Speckhard and colleagues’ finding that in comparison to the general population, rates of ASD diagnoses and traits are significantly higher in incel communities.¹⁰³ As Gheorghe and Clement highlight, however, not only are these works promoting an ableist narrative, but in connecting incels’ experiences of bullying, social exclusion, and difficulty forming relationships with autism, such individuals are then signposted to incel communities and to form an affinity with incel rhetoric, potentially fuelling the now established association between incels and autism.¹⁰⁴

On a methodological note, it is worthwhile to note that these mental health struggles (anxiety and depression) and autism spectrum disorder diagnoses were all self-reported and not externally validated, and the article notes that almost half of survey respondents that reported mental health issues were self-diagnosed. While there are a variety of scales used in research on mental health that could have been used to validate these claims of mental health issues, none were used by the authors.¹⁰⁵ Further, bullying and persecution were not defined in the survey but left up to respondents to interpret. This is concerning given that the authors themselves acknowledge that,

...it is possible that the prevalence of mental health issues discussions on Incel forums creates a kind of “demand characteristic,” normalising and even encouraging those who wish to belong to the Incel community to express mental health problems.¹⁰⁶

However, this limitation does not come into the analysis itself. This is problematic, as self-reporting of mental health issues or histories of bullying should not be necessarily taken at face value and in isolation, but instead analysed for how these incidents might interact with incel ideology, and victimhood and persecution as a key factor. Further, the authors do not interrogate whether or not the mental health issues explored are pre-existing, formed, or were worsened by participation in incel spaces. This is a big omission, especially considering how normalised suicide discourse is in incel spaces.¹⁰⁷

In the IRS paper, this such-derived mental health struggles and incels’ “history of bullying and/or persecution” is set in relation to their (supposed) rejection of violence from most incels according to the scale. Taking both of these findings together leads the authors to conclude that “there is little warrant for classifying Incels as a terrorist group based on the action of a tiny

minority among them.”¹⁰⁸ Even if these numbers are an accurate representation, poor mental health or an ASD diagnosis does not justify or even mitigate the violence emanating from incel spaces nor membership in a hateful group. Misogyny and misogynistic motivated violence are not caused by mental illness, poor mental health, or autism, but rather the result of misogynist and patriarchal structures. Such assessments further risk stigmatising people with autism, mental illnesses, and poor mental health.¹⁰⁹ Similarly, this does not explain participation in a hateful forum. Straight cis-men, which is how most incels on misogynist incel forums identify, are not the most vulnerable population in regards to mental health, and many other vulnerable populations (take LGBTQ+ youth for example) suffering from mental health issues, including being at high risk for depression and suicide, are very unlikely to commit mass violence.¹¹⁰

Research on masculinity has indeed long found that experiences of bullying can result in a feeling of humiliation and emasculation, which has played a role in school shootings.¹¹¹ However, different from the IRS study, such studies typically highlight how this humiliation tends to be gendered as masculine and results from a male supremacist feeling of entitlement.¹¹² This entitlement is particularly strong in incel spaces, which are fuelled by aggrieved sexual entitlement, making them feel like that they have been “sexually excluded” and have a moral obligation to get their “sexual rights” back.¹¹³ As Nicole Nguyen explains, in her exploration of the treatment of the 2015 Charleston Church massacre perpetrator,

*Mental health often is used as an alibi to justify massacres waged by white shooters, eschewing more complex discussions about the primacy of white supremacy as an organising frame for violence while criminalising individuals with psychiatric disability labels.*¹¹⁴

The way in which mental health and ASD diagnoses are invoked in the IRS article, in part to establish that incels should not be classified as a terrorist group, combined with the lack of engagement in understanding how systemic misogyny and male supremacism fuels incel communities, but is also enacted beyond them, mirrors Nguyen’s observation of the treatment of white supremacist shooters. The invocation of mental illness, ASD diagnoses, and poor mental health dismisses the political agency of white and male supremacist actors, and instead pathologises participation in violent action and/or extreme movements as resulting from an abject mental state. Platforming these incel convictions without engaging with their implications is based on an underlying tendency of *himpathy*—the undue sympathy for men who have done harm.¹¹⁵ Because the authors fail to analyse the misogyny that shapes this movement, and put the emphasis instead on mental health, misogyny and male supremacy is at once made aberrant and excused.

