“Writing all this is helping me justify my plan and to see the futility of continuing:” An Exploratory Study on the Use of Neutralization Techniques in Incel Manifestos

Katerina Papatheodorou

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/psych_theses

Recommended Citation
Papatheodorou, Katerina, ""Writing all this is helping me justify my plan and to see the futility of continuing:" An Exploratory Study on the Use of Neutralization Techniques in Incel Manifestos." Thesis, Georgia State University, 2022.
doi: https://doi.org/10.57709/29413763

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of Psychology at ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Psychology Theses by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gsu.edu.
“Writing all this is helping me justify my plan and to see the futility of continuing:” An Exploratory Study on the Use of Neutralization Techniques in Incel Manifestos

by

Katerina Papatheodorou

Under the Direction of John Horgan, Ph.D.

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in the College of Arts and Sciences Georgia State University 2022
ABSTRACT

“Incels”, or involuntary celibates, are a self-described, largely anonymous online community of men who embrace and promote a deeply misogynistic worldview. This study explored how Incels use “neutralization techniques” (first identified in research by Sykes and Matza, 1957) through a thematic analysis of Incel manifestos, personal diaries, online blogs, and police interviews. Analysis revealed that violent Incels use a variety of neutralization techniques to justify their crimes. Entitlement was found to be the biggest rationale behind their views and actions. A new theme also emerged from the data centered around the belief that life is futile and nothing can improve their lives. This study has the potential to help us understand the psychological procedures that allow Incels to mobilize to violence and can help us assemble a more comprehensive picture of their worldview and psychology.

INDEX WORDS: Involuntary celibate, Mobilization, Neutralization techniques, Thematic analysis, violence
“Writing all this is helping me justify my plan and to see the futility of continuing:” An Exploratory Study on the Use of Neutralization Techniques in Incel Manifestos

by

Katerina Papatheodorou

Committee Chair: John Horgan

Committee: Gabriel Kuperminc
Dominic Parrott

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Services
College of Arts and Sciences
Georgia State University
August 2022
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Yiannakis and Archontia Papatheodorou, and my sister, Annita, for their endless support, encouragement, and patience throughout my academic career. I would also like to dedicate this project to Kristin Cotter for her unlimited support - thank you for not leaving when I inevitably started talking about this project!

Finally, this thesis is dedicated to the memory of my uncle, Demetris Papatheodorou, who passed away late last month. We miss you, òείε.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The completion of this study would not have been possible if it weren't for the support and patience of my supervisor, Dr. John Horgan. Working with you has been a pleasure. Thank you for your kindness and encouragement.

I'd also like to express my gratitude to my committee members, Dr. Gabriel Kuperminc and Dr. Dominic Parrott, for their intelligent suggestions and thoughtful comments. Thank you also for your kindness.

Finally, I would like to thank my colleagues, Ari, Katharina, Prashansa, and Priyam, at the Violent Extremism Research Group (VERG) at Georgia State University, as well as my non-GSU terrorism friends who always lend a listening ear.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ........................................................................................................................................... V

LIST OF TABLES ........................................................................................................................................................ IX

LIST OF FIGURES ..................................................................................................................................................... X

INTRODUCTION .......................................................................................................................................................... 1

1 TECHNIQUES OF NEUTRALIZATION .................................................................................................................... 3

1.1 The development of the techniques of neutralization ......................................................................................... 3

1.2 The techniques ...................................................................................................................................................... 5

1.3 Neutralization Techniques and Ideologically-motivated crimes ................................................................. 8

2 INCELDOM ............................................................................................................................................................ 12

2.1 Male Supremacy .................................................................................................................................................. 12

2.2 The Men’s Right Movement (MRM) .................................................................................................................. 12

2.3 The Manosphere ................................................................................................................................................ 14

2.3.1 Subcultures of the Manosphere ..................................................................................................................... 15

2.4 Involuntary Celibates (Incels) ........................................................................................................................... 17

2.4.1 Incel Pills ...................................................................................................................................................... 19

2.4.2 Incel Archetypes ........................................................................................................................................... 22

2.4.3 Incel Violence ............................................................................................................................................. 25

3 THE CURRENT STUDY .......................................................................................................................................... 28

3.1 Why it matters – Misogyny gone mainstream ................................................................................................. 28
4 METHODOLOGY .................................................................................................................. 31

4.1 Thematic analysis........................................................................................................... 31

4.2 Research questions........................................................................................................ 33

4.3 The data ......................................................................................................................... 34

5 RESULTS ............................................................................................................................. 35

5.1 Analysis .......................................................................................................................... 37

5.1.1 Denial of Responsibility: ......................................................................................... 37

5.1.2 Denial of Injury: ....................................................................................................... 38

5.1.3 Denial of the Victim: ............................................................................................... 38

5.1.4 Condemnation of the Condemners: ....................................................................... 39

5.1.5 Appeal to Higher Loyalties: .................................................................................... 40

5.1.6 Claim of Entitlement: .............................................................................................. 40

5.1.7 Defense of Necessity: .............................................................................................. 41

5.1.8 Appeal to a Higher Moral Law: ............................................................................... 42

5.2 Emergence of new theme: ........................................................................................... 43

5.3 Co-occurrence of neutralization techniques: ............................................................... 43

6 DISCUSSION ....................................................................................................................... 45

7 CONCLUSION ..................................................................................................................... 50

7.1 Limitations .................................................................................................................... 50

7.2 Future Research ............................................................................................................ 51
7.3 Final Thoughts.................................................................................................................. 53

REFERENCES........................................................................................................................ 54
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Frequency Table .......................................................................................................................... 36
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Frequency Distribution Chart................................................................. 37
AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON THE USE OF NEUTRALIZATION TECHNIQUES IN INCEL MANIFESTOS

INTRODUCTION

Young men living in the U.S. are having less sex than their counterparts in previous generations. According to the General Social Survey\(^1\), due to a variety of reasons, including an aging population and lower marriage rates, 22% of U.S. males aged between 18-34 reported no sexual activity in 2018 as opposed to 14% of U.S. females within the same age group (Wilcox & Stone, 2019).

Nevertheless, there exists an online subculture of young men who believe everyone is having sex but themselves. This, they attribute to a gynocentric society that values looks and wealth above everything else, both of which they believe they lack. These individuals, who call themselves "Incels" (or involuntary celibates), are part of a growing online movement that attributes all of their and society's problems to the rise of feminism and the disproportionate amount of sexual and societal power women yield.

Most members of the Incel movement seem to be non-violent, meaning they have not engaged in public acts of violence. However, there is a subsection of them advocating for women to be killed or be sexually and physically assaulted. Worse still, some have left the confines of their almost exclusively online world and have engaged in public acts of violence. For this reason, Inceldom needs to be carefully dissected, and the processes allowing these individuals to carry out such atrocities need to be closely examined. Furthermore, some attackers ascribing to the violent, misogynistic worldview that women are somehow to blame for their lack of sexual success have produced sometimes-extensive writings explaining their beliefs and justifying their violent conduct.