Conclusion

The article presents a distinction between activists, terrorists, and those suffering from depression and loneliness. Incels are presented as a vulnerable population, through a proximity to a (supposedly positive) activism, a misunderstanding of how their unorganised activism

can still lead to mobilisation, and through an emphasis on mental health issues and other vulnerabilities. All of these are not set into a causal relationship by the authors; yet their co-consideration in the context of any combination of these scales, as well as their portrayal as being somewhat indicative of individuals and groups' violence potential, are problematic, because they imply them as factors to assess risk of incel violence. These factors are not set in relation to a more systemic perspective on ideology, including the centrality of misogyny as a violent category or goal of advocacy in itself. Yet, it is precisely where we can see overlaps between the distinct categories, as their misogyny rather than their self-understanding as activists or suffering from mental illness, that their status has the potential to become violent. This lack of engagement with how ideology and worldviews interact with violence is also reflected in the lack of a broader understanding of online radicalisation and recruitment as established means of the far-right, which does not necessarily lead to individual lone actor violence for all those involved, but entails dangers of a broader societal anti-democratic mobilisation based on distrust of institutions and resulting justification of a diverse set of violence.

Discussion: An Easy Fit? On “Unreal” Research and Real Victims

We see a variety of issues with how the authors of the IRS article treat incel radicalisation. While we have focused in particular on the problems of how the article conceptualises the core aspects of inceldom, violence and radicalisation, here we want to focus on the methodological and epistemological problems that accompany these shortcomings to outline why we consider them as particularly problematic when set in relation to their potential reception by policymakers.

First, as we have outlined in all three sections, there is a lack of reflection on how the methodological approach of surveying a particular sample of incels relates to the broader incel community. This is not only relevant considering the sampling method as outlined above. While survey and interview data can provide new insights on who and why people participate in these spaces, it is important to caveat and triangulate these insights with data from the forums themselves. However, the IRS article positions the data mined from surveys and interviews as *actual* and *real*: “The prevalence of trolling and ‘shitposting’ on Incel social media makes extrapolating from Incel online rhetoric to their *actual*¹¹⁶ opinions and attitudes problematic and primary data on Incels (surveys or interviews) remain scarce.”¹¹⁷ In this way, the authors render online discourse analyses *unreal* and suspect, and therefore position them as less accurate. However, this underestimates how misogynist incels, who often seek to represent themselves as victims of women, feminism, and society, might choose to represent themselves in a way that emphasises their perceived victimhood with researchers.¹¹⁸ Further, as the IRS article, and other researchers have noted, incels are hesitant with outsiders, be they researchers, mental health professionals, or P/CVE interventionists, and participating in such a survey may also be a method of trolling but also a reason that those who responded are not representative

overall. For example, an earlier survey with Light Upon Light (the same countering violent extremism initiative involved in the IRS paper) was met with extreme scepticism and paranoia in several misogynist incel forums, with posts warning members to leave the forum for other spaces to protect their identities or risk having their personal information leaked to security authorities.¹¹⁹ These problematiqués should be considered when interpreting the authors' conclusion that their findings indicate that "news stories about Incel killers do not adequately represent the larger Incel population, the majority of which reject violence."¹²⁰ Surveys or interviews are no more objective "real" representations than online discourses, and understanding of incel ideology based on these self-representations alone is concerning particularly when the difference between self-representation in surveys and interviews and online activity is not investigated.

Yet, this epistemological perspective is often adopted by policymakers and practitioners for three reasons: first, the understanding of good research as quantitative and/or quantifiable fits well with the incentive of policymakers to base their interventions on what is perceived as an objective measure, which the IRS article claims to provide.¹²¹ Scholars have shown that the path-dependencies, as well as technocratic workings of policy-making cycles resonate with both the quantitative language and perspectives.¹²² Second, a similar "easy fit" applies to a lack of engagement with systemic factors, including the complex interplay between practices and rhetoric, between online and offline, and between direct and indirect and structural violence. These types of interplay are hard to capture, complex to include, require much long-term planning and research, and the triangulation of data. More so, the required solutions to such problems are likely to expose a necessary shift in the systemic workings of the institutions of governance themselves (in our case P/CVE practitioners and policymakers, as well as security apparatuses in a variety of government systems), which require hard work, self-reflection, and significantly, the political will to change. Compared to this, the IRS scale presents a much easier approach to inceldom by focusing on the easier more direct manifestations and effects.

Third, as has been shown in previous works, the very basis of P/CVE interventions and some of the research on incels, are themselves implicated in the logics of male supremacy, which makes the above-mentioned reflection all the more necessary and all the harder.¹²³ Similarly, the authors of the IRS article fail to critically assess the role that victimhood plays among male supremacists and obscure this victimhood claim's foundations in male sexual entitlement and misogyny, and the harm that these movements perpetuate. While the IRS authors as well as a range of others publishing similar research, are hesitant to take incel's hateful discourse completely seriously, many of them seem to readily, and uncritically, accept other narratives that incels hope to forward, namely, incels' claim to victimhood. This readiness to accept male supremacist assumptions is not a particularity of the authors but is instead indicative of the broader embeddedness and uncritical replication of misogynist arguments in media and public discourses about incels so far.¹²⁴ The fact that – as opposed to other radical movements

– incels’ narratives of victimhood and “non-violent”/“non-radical intentions” are taken to trump their expressions of violence is both problematic and revealing about how the analysis is unable or unwilling to tackle the underlying male supremacist worldviews of incels. Because the epistemological and methodological setting of the article is likely to resonate well and be easily integrated with policymaking practices and logic, we caution strongly against the usage of the IRS scale to assess the danger and violence emanating from incel spaces. Ultimately, the authors present their “newly validated” IRS to be a “useful measure for early detection of individuals vulnerable to radicalisation to violent Incel action.”¹²⁵ However, as we have outlined, the methodology and validation of this scale is highly suspect. As we have shown, the framing of incels as simply “vulnerable” and “mostly peaceful” fails to recognise the less spectacular harms and violence (i.e., misogynistic, racist, and homophobic hate speech and cyberharassment, for example) that exist in misogynist incel spaces as fully “real.”¹²⁶ All of these harms are then not recognised as political or representative of incels nor connected to broader structural male supremacy, but rather painted as a problem of “certain men.”¹²⁷ Coupled with the emphasis on ASD diagnoses and a history of victimhood (through bullying) seems to explain away “radical incels,” and therefore any group association with violence or misogyny, and likely further stigmatise those with mental illness as potentially violent. We strongly caution against this approach, because, as we have shown, it ends up depoliticising the misogyny and violent rhetoric that other studies have recognised as *widespread* in incel spaces, and which has motivated the violence emerging out of incel and other male supremacist spaces.¹²⁸ Moreover, it is precisely this rhetoric that has been shown to increase distrust in institutions and underlie a general democratic backsliding and general support for populist voices.¹²⁹

Conclusion

This article has provided a discussion and feminist critique of the methodological, conceptual, and epistemological underpinnings of the IRS article, a potentially influential publication into a broader trend to assess incels based on surveys without a more comprehensive understanding of societal power dynamics. We have concluded that at best, the article relativises and excuses the violent emanations from these spaces. At worst, this scale contributes to the mainstreaming of misogynist male supremacist discourses of victimhood and antifeminism, reproduces antifeminist stances within academia itself, as well as an outdated perspective on the role of social media and online mobilisation and radicalisation. The central claim of this type of research and policymaking on incels is that “listening to incels” can help to expose a hitherto hidden *mismatch* between public perception of incels and their self-description. However, as we have shown, the very problematising of this supposed mismatch is part of incel’s identification as ultimate victimhood and is thus vital to their strategies to legitimise and perpetuate misogynist violence through their own position as victims.