\(^1\) The General Social Survey measures societal and attitudinal changes of U.S. adults on various topics such as crime and violence, national spending preferences, and psychological well-being. It has been administered since 1972 by the NORC at the University of Chicago.
Drawing on Sykes and Matza’s work on neutralization techniques (as well as subsequent contemporary approaches), this study seeks to analyze the manifestos, online blogs, and interviews of violent Incel attackers to understand how they made sense of their world, their violent behavior, and, in some cases, their demise, as well as how they prepared, *psychologically*, for mass murder.

Some might argue that Sykes and Matza’s 1957 theory on techniques of neutralization is outdated. However, it is clear by the sheer amount of research studies, including numerous contemporary ones, using the theory to analyze and understand all kinds of legal and illegal conduct, that Sykes and Matza have developed a theory that has been able to stand the test of time.

Hazani (1991) also highlighted how useful the theory has been in understanding discrepancies between someone’s beliefs and actions and that the techniques developed are “universal modes of response to inconsistency” (p. 146). Furthermore, the fact that researchers have applied the theory to differing behaviors, from playing bingo (Chappelle & Nofziger, 2000) and theft among restaurant workers (Shigihara, 2013) to how members of the Latter-Day Saints church justify shopping on Sundays (Dunford & Kunz, 1973) and how supporters of former president Donald Trump justified their unwillingness to follow restrictions and social distancing measures during the COVID-19 pandemic (Cullen, et al., 2021), further establishes the universal applicability of the theory and its far-reaching implications for research beyond criminology.
1 TECHNIQUES OF NEUTRALIZATION

1.1 The development of the techniques of neutralization

Edwin Sutherland, who coined the term white-collar crime and is a highly influential criminologist, proposed, in 1955, the theory of differential association in which he explained juvenile delinquency in terms of learned or acquired behaviors (Sutherland, 1955). Specifically, he theorized that juvenile delinquents learn the techniques, rationalizations, incentives, and stances that promote illegal behavior from interactions with their peers. Cohen (1955) further asserted the existence of so-called "delinquent subcultures," which act as communities with values and norms antithetical to the (societal) status quo that promote illicit acts.

Building on Sutherland's differential association theory and while acknowledging but eventually rebuking Cohen's subcultures idea, Gresham Sykes and David Matza (1957) explained what precisely juvenile peers acquire through these differential associations. Furthermore, though they applaud Cohen's nuanced discussion on low-class boys' experiences, which he asserted might lead to the creation and sustainability of such delinquent subcultures, they find significant faults in the general idea of subcultures as an explanation for juvenile delinquency.

Sykes and Matza's main issue with the idea of delinquent subcultures is that their existence also implies the presence of aberrant standards and values that would create situations "in which the delinquent defines his delinquency as "right" (Sykes & Matza, 1957). It then follows that if a delinquent accepts his illegal behavior as morally and ethically right, then he would not be ashamed or tormented by guilt for his transgressions. Research, however, they assert, has repeatedly shown that delinquents do indeed feel remorse and shame for their crimes. Not only that, but research has also noted that juvenile delinquents do not believe that law-
abiding individuals are to be disrespected or shunned or that they are inherently unethical and immoral. Therefore, it would be highly doubtful for a juvenile belonging to a delinquent subculture to maintain values and standards diametrically opposed to those held by the rest of society (Sykes & Matza, 1957).

Moreover, Sykes and Matza further maintain that juvenile delinquents' standards of whom they can and cannot victimize serve to highlight their recognition of the wrongness of their unlawful actions. Finally, they insist, it is highly improbable that juvenile delinquents are exempt from expectations to adhere to the social order. Instead, they are likely to internalize such demands to conform. The individual cannot disregard or set aside such calls to adhere to the status quo; therefore, Sykes and Matza (1957) asserted, they instead need to be neutralized to allow the individual to engage in unlawful behaviors and "violate laws in which they believe" (p. 666).

Criminals have always cited certain crime defenses, such as insanity and self-defense, to prove a lack of intent to violate the laws. Based on this function of the legal system, Sykes and Matza argue that delinquency "is essentially an unrecognized extension of defenses to crimes, in the form of justifications for deviance that are seen as valid by the delinquent but not by the legal system or society at large" (p.666).

Such justifications are often used to explain deviant behavior after it has occurred to shield the perpetrator from responsibility and lessen his liability. However, Sykes and Matza (1957) argue that criminals, instead, utilize justifications before committing criminal acts to neutralize the internalized norms pushing them to conform, divert condemnation, and weaken the social restrictions which inhibit delinquency. This characteristic of delinquency, they believed, was missing from Sutherland's "definitions favorable to the violation of laws" (Sutherland,
1955). They further highlight that juveniles become delinquents by learning these "techniques of neutralization" as they named them, not by acquiring "moral imperatives, values or attitudes standing in direct contradiction to those of the dominant society (Sykes & Matza, 1957)" as the theory of delinquent sub-cultures suggests. In other words, techniques of neutralization are what make aberrant behavior possible.

Sykes and Matza’s work is widely used even to this day and as discussed later, researchers from various fields studying legal and illegal behaviors, ranging from morally-questionable dating games to elder abuse, have utilized techniques of neutralization.

1.2 The techniques

Sykes and Matza (1957) identified five techniques of neutralization that allow juvenile delinquents to continue being faithful to the prevailing societal customs and define their violations of the status quo as ""acceptable" if not "fair"" (p. 667).

Denial of Responsibility

The first technique Sykes and Matza identified is called The Denial of Responsibility. This, essentially, allows the criminal to establish himself as lacking responsibility for the crime and, therefore, significantly diminishes the amount of disapproval by himself and others. The individual might allege that he had no control over the circumstances which rendered delinquency possible if not inevitable, such as bad or unloving parents. He might also assert that his unlawful conduct was an accident.

Essentially, what this technique does is it allows the individual to view and portray himself as a victim, as a ball "helplessly propelled into new situations” (p. 667). Learning to see
himself as a victim being "acted upon than acting” (p. 667), the delinquent manages to break the law without having to confront the fact that he has deviated from society's acceptable norms.

Denial of Injury

Sykes and Matza's second technique focuses on the harm the deviant act inflicts rather than on the perpetrator. Denial of injury allows criminals to minimize the seriousness and, therefore, the wrongness of their conduct by questioning the extent of the injury caused by the unlawful act. He may argue, for example, that vandalism is a victimless crime, ignoring the financial costs of the damage the property owner will have to absorb or justifying it by claiming that the owners can afford to repair the damage. Denial of injury serves to communicate that the deviant act, however unlawful, did not harm, neutralizing the connection between the unlawful conduct and its consequences. Society and the legal system already qualify offenses in terms of severity (for example, assault is markedly different from murder). Therefore, the delinquent's use of the denial of injury neutralization is merely "an extension of common practice rather than a gesture of complete opposition” (p. 668).