More so, the mismatch between incel and media discourses is not as significant as it seems. Instead, feminist researchers have consistently shown that the underlying misogynist and male supremacist assumptions that undergird incel ideology are deeply embedded in both media and academic discourse. That the beliefs shared by incels are so easily published in media and research without problematising their misogynist roots and effects shows they are somewhat of an “easy fit” with sets of sexist beliefs, still deeply rooted in society and academia. Viewing the IRS article in this light, it can be identified as one incident of a broader tendency whereby the platforming of incel convictions contributes to the uncritical reproduction of misogynist male supremacist discourses of victimhood, which serve to cement antifeminist and misogynist belief sets within society and academia itself. In order to productively deal with decidedly antifeminist and misogynist movements, we argue that what is required instead is greater critical feminist awareness about how misogyny and male supremacy is not an individual characteristic of some men, which sometimes turn violent, but rather a systemic underpinning of most societies, which easily interlinks with other systems of oppression. We therefore want to close this piece with a call for researchers and policy practitioners to engage with a more comprehensive understanding of incel radicalisation that does not take incel’s claims of so-called wounded male victimhood at face value, but instead integrates a systemic understanding of how male supremacy underlines and transcends incel radicalisation. Future analyses must be more careful about addressing the problematic effects resulting from research designs of uncritical epistemologies in male supremacist research. We recommend that practitioners and policymakers carefully consider the research that they choose to inform their recommendations, and critically reflect on the biases and interests that inform research, and their own positionality and practices.

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Endnotes

1 We distinguish between individuals who historically and presently have identified with the involuntary celibate or incel label from self-identifying incels who engage and perpetuate male supremacist ideology and the misogynist incel movement. The focus of this article is on the latter group.

2 For a more comprehensive overview of the Manosphere's history, composition, and beliefs, we would point the reader to several texts including: Ann-Kathrin Rothermel, Megan Kelly, and Greta Jasser, "Of Victims, Mass Murder, and "Real Men": The Masculinities of the "Manosphere" In *Male Supremacism in the United States: From Patriarchal Traditionalism to Misogynist Incels and the Alt-Right*, ed. Emily K. Carian, Alex DiBranco and Chelsea Ebin, (London: Routledge, 2022), 117-141, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003164722>; Debbie Ging. "Alphas, betas, and Incels: Theorizing the masculinities of the manosphere." *Men and Masculinities*, 22 no. 4 (2019): 638-57, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X17706401>; Lisa Sugiura, *The Incel Rebellion: The Rise of the Manosphere and the Virtual War Against Women*. (Emerald Publishing Limited, 2021); Rachel Schmitz and Emily Kazyak, "Masculinities in Cyberspace: An Analysis of Portrayals of Manhood in Men's Rights Activist Websites," *Social Sciences* 5, no. 2 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci5020018>.

3 Ging, "Alphas, betas and Incels"; Sugiura, *The Incel Rebellion*; Rothermel, Kelly, Jasser, "Of Victims, Mass Murder, and "Real Men"; Schmitz and Kazyak, "Masculinities in Cyberspace".

4 Ging, "Alphas, betas, and Incels".

5 Written as both "blackpill" and "Black Pill".

6 Megan Kelly, Alex DiBranco, and Julia DeCook, "Misogynist Incels and Male Supremacism" *New America* February 18, 2021. <https://www.newamerica.org/political-reform/reports/misogynist-incels-and-male-supremacism/>; Sugiura, *The Incel Rebellion*.

7 Ann-Kathrin Rothermel, "'The Other Side': Assessing the Polarization of Gender Knowledge Through a Feminist Analysis of the Affective-Discursive in Anti-Feminist Online Communities" *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*, 27 no. 4 (Winter 2020), 718-741, <https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/jxaa024>; Angus Lindsay, "Swallowing the Black Pill: Involuntary Celibates' (incels) Anti-Feminism within Digital Society" *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy*, 11 no. 1, (2022): 210-224, <https://doi.org/10.5204/ijcjsd.2138>; Rothermel, Kelly, and Jasser "Of Victims, Mass Murder and 'Real Men'".

8 Michael Halpin, "Weaponized Subordination: How Incels Discredit Themselves to Degrade Women," *Gender and Society*, 36 no. 6 (2022): 813-837.

9 Ging, "Alphas, betas, and Incels" Alice E. Marwick and Rebecca Lewis, "Media Manipulation and Disinformation Online." *Data & Society*. (2017), <https://datasociety.net/library/media-manipulation-and-disinfo-online/>; Jack Bratich and Sarah Banet-Weiser, "From Pick-up Artists to Incels: Con (Fidence) Games, Networked Misogyny, and the Failure of Neoliberalism." *International Journal of Communication* 13, no. 25 (2019): 5003-5027, <https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/102183/>.

10 Julia DeCook and Megan Kelly, "Interrogating the "incel menace": assessing the threat of male supremacy in terrorism studies." *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, (2021): 706-726, <https://10.1080/17539153.2021.2005099>; Caron E. Gentry, "Misogynistic terrorism: it has always been here." *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 15, no. 1 (2022): 209-24, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2022.2031131>; Eviane Leidig, "Why Terrorism Studies Miss the Mark When It Comes to Incels," *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism*. August 31, 2021 <https://www.icct.nl/publication/why-terrorism-studies-miss-mark-when-it-comes-incels>; Kelly, DiBranco, and DeCook, "Misogynist Incels and Male Supremacism".

11 M. Kelly, "The Mainstream Pill." *Political Research Associates*. July 1, 2021. <http://www.politicalresearch.org/2021/07/01/mainstream-pill>.

12 Sophia Moskalenko, Naama Kates, Juncal Fernández-Garayzábal González, and Mia Bloom, "Predictors of Radical Intentions among Incels: A Survey of 54 Self-identified Incels," *Journal of Online Trust and Safety*, 1 no. 3 (2022), 1-21, <https://doi.org/10.54501/jots.v1i3.57>.

13 We understand that this commitment to feminist theory might seem “loaded” in the context of analysis of antifeminist movements and may even disqualify us in the eyes of some. Yet as we show in the remainder of the argument, such an anti-feminist stance to the analysis of antifeminist movements is likely to be less rather than more “objective.” A similar argument would be to say a democratically leaning person was too biased to analyse anti-democratic movements. (Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective” *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 575-99, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3178066>; Anita Lavorgna, and Lisa Sugiura, “Blurring Boundaries: Negotiating Researchers’ Positionality and Identities in Digital Qualitative Research.” *Italian Sociological Review*, 12, no 7s (2022): 709-727, <https://doi.org/10.13136/isr.v12i7s.578>.)

14 Kate Manne, *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny*. (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2017), 78-79.

15 Ibid, 47.

16 Emily K. Carian, Alex DiBranco, and Megan Kelly. “Intervening in Problematic Research Approaches to Incel Violence.” *Men and Masculinities* (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X231200825>.

17 Emily K. Carian, Alex DiBranco, and Chelsea & Ebin. “Preface,” C. In *Male Supremacism in the United States: From Patriarchal Traditionalism to Misogynist Incels and the Alt-Right*, edited by Emily K. Carian, Alex DiBranco and Chelsea Ebin, (London: Routledge, 2022), vii-xiv.

18 Moskalkenko, Kates, Fernández-Garayzábal González, and Bloom, “Predictors of Radical Intentions,” 2.

19 Jesse Morton, Alexander Ash, Ken Reidy, Namma Kates, Molly Ellenberg, and Anne Speckhard. “Asking Incels (Part 1): Assessing the Impacts of COVID-19 Quarantine and Coverage of the Canadian Terrorism Designation on Incel Isolation and Resentment,” International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism, January 21, 2021, <https://www.icsve.org/asking-incels-part-1-assessing-the-impacts-of-covid-19-quarantine-and-coverage-of-the-canadian-terrorism-designation-on-incele-isolation-and-resentment/>; Sophia Moskalkenko, Juncal Fernández-Garayzábal González, Naama Kates, and Jesse Morton. “Incel Ideology, Radicalization and Mental Health: A Survey Study.” *The Journal of Intelligence, Conflict, and Warfare* 4 no. 3 (2022): 1–29, <https://doi.org/10.21810/jicw.v4i3.3817>; Anne Speckhard and Molly Ellenberg. “Self-Reported Psychiatric Disorder and Perceived Psychological Symptom Rates among Involuntary Celibates (Incels) and Their Perceptions of Mental Health Treatment.” *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression* (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1080/19434472.2022.2029933>; Anne Speckhard, Molly Ellenberg, Jesse Morton, and Alexander Ash. “Involuntary Celibates’ Experiences of and Grievance over Sexual Exclusion and the Potential Threat of Violence Among Those Active in an Online Incel Forum.” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 14, no. 2 (2021): 89-121, <https://doi.org/10.5038/1944-0472.14.2.1910>.