Denial of the Victim

The third method of neutralization does not deny the harm caused, nor does it assert that the individual is not responsible for the injury. Instead, it paints the victim of the crime as the real aggressor who essentially deserved the pain inflicted on them, such as “she deserved it because she was acting immorally.” It depicts the injury as right, given the circumstances, portraying it as just retaliation. As mentioned earlier, one of Sykes and Matza's main criticisms regarding the sub-cultures theory is that the existence of a 'pecking order' of targets (who is an
acceptable target of violence and delinquency) contradicts the idea that delinquency is adopted as
a norm but is instead still understood as wrong. The denial of the victim defense transforms the
victim into an individual deserving harm and injury and is a way of recognizing this
aforementioned 'acceptability' of targets.

Condemnation of the Condemners

For their fourth technique of neutralization, Sykes and Matza borrowed McCorkle and
Korn's (1954) 'rejection of the rejectors' concept discussed in their work on inmate
resocialization in prison. Condemnation of the condemners occurs when criminals shift the
narrative to focus not on their unlawful acts but rather to highlight their detractors' motivations
and behavior. In the case of criminals, their critics are the police officers whom the delinquent
might portray as corrupt or vindictive.

Appeal to Higher Loyalties

Lastly, delinquents will try to minimize or justify their unlawful conduct by claiming
loyalty to a community of higher importance. Such a community could be a family, a gang, or a
group of friends the delinquent feels like he needs to defend and support, even if that means
violating societal standards towards unlawful behavior. As Sykes and Matza (1957) explain, the
juvenile does not reject societal norms, but rather, he chooses to break the law "because other
norms, held to be more pressing or involving higher loyalty, are accorded precedence" (p. 669).
Essentially, what that implies is that the juvenile's allegiance to his community is far more
significant than his unspoken allegiance to the status quo, and he will not hesitate to shatter
societal rules if it means protecting 'his own.'
As researchers studied and applied the theory of neutralization techniques to various crimes, some observed new neutralization methods, adding to Sykes and Matza's original five.

1.3 Neutralization Techniques and Ideologically-motivated crimes

Though Sykes and Matza developed neutralization techniques to explain why and how juveniles become delinquent, their theory has been applied to numerous other types of behaviors, including white-collar crime (Alvarez, 1997; Benson, 1985; Klenowski, 2011; Stadler & Benson, 2012), shoplifting (Cromwell & Thurman, 2003), clergy sexual abuse (Spraitz & Bowen, 2016), and "hogging" (Gailey & Prohaska, 2006).²

Furthermore, though the original framework was developed to explain how offenders mobilize to action (how they become criminals), further research has successfully applied neutralization techniques to offenders' statements following their crimes. Individuals might use such justifications not only to appear less culpable during their trials, but neutralization techniques may also offer them ways to reduce the shame, guilt, and cognitive dissonance associated with their unlawful behavior.

Researchers have also applied the framework to crimes motivated by or at least associated with, various political, religious, and sociocultural issues, such as terrorism (Liddick, 2013), genocide (Bryant, Schimke, Brehm, & Uggen, 2017), and honor crimes (van Baak, Hayes, Freilich, & Chermak, 2018).

---

² Hogging is a game in which men try to ‘pick up’ unattractive women at a bar. At the end of the evening, the man who manages to pick up the most overweight and unattractive woman is declared the winner. Women, in this scenario, are seen as fat pigs or hogs, hence the term ‘hogging.’
Van Baak et al. (2018) examined which justifications offenders of honor crimes in the United States offered to explain their crimes and found that all of Sykes and Matza's original techniques were used by the offenders, with denial of the victim being the most frequently cited, with statements such as "Don't blame me. Can you watch [her] demeanor and do nothing? She brought it upon her" (p. 196). Most of the offenders van Baal et al. studied were guilty of filicide, which might explain the level of dehumanization displayed.

Interestingly, researchers also found that Appeal to Higher Loyalties, specifically religion, and Denial of the Victim appeared together. For example, the offender would state that the victim's behavior or clothing brought shame to the family because it violated religious and culturally-acceptable conduct (van Baak et al., 2018). Such statements blame the victim while simultaneously explaining they had to be punished for abandoning certain religious and cultural traditions.

Surprisingly, given that most of these offenders justified their crimes by appealing to cultural violations such as having a daughter who was "too Western," for example, Condemnation of the Condemners was rarely used (van Baak et al., 2018). Moreover, Denial of injury was also rare, but that might be harder to claim when the victims are dead.

In another study conducted by Bryant, Schimke, Brehm, & Uggen (2017), researchers found that perpetrators of genocide employed Denial of Responsibility and Condemnation of the Condemners most often, while they rarely used Appeals to Higher Loyalty, Denial of the Victim, and Denial of Injury. As the authors explained, the fact that the study focused on the offenders' statements during their highly publicized trials in front of the United Nations (UN) International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) made it exceptionally hard (and impractical) to claim that
the genocide never happened. Instead, all these génocidaires could do was deny
their *connection* to the genocide. Also, given the widespread condemnation of the Rwandan
government for their participation and encouragement of the genocide, perpetrators could not
successfully claim allegiance to a higher loyalty such as the government.

Liddick (2013) applied the neutralization techniques framework to the far-left terrorist
group, the Animal Liberation Front (ALF). He also found Sykes and Matza's original five
techniques were represented among ALF claims of responsibility. However, he also found
several statements that did not fit any of the original neutralization techniques and thus expanded
the list to include Claim of Entitlement and Defense of Necessity.

Claim of Entitlement

The Claim of Entitlement technique comes from Cressey's 1953 study of the
justifications white-collar criminals use when explaining their crimes. According to Cressey,
some embezzlers claim that they had a right to the money they stole because, for example, of all
their hard work. The rationale behind that is that individuals cannot steal something that belongs
to them in the first place.

Defense of Necessity

H.H.A. Cooper (1977) offered one of the first portraits of terrorist psychology. He
highlighted that terrorists usually see terrorism as a last resort. The 'true terrorist,' according to
Cooper, will first consider more reasonable tactics, such as peaceful protesting. However, once
he perceives that all other options are exhausted, he will see no other choice but terrorism, and

---

3 The term refers to perpetrators of genocide.
"terrorism is thus justified (emphasis mine) by an appeal to the doctrine of necessity” (Cooper, 1977, p.17).

Liddick (2013) found that the doctrine of necessity was the third most prevalent (15.5%) justification used by ALF, with statements such as: "Factory farming is just as bad as the Jewish Holocaust - we have no choice, the animals must be liberated” (p. 624).

Appeals to Higher Moral Law

Terrorism is inherently political, since the perpetrators seek to influence policy to satisfy their religious, social, or political aims, and therefore, it involves crimes inspired and motivated by ideology. Liddick (2013) identified a new neutralization technique he attributed to this unique terrorism feature. Specifically, he recognized a common theme among ALF communiqués indicating that direct violent action "was justified because it served a higher moral law or principle” (p.625). Appeals to Higher Moral Law was the second most common justification found in 23.7% of the 190 neutralization statements found in the communiqués.

Liddick explains that the new category is *not* the same or part of Sykes and Matza's Appeal to Higher Loyalties, which claims responsibility to a particular group or community. Specifically, "committing a crime because of loyalty to a group, and stating that one committed a crime because it served a higher moral principle, while related ideas, seem to be two distinct and separate notions - one cites loyalty to a concrete object (a group of people) while the other espouses adherence to an abstract belief” (2013, p.626).
2 INCELDOM

2.1 Male Supremacy

Male Supremacism is an ideology whose central governing argument is that women are biologically inferior to men and are only useful for sex. It portrays women as stupid yet manipulative who use sex to get what they want. Male Supremacism also harnesses the argument that men are entitled, are owed sex, and, if they need to, can force a woman to have sex with them (SPLC, n.d.).

Male supremacism adherents are convinced that the current social order is stacked in favor of women (it is inherently gynocentric) and, worse yet, is biased against men. They see men as the oppressed and the women, collaborating with local and federal judicial systems, manipulating the rules to hurt men in a grand feminist conspiracy (DiBranco, 2020). The Fathers' Rights Movement is an example of this type of thinking. Fathers' Rights Activists are convinced that the legal system views men merely as "walking wallets and sperm donors" (Chamberlain, 2011) and prevents them from seeing their children.

2.2 The Men's Right Movement (MRM)

The First Wave Feminism sparked the suffrage movement in numerous Western countries. Suffragettes demanded equal treatment and extension of fundamental rights, such as voting, to women. During the sociopolitical upheaval of the 1960s and 1970s, Second Wave Feminism emerged, and alongside it, so did the Men's Liberation Movement, which sought to liberate men from societal norms and traditional male roles (Carrigan, Connel, & Lee, 1985). In the 1980s and 1990s, however, the Men's Liberation Movement fractured into two markedly different ideological camps. According to Messner (2016), a disagreement regarding male
privilege and its negative impact on women split the movement into the pro-feminist faction and the anti-feminist faction.

The anti-feminist camp grew increasingly misogynistic, blaming women and feminism for oppressing men. They began to celebrate all things masculine and longed to strengthen and promote a patriarchal system (Kimmel, 2013). They believed men did not need to be free from a society that focused solely on their masculinity. Instead, they had to be liberated from the hold women had on them. At the same time, they denounced feminists as "castrating bitches" who only sought to manipulate and exploit men (Kimmel, 2013, p. 108).

Women becoming more independent and making significant social strides (including changing family dynamics) signaled to these MRM members that feminism was to blame for all issues men were facing (Messner, 2016), including paying child support and alimony following divorce (SPLC, n.d.). As a result, they began advocating for a return to more traditional masculine roles that they either celebrated or viewed as benefiting women (SPLC, n.d.).

In 1993 and following his own divorce, Warren Farrell, a former feminist who was also once a board member of the National Organization for Women, published his book, The Myth of Male Power. Though claiming to provide a balanced view and advocating for both men's and women's rights, the book serves more like a manifesto for the modern Men's Rights Movement. In it, Farrell (1993) claims that sex affords women the power to hold men hostages and can destroy a man's life with false allegations of rape and sexual harassment.
2.3 The Manosphere

As Ging (2017) noted, the current debate surrounding men's issues has been increasingly focused online, and as a result, "the discursive tone and communicative politics of men’s rights have changed substantially” (p.639).

The online world of MRM is usually referred to, by researchers and its members, as the 'Manosphere.' The term was first introduced to the vernacular by an online post in 2009, which referred to an online community focused on men's issues as the 'Manosphere’ (Ging, 2017). The Manosphere cannot be located on one particular website or platform. Instead, members congregate on various social media platforms such as Reddit, Twitter, and 8chan. Since the term's introduction, the Manosphere has become infamous for its misogyny and celebration of violence against women. For example, the Manosphere organized and engaged in a lengthy online harassment campaign, known as Gamergate, against women in the gaming industry. The attacks were so severe that some women were forced to leave their homes, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) stepped in to investigate the various death and rape threats women received online (Rott, 2014).

The Manosphere embraces the theory of the so-called Red Pill. The term comes from the science fiction movie *The Matrix*, where the central character is helped see the world as it really is. Getting "RedPilled" refers to an initial political awakening in which the adherent has achieved insight into how and why their existing state of affairs can be understood. The Red Pill theory is not exclusive to the MRM or its subcultures. Instead, the Red Pill is part of many mostly right-wing extremist ideologies, including White Nationalism. In fact, the term has also found its way into the mainstream political discourse. For example, when former U.S. President Donald Trump re-tweeted an anti-semitic post that included a red Star of David next to a picture
of Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, former Grand Wizard of the Ku Klax Klan (KKK) David Duke, praised Trump for "slipping some 'Red Pills' to the American people!" (McCammon, 2016).

Being "RedPilled" does not necessarily mean that an individual is now a violent extremist or supports and promotes political violence. It merely signifies that an individual has abandoned his previous political beliefs for the other side, such as, for example, a Democrat becoming a Republican.

### 2.3.1 Subcultures of the Manosphere

This online MRM community is made up of interconnected units of varying ideological persuasions, including, but not limited to, traditional Men's Rights Activists (MRAs), Pick Up Artists (PUA), Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW), and Involuntary Celibates (Incels).

Traditional MRAs focus on institutional spheres they think are victimizing men. They see such arenas as deliberately pro-female and also discriminating against men. They perceive the social and professional gains that women have achieved over the years as having been accomplished at men's expense. For example, they see changing gender roles and family structures as allowing women to leave or divorce their husbands easily and, in the process, excluding them from their children's lives.

The MRA ideology is inherently contradictory. Adherents hate strong independent women who have high-profile jobs and demand equality, but they also despise traditional women who ignore their husbands and only care about how much money they make. As Coston and

---

Though the ever-expanding Manosphere includes many groups, only a handful of the most well-known are included here.
Kimmel (2013) explained: "The real trouble is that Men's Rights guys don't know if they want to be restored patriarchs or liberated men" (p. 373).

Another Manosphere sub-culture, the Pick-Up Artists (PUA), focuses on the idea that women are prey to be hunted in the dating game. Pick-Up Artistry hinges on the belief that feminism has empowered and gave women the upper hand in sexual relationships; therefore, dating is a game stacked against men. To balance the 'playing field,' PUAs teach men to manipulate and ridicule women into sex, with borderline harassing techniques such as 'negging.' They also discredit the concept of consent. For example, Roosh V., whom the SPLC has characterized as "the most visible pick-up artist in the world" (SPLC, n.d.), has advocated for the legalization of rape on private property and frequently brags about his various non-consensual encounters with women around the world. He has written a series of so-called 'bang books,' centered around his travels and exploits worldwide. These books are misogynistic, and in them, he admits to raping women though later, he claimed that he exaggerated his stories to appear more manly.

*Men Going Their Own Way* is a relatively new but rather extreme movement advocating for male separatism. They believe that men should stop having intimate relationships with women and financially disengage from both society and women. The severity of disengagement depends on which of the four MGTOW levels each adherent occupies, with the fourth and final level, "going ghost," referring to complete withdrawal from society (Lin 2017).

Like all the sub-cultures operating in the Manosphere, MGTOW also subscribe to the belief that society, from family court to gender equality, is gynocentric and regularly victimizes men. Such a realization constitutes the first level of MGTOW, and in true Manospheric fashion, level one is when individuals get purple-pilled. The Purple pilled individual, according to
AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON THE USE OF NEUTRALIZATION TECHNIQUES IN INCEL MANIFESTOS

Sandman (2014), is a man who has become aware of the feminist hold on society but still chooses to engage and have intimate relationships with women.

Unsurprisingly given the considerable variation found in the Manosphere, there seems to be a rivalry and disagreement between these different sub-cultures. For example, Roosh V. has publicly expressed his disdain for MGTOW for being too passive (SPLC, MS). Furthermore, the official MGTOW website (2018) states that MGTOW focus on prevention, unlike MRAs, who seek to actively engage in the political process in the hopes of changing the system. Specifically, an individual MGTOW "is more likely to assume 100% agency in his personal life to protect and preserve his own sovereignty by rejecting cohabitation, and/or refusing to sign a fraudulent marriage contract in the first place" (MGTOW, 2018).

2.4 Involuntary Celibates (Incels)

Mostly heterosexual men comprise the final Manosphere community, that of the Involuntary Celibate or Incel. Due to the nature of the discourse expressed in the Manosphere and the White Supremacist talking points parroted by individuals on Incel forums, discussions regarding Incels sometimes imply that these individuals are mostly White (Leon, 2019; Lynch, 2018; Romano, 2018). However, Incels are actually quite diverse (Jaki et al., 2019). Two mass murderers who subscribed to Inceldom, Elliot Rodger and Chris Harper-Mercer, were mixed-race, and Incel terminology reflects the diverse membership of the movement, with terms such as Currycel or Sandcel denoting an Incel of South Asian and Middle Eastern descent, respectively. Despite the fact that these terms are obviously derogatory, Incels use them to self-identify because they are tied to their belief in racial hierarchies where White men always fare better in the dating world. The suffix ‘-cel’ added at the end of offensive terms used to describe
individuals of a certain ethnicity or culture denotes that the individual is an Incel *because* of that characteristic. For example, a Middle Eastern Incel will refer to himself as a Sandcel because he is convinced that the reason he is involuntarily celibate is because he is Arab.

The portmanteau Incel is not a recent invention, nor is it specific to the current misogynistic and sometimes violent movement. The term was created in 1997 by a Canadian woman named Alana, who started an online support group for individuals who desired but were unable to form sexual or romantic relationships. Alana's *Involuntary Celibacy Project* became an inclusive forum where men and women of all sexual orientations could congregate to share their experiences being involuntarily celibate and support each other (Alana, 2019). According to Alana,\(^5\) from the beginning, men outnumbered women on the forum, and slowly, over the years, the forum was overtaken by men who posted increasingly sexist and misogynistic comments and seemed preoccupied with efforts to "get a girl" (Alana, 2019).

According to, ReformedIncel (n.d.), a former Incel who participated in various Incel forums throughout the 1990s and 2000s and later wrote a comprehensive history of the movement, participants in Alana's Involuntary Celibacy Project identified Incels as individuals who wanted to but did not have sex for at least six months. This description was based on Donnelly, Burgess, Anderson, Davis, & Dillard's (2001) work, which defined involuntary celibate as "one who desires to have sex, but has been unable to find a willing partner for at least 6 months prior to being surveyed" (p.159). Researchers chose the six-month mark based on previous research, which confirmed the reality that people experience weekly or monthly periods of sexual inactivity frequently (Donnelly et al., 2001).

\(^5\) Alana is the individuals real first name. However, she never reveals her last name citing privacy concerns.
Donnelly et al. (2001) classified involuntary celibate research participants into three categories. Those who had never had sex before (virgins), those who have had sexual relationships before but not currently (singles), and individuals who were in sexless relationships (partnered). These categorizations were present in the original Incel online forums that sprang up in the late 1990s. Currently, there is an ongoing debate among members of the Incel forums online regarding who is really an Incel and whether only virgins can be Incels or if prolonged periods of involuntary sexlessness also make someone an Incel. There is, of course, not a consistent message regarding virginity. For example, in their online discussions and Incel doctrine, some in the movement have canonized George Sodini who though celibate for almost 30 years was not a virgin. Moreover, there is also debate regarding having sex with sex workers and whether or not that would alleviate Incels’ suffering.

2.4.1 Incel Pills

Like in the rest of the Manosphere, the different 'pills' also prevail in the Incel subculture with slight modifications to cater to the Incel-specific ideology. For example, the Red Pill as it pertains to the Incel ideology refers to the 80/20 rule. Incel doctrine states that women choose romantic and sexual partners through the process of hypergamy.

Hypergamy is a type of biological essentialism\(^6\) that asserts that women are biologically inclined to be selective when picking sexual and romantic partners, are less promiscuous than men, and are very fastidious in finding the most attractive partner (Baele, Brace, & Coan, 2019).

\(^6\) Biological essentialism refers to the idea that people are predisposed to certain ways of thinking and particular behaviors. Gender essentialism, a type of biological essentialism, postulates that the differences between men and women are due to these innate and fixed biological qualities. Incels and other Manospheric groups are particularly fond of these theories which they see as confirmation of their beliefs regarding female inferiority.
Historically, because women were physically, socially, and financially restricted and had to rely on men to fulfill their primary needs, hypergamy was not prevalent. However, since feminism has granted women unprecedented educational, financial, and social opportunities, they no longer have to rely on men. Their independence has also provided them with unfettered access to sexual partners allowing them to practice hypergamy on a massive scale (MoonshotCVE, 2020).

Being able to live independently, Incels assert, women have also dominated the 'sexual marketplace,' which operates under the 80/20 rule mentioned above. The 80/20 rule posits that 80% of women only want the attractive 20% of men (MoonshotCVE, 2020). Therefore, such skewed and unbalanced scene leaves unattractive men or men who identify as unattractive, with no romantic or sexual prospects. Becoming redpilled in the Incel context occurs when men identify the sexual marketplace for the uneven and unfair landscape that it is and wake up to the fact their chances of finding a partner are severely hindered by the way they look.

The Black Pill, which is not an Incel-specific concept, represents a somewhat nihilistic way of thinking. Within the Incel culture, the Black Pill theory asserts that there is no hope for unattractive individuals. It conveys the idea that the sexual marketplace is governed and dominated by genetic factors, and men are either attractive or not. No amount of exercise or plastic surgery can change the way individuals look. Therefore, Incels only have two avenues they can pursue. They can kill themselves or 'lie down and rot (LDAR).' A few Incels also believe in the existence of a third option: to seek retribution by "going ER," which refers to mass violence in the style of Incel Elliot Rodger (ADL, 2019), though this option is not an inherent

---

7 The Pink Pill is the female version of the Black Pill (ADL, 2019). However, it is essential to note here that despite the existence of several Femcel forums online, Incels maintain that women cannot be involuntarily celibate because men will always have sex with them, however unattractive they might be, though ironically, Incels themselves only want to date women of a particular attractiveness.
Black pill belief. Incels who subscribe to the Black Pill are convinced that society views them as inferior and should be eliminated from the human genetic pool (MoonshotCVE, 2020).

The Blue Pill refers to a blissful ignorance that all other people experience. Taking the Blue Pill means that people believe that the world is a fair and balanced place, and that genetics and physical attributes have no relevance in dating and sexual relationships. The centrist Purple Pill rejects both the Red and the Blue Pills and tries to understand instead and interpret interpersonal relationships in more reasonable terms (ADL, 2019).

An Incel-specific pill is the so-called Rapecell. Rapecell adherents argue that women's lower intelligence does not allow them to make informed decisions regarding sexual or romantic partners; rather, men will always have to coerce women into sex (ADL, 2019). Furthermore, the theory asserts that even if by some miracle Incels do encounter a smart woman, she will still need to be raped because sexual violence communicates to women, who secretly prefer traditional gender roles, that a man can be assertive and will therefore be able to take care of her (ADL, 2019). In one of the few systematic research efforts into Incel message content so far, Baele et al. (2019) analyzed discussions on the now-defunct Incel.s.me forum. The researchers found that Incels theorize that women wear sexual and physical abuse by attractive alphas as a badge of honor. Incels claim that women not only enjoy, but also seek out, such abuse. As one discussion they reported on highlights: "[Women] are hypergamous whores deep down that need to be dominated and treated like shit to keep them attracted to you (Baele et al., 2019). The rationale behind that worldview is that mistreatment by a dominant male shows the woman's ability to trap such a desirable man; that is why, according to Incel doctrine, women rarely accuse attractive men of rape (Baele, 2019).
Finally, another Incel-specific pill is the Dog Pill, which alleges that women would rather have sex with a dog than an unattractive man (ADL, 2019).

2.4.2 Incel Archetypes

The Incel ideology relies on certain archetypes or ideals of human attractiveness and beauty rooted in the racist principles of eugenics and controversial evolutionary psychology theories. Lookism, or discrimination based on physical appearance (Warhurst et al., 2009), is also at the core of the Incel worldview. Incels believe that there is an ideal type of man that all men aspire to, and all women want, and men who fit that typology get all the attention while everybody else is overlooked and shunned.

Chad

Chad is the perfect Aryan man. He is tall, handsome, well-endowed, with a perfectly chiseled face and a full hairline. Essentially, Chads represent the stereotypical white alpha male that Incels perceive as all-around successful and able to have sex with any woman he wants. Moreover, because of Chads' sexual agility, they can reach women when they are young, which is why, according to Incel doctrine, there are no female virgins over 18 (Moonshot, 2020).

Interestingly, though Incels seem to be racially diverse and Incel language includes racialized versions of Chad, like Tyrone, a Black Chad, there still seems to be a hierarchy among the racialized Chads with White Chads being physically and sexually superior. Of course, it is unsurprising that even among the Chad stereotype, Incels perceive White Chad as superior and women's preferred choice given that eugenics and lookism are the underlying theories of their
worldview. Furthermore, as evident by Incel vernacular, one can also be an Incel because he is not White. For example, Currycel is an individual who attributes his Inceldom to being Indian.

At the core of the Incel ideology is that Chads are physically and biologically superior to other men, and women are predisposed to find the genetically perfect male through hypergamy. Therefore, women will always seek out the Chads. Even women who had to settle for a beta because they had exceeded their prime will continue to hunt for Chads and cheat on their husbands with them. According to Incels, women also refuse to engage in sexually deviant acts with their lawful husbands but have no qualms performing such acts with Chads (Moonshot, 2020).

Alphas, other than women, of course, are presented as Incels' primary antagonist. Even so, Incels do not place blame on Chads for the state of the gynocentric society, which prevents them from having sex because, according to them, they are not aware of the development and expansion of feminism and its consequences (Baele et al., 2019).

Stacy

Stacy is the stereotypical American high-school cheerleader trope found in popular culture. She is unattainable and only dates Chads, her male counterpart. Stacys are particularly despised in the Incel movement and are often the target of especially vile and hateful posts. The most common words associated with Stacy include "blonde," "white," "typical," and "fucking" (Baele et al., 2019).

Betas or Normies
Betas or 'normies' are, according to Incel phraseology, regular men of average physical attractiveness. Incels are incredibly angry at Betas because of their willing participation in the feminist agenda that has created a gynocentric culture depriving unattractive men (Incels) of access to sex and romantic relationships (Baele, 2019). Incels see normies as traitors for supporting society's feminization by not objecting and trying to prevent women from advancing professionally. As Baele et al. (2019) observed on Incels.me, education, professional development, and sexual empowerment are seen as a colossal mistake that only expanded Chads' pool of potential sexual partners while further marginalizing unattractive men, and Betas are complicit in this injustice.

Becky

Beckys are the female equivalent of Betas. They are subordinate to the desirable and attractive Stacys and are seen as being of lower status. Most women, according to Incel thinking, are Beckys. They are average looking with scores on the physical attractiveness index ranging between a three and a seven (out of 10)(Moonshot, 2020). Incels describe Beckys as "basic," "who are all the same cookie cutter type who watch the Office, drink Franzia, and get excited for pumpkin spice anything" (Menzie, 2020).

Like all women, Beckys desire Chads, but they have unrealistic standards and seek out men who are markedly more attractive than they are, and when their efforts to secure an Alpha fail Beckys extoll feminism and declare they do not need men to be satisfied (Menzie, 2020). Beckys exploit their sexuality and use it as a political tool against the patriarchy. Incels ridicule their support for feminism and women's rights, which they find off-putting. Stacys have a much easier time attracting men, but "Becky has to work harder and justifies her trials and errors
through a narrative of sexual liberation and empowerment” (Menzie, 2020). The implication is that Beckys' feminism is not genuine; they are merely pretending to be feminists to cope with the fact that they are not as desirable as other women.

Unlike Stacys, Beckys are attainable to Incels, but because they also only care about physical appearance, they spend most of their time chasing Chads (Menzie, 2020). However, both women are portrayed as shallow and always trying to alter their appearance to appear more attractive to men. Unsurprisingly, given the Incel ideology's misogyny, the concepts of Becky and Stacy always appear together in discussions, with the two archetypes pitted against each other in a fight to attract the most sought-after men (Menzie, 2020).

### 2.4.3 Incel Violence

As highlighted earlier, Incels are not new. The movement's current iteration is markedly different from what Alana's Involuntary Celibacy Project addressed in the late 1990s. However, there have been clear signs that misogyny and sexism from male participants were prevalent in online Incel discussions from the outset.

Now-defunct Incel forums from the early 2000s are evidence that violent rhetoric is not a new phenomenon either. For example, a 2006 discussion titled "When will you go on a killing spree?" found on alt.support.shyness, an Incel forum, clearly demonstrates the violent hate its members felt and expressed towards women. User MadMamboRodentShitHead praised Marc Lepiné, who murdered 14 female engineering students in Quebec, Canada in 1989, and stated

---

8 There is no evidence to suggest that Mac Lepiné identified as an Incel. The different Manospheric descriptions did not exist at the time of his attack but based on his actions as well as a suicide note he left behind, today he would be characterized as a Men’s Rights Activist. He never expressed any Incel-like sentiments, meaning he did not blame a lack of sexual or romantic relationships for his actions. Instead, both in his suicide note and during the attack, he rallied against feminism and affirmative action that he believed kept him from being accepted into an engineering program.
that it is "hunting season for bitches" imploring other users to "watch the news if you want to see
some mutilated bitches next week" (2006).

However, it was not until 2014 that the Incel movement became synonymous with
violence when Elliot Rodger murdered six people and injured 14 more at the University of
California's Santa Barbara campus in Isla Vista, California, before killing himself (Nagourney,
Cieply, Feuer, & Lovett, 2014). Before his killing spree, Rodger wrote and emailed a detailed
manifesto to explain how his past experiences and the current social situation led him to kill
innocent people. Since his attack, Rodger has been canonized by Incels online, who often refer to
him as Saint Elliot, and his name is now quite literally synonymous with retribution through
mass violence with the phrase "going ER" (his initials) denoting violent attacks (DiBranco,
2018).

Rodger's attack became the first time many people became familiar with the Incel
movement and ideology; however, his attack was not the first instance of violence motivated by
similar grievances in the US. George Sodini killed three women and injured nine other
individuals at a fitness center in Pennsylvania in 2009. Though the term Incel had not yet entered
our vernacular, Sodini's online diary indicates his anger towards women and frustration due to a
lack of sexual and romantic relationships. Sodini claimed that his last romantic relationship
ended in 1984, and he had not had sex since 1990 (ABC News, 2009).

A year after Elliot Rodger’s attack, Chris Harper-Mercer opened fire at the Umpqua
Community College campus in Oregon, murdering nine people before killing himself. Harper-
Mercer (n.d.) explained in his manifesto that he was a 26-year-old virgin and though sex,
Inceldom, or lack of sexual and romantic relationships do not appear prominently in his
manifesto, the ADL reported that before the attack, he was active in Incel forums where he "lament[ed] his lack of sexual prospects" (ADL, 2018).

With more direct ties to the Incel ideology, another high-profile attack was the vehicle-ramming of innocent pedestrians in Toronto, Canada, in 2018. The perpetrator, Alek Minassian, admitted to law enforcement officers that he idolized Elliot Rodger and hoped his attack would serve as the inspiration for other Incels (Hasham, 2019).

Also in 2018, Scott Paul Beierle attacked a yoga studio in Tallahassee, Florida, shooting six and killing two women before turning the gun on himself. Beierle was an avowed misogynist and racist who recorded several videos railing against women whom he called "sluts" and "whores," as well as immigrants and black people (Mack, Jamieson, & Reinstein, 2018).

The first Incel forum was a welcoming place where individuals struggling with anxiety, love shyness, and sexual issues could find support and air their grievances. Even then, a fringe group of individuals expressed problematic views. However, those participants remained on the sidelines until the early 2000s, when the more anti-feminist and misogynistic factions took over, the same factions that now monopolize discussions and spread hateful discourse. As ReformedIncel succinctly stated: "ten years and the extreme has become mainstream" (n.d.). Moreover, it is clear from the incidents mentioned above that Incels are not merely confined to rhetoric anymore. Though most Incels are not violent, and most discussions online are centered around self-harm and, the frequency of Incel-related attacks in the last few years and the growth of the Incel ecosystem is alarming.
3 THE CURRENT STUDY

3.1 Why it matters – Misogyny gone mainstream

As the SPLC (n.d.) has noted, the line between Male Supremacy groups found in the Manosphere and the racist, xenophobic groups of the extreme right-wing is blurry, and there seems to be significant overlap between the so-called 'alt-right,' male supremacist, and white supremacist groups online. Their misogyny brought on by the belief that feminism is the reason Western culture is deteriorating unites them, and they "feed each other’s narratives of the dispossession and oppression of white men, which is blamed on minorities, immigrants and women” (SPLC, n.d.).

Regardless of the ideological rifts and the various de-platforming actions by social media companies, the Manosphere is growing; Reddit threads that garner controversy are frequently deleted only for a new thread to emerge within a few minutes. Many members of the Manosphere have learned to exploit the loopholes found in the User Agreement policies of the various social media platforms they operate on and, therefore, create new groups, new posts about the same topic, and advocate for the same ideology but with coded language to avoid detection.

The importance of the Manosphere in the development and proliferation of the misogynistic ideology feeding these different groups cannot be overstated. The Internet has not only given individuals seeking something new a place to congregate and bond with like-minded others, but has immensely helped those with nefarious motivations to spread their hateful rhetoric, recruit others to their cause, and celebrate the lives and crimes of their ideological brethren.
Perhaps, the following statement from the official MGTOW website (2018) is the best
description of the Manosphere, its evolving nature, and its importance to the thousands of racist
and misogynistic men spending their time online.

"To the casual observer, the Manosphere may seem like a disjoined collection of
blogs and websites, but the Manosphere does not exist online; it exists in the hearts and
minds of the next great generation of men. The Manosphere is the Big Bang of chaotic
masculine disruption that will eventually bring into existence a new personal world of
freedom for those who choose to be free."

With the current rise of the extreme right and the proliferation of anti-feminist and
misogynistic ideas online that sometimes result in real-life mass violence, it is crucial to examine
and understand the Incel ideology closely. It is also essential to understand how some Inceldom
adherents become violent. According to a study of mass shootings in the US, 40% of the
perpetrators killed themselves following the incident (Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund,
2019). Like other mass shooters, some individuals who have perpetrated attacks motivated by
their lack of sexual and romantic relationships have also taken their own lives. However, some
have also left behind detailed manifestos, online blogs, and Canadian authorities have made Alek
Minassian's post-arrest interview available to the public.

Analyzing online Incel forums and other Inceldom artifacts can illuminate and help us
understand their worldview and ideas about society and violence. For this reason, the mementos
left behind by perpetrators of attacks tied to the Incel community should also be scrutinized. The
rise of the current violent iteration of male supremacy is a relatively new phenomenon. As a
result, research has yet to offer significant insights into the Manosphere and the different yet overlapping ideologies of the male supremacy umbrella. Early examinations of Incel online forums have illuminated some key dynamics (Baele et al., 2019; Ging, 2017; Jaki et al., 2019). However, there has not been a comprehensive analysis of artifacts by violent Incel actors to understand how they psychologically prepare themselves for their crimes and neutralize their feelings of doubt and guilt.

Sykes and Matza developed the theory of neutralization techniques they believed perpetrators use to prepare themselves to commit crimes psychologically. In reviewing the neutralization techniques literature from 1957 to 2005, Maruna and Copes (2005) assert that Sykes and Matza's (1957) theory is ineffective in examining criminal etiology since it is not possible to neutralize or justify behavior before it happens. However, throughout the years, researchers have applied the idea to analyze the post-crime narratives defendants use to justify, sanitize, and otherwise neutralize their crimes (Bryant, Schimke, Brehm, & Uggen, 2017; Liddick, 2012; van Baak, Hayes, Freilich, & Chermak, 2018). As Liddick (2012) highlighted, the idea behind the techniques of neutralization is to counterbalance the norms regarding criminal behavior. In other words, perpetrators use the techniques presented by Sykes and Matza (1957) to develop cognitive justifications for their crimes both before and after commitment (Liddick, 2012).

The current exploratory study analyzed the manifestos, online blogs, and video diaries of mass violence perpetrators motivated by their lack of romantic and sexual relationships. It sought to examine a) which neutralization techniques are most prominent among violent Incel actors both pre- and post-crime, and b) determine if the neutralization technique identified by Liddick (2012) as being specific to political crimes, such as terrorism, is also used by Incels. The second
question can help us understand if Incels are psychologically similar to violent extremists whom they are often described as.

4 METHODOLOGY

4.1 Thematic analysis

The current study utilized the qualitative research method of thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a six-step process used to recognize, examine, and describe patterns or themes within data, and though it is widely used, there is no one universally agreed method of carrying it out (Boyatzis, 1998). Nevertheless, Braunn & Clarke (2008) suggest a six-step procedure for conducting thematic analysis.

During the first step, researchers should familiarize themselves with the data by reading and re-reading or transcribing it if necessary. While reading the data, researchers, Braunn and Clarke (2008) suggest, could also be noting potential codes or themes. Once researchers are intimately familiar with their data, they can then generate initial codes. These codes should then be collated in potential themes. Once themes are identified, researchers should ensure that the themes are accurate and based on the data. Then, themes need to be clearly defined and refined through systematic analysis, and finally, researchers can analyze their data and report their findings (Braunn & Clarke, 2008).

Thematic analysis research can be a contextualist process, allowing researchers to highlight how people attach meaning to their experiences and how it is affected by our broader social environment (Braunn & Clarke, 2008). Furthermore, it is flexible and can allow for a "rich and detailed, yet complex account of data (Braunn & Clarke, 2008, p.5)," especially when the
AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON THE USE OF NEUTRALIZATION TECHNIQUES IN INCEL MANIFESTOS

research topic has not been studied widely. Since research regarding Incels, their ideology, dynamics, and violent crimes is still in its infancy, a qualitative examination of Incels' writings can provide researchers with a more nuanced understanding of the ideology and Inceldom mobilization to violence.

This research used a hybrid form of thematic analysis which included both deductive (or theoretical) and inductive processes. The bulk of the research utilized a deductive process for the thematic analysis as described by Boyatzis (1998). The deductive approach was ideal for this type of research since the researcher sought to answer specific research questions as outlined in the previous section and allowed for a more detailed analysis of the aspects of the data particular to the theory of neutralization techniques. An inductive approach was also used which complemented the work. This hybrid approach was possible because of the flexibility that thematic analysis affords researchers. Though the themes or codes were identified a priori following a thorough examination of the existing literature on neutralization techniques, the researcher allowed for space for potentially new themes to emerge, thus the hybrid approach.

A hybrid of inductive and deductive thematic analysis was the preferred research method for this study. It allows the researcher to explore specific themes based on previous literature applying neutralization techniques theory on various ideological and non-ideological crimes such as white-collar crimes, genocide, terrorism, and hate crimes, but offer the potential for the generation of new themes based on the data. Therefore, themes were identified prior to conducting the analysis of the artifacts, and the researcher examined the data to determine a) if any of the themes (neutralization techniques) were present, and b) whether or not Liddick’s (2013) appeal to a higher moral principle neutralization techniques was present or not.
4.2 Research questions

As stated earlier, this was an exploratory study aimed to understand some of the basic qualities of Incel violence. Both violent and non-violent Incels likely use neutralization techniques to normalize, sanitize, and legitimize their misogynistic views and actions. However, this study focused on the violent ones who have moved from the strictly online echo chambers of the Incel forums to real-world violence.

Furthermore, there is currently a debate among terrorism scholars on whether Incel crimes are terrorism. The issue is not new. Scholars, practitioners, and policymakers have debated the nature and definition of terrorism for years with no clear conclusion. As an exploratory study, this research did not attempt to resolve the debate regarding the nature of Incel crimes.

However, given that Incels are frequently compared to terrorists and extremists, and because of the interaction and intersection of Inceldom with movements that operate with concrete ideologies (that emphasize misogyny), such as white supremacism and male supremacism, Liddick's (2013) additional techniques identified among politically-driven criminals, like ALF, was also included.

The author believes that what distinguishes Incels from political actors is their degree of entitlement. Political actors, such as Salafi jihadist terrorists, express loyalty and belief in ethical, religious, and political principles that supersede man-made laws, such as jihad. Therefore, their justifications seem to agree with Liddick's (2013) finding that terrorists swear allegiance to higher moral codes that are so important they need to be defended even if it means engaging in unlawful conduct.
Incels, however, do not seem to subscribe to complex moral or ethical principles. As previously explained, Inceldom revolves around individual entitlement to sex, and Incels are angry at women for choosing to form sexual and romantic relationships with attractive men instead of them. Therefore, the author believed that Liddick's Appeal to higher moral law or principle would not appear prominently in Incel narratives.

The presence or absence of Liddick's Appeal to a higher moral principle technique might demonstrate that Incels could indeed be, at least psychologically, different than terrorists who mentally prepare themselves and justify their actions by claiming loyalty to a cause or principle more important than themselves.

### 4.3 The data

Recently there seems to be disagreement regarding which mass violence attacks are Incel-related or not due to the overlap in right-wing extremist ideologies fueling perpetrators. However, for this study, only individuals who have explicitly stated they identify as Incels, had extensive ties to online Incel communities, or wrote about hating women for not sleeping with them, are considered Incel-related.

Therefore, only the following individuals' writings were part of the current study:

- a) George Sodini's 2009 eight-page online diary.
- b) Elliot Rodgers' 170-page manifesto as well as a transcript of a video he recorded and uploaded to YouTube before his attack. The video was transcribed by Dr. Peter Langman, Ph.D., and made available on his website www.schoolshooter.info.
- c) Chris Harper-Mercer's two-page online blog as well as his six-page manifesto.
d) Alek Minassian's Facebook post referring to the attack as well as his interview with Canadian law enforcement agents following his arrest for the vehicle-ramming attack in Toronto, Canada in 2018. The Canadian government has made the 190-page transcript of the recorded interview available to the public. The full video of the police interview is also available online.

All perpetrators committed mass violence incidents against the general public. They attacked and killed indiscriminately, both men and women. Other than Elliot Rodger killing his roommates, which seemed to be an act of revenge after a fraught relationship, no one particular victim was specifically targeted (in that they were unknown in a personal sense to the perpetrators).

5 RESULTS

Since this research included a deductive thematic analysis, the literature review was completed first to identify the themes that were sought out in the data. Following the review, I read the artifacts twice each to make sure I was familiar with their writings. Then, using MAXQDA\(^9\), I coded statements in each artifact that expressed one of the initial seven justification techniques identified.

Seven artifacts were analyzed for the study; Alek Minassian's interview with Canadian police as well as his publicized Facebook post tied to the attack,\(^{10}\) George Sodini's and

\(^9\) MAXQDA is a qualitative and mixed methods research software tool.
\(^{10}\) Alek Minassian’s Facebook account was deleted shortly after his attack. However, his Facebook page and final post were archived online. The now-deleted post was widely shared by news outlets and can be found [here](#) in its entirety.
Christopher Harper-Mercer's online blogs as well as Harper-Mercer’s manifesto