20 Moskalkenko, Kates, Fernández-Garayzábal González, and Bloom, “Predictors of Radical Intentions,” 2.

21 Ibid,14.; The “Incel Podcast” is hosted by one of the authors of the “Predictors of Radical Intentions” article. Light Upon Light is a Preventing and Countering Extremism (P/CVE) initiative, and has also been involved with several of the other articles that use survey data of incel forums (Morton, Ash, Reidy, Kates, Ellenberg, and Speckhard. “Asking Incels”; Moskalkenko, Fernández-Garayzábal González, Kates, and Morton. “Incel Ideology, Radicalization and Mental Health”; Anne Speckhard, Molly Ellenberg, Jesse Morton, and Alexander Ash. “Involuntary Celibates’ Experiences of and Grievance over Sexual Exclusion and the Potential Threat of Violence Among Those Active in an Online Incel Forum.” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 14, no. 2 (2021): 89-121.

22 Moskalkenko, Kates, Fernández-Garayzábal González, and Bloom, “Predictors of Radical Intentions,” 11.

23 Ibid, 12.

24 Ibid, 11-13.

25 Ibid, 14.

26 Ibid, 14.

- 27 Kelly, DiBranco, and DeCook, "Misogynist Incels and Male Supremacism"; Rothermel, Kelly, and Jasser, "Of Victims, Mass Murder, and "Real Men"; Sugiura, *"The Incel Rebellion"*.
- 28 Moskalenko, Kates, Fernández-Garayzábal González, and Bloom, "Predictors of Radical Intentions," 9.
- 29 Notably, this podcast and this (P/CVE) programming initiative have both given uncritical sympathetic platforms to incels from the largest misogynist incel forum, including moderators and the (now former) administrator of the forum, for an overview see: Kelly "The Mainstream Pill."
- 30 Moskalenko, Kates, Fernández-Garayzábal González, and Bloom, "Predictors of Radical Intentions," 13.
- 31 Ibid, 6.
- 32 Ibid, 5-6.
- 33 DeCook and Kelly "Interrogating the 'incel menace'".
- 34 Meg Roser, Charlotte Chalker, and Tim Squirrell. "Spitting out the blackpill: Evaluating how incels present themselves in their own words on the incel wiki" *Institute for Strategic Dialogue*. January 30, 2023, <https://www.isdglobal.org/isd-publications/spitting-out-the-blackpill-evaluating-how-incels-present-themselves-in-their-own-words-on-the-incel-wiki/>; There are a few online sites that allow men and women to join incel forums and identify as incels, however, these communities do not seem to engage as much with the "pill" ideology of more explicitly misogynist incel spaces that are most often the focus of current academic study and media reporting. Further some of these forums actively work to distance themselves from misogynist incel spaces by identifying as "involuntary celibates" instead of "incels" Jan Christoffer Andersen and Lisa Sugiura, "Interacting with online deviant subcultures: Gendered experiences of interviewing incels." In the *Routledge International Handbook of Online Deviance*. (forthcoming).
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agnosis associated with social media usage. We argue that caution should be taken regarding drawing conclusions about incels based on their own unvalidated self-diagnoses, especially when, as the authors themselves note, incel online spaces have a tendency towards “normalising and encouraging those who wish to belong to the Incel community to express mental health problems” For more information about mental health scales and self-diagnosis see: Ellen McKay “Social Media and Self Diagnosis” John Hopkins All Children’s Hospital (Summer 2023); Kurt Kroenke et al. “The Patient Health Questionnaire Anxiety and Depression Scale (PHQ-ADS): Initial Validation in Three Clinical Trials,” *Psychosomatic Medicine* 78, no. 6 (Jul-Aug 2016): 716-727, <https://doi.org/10.1097%2FPSY.0000000000000322>; Catalogue of Mental Health Measures (2023). Available at <https://www.catalogumentalhealth.ac.uk>.

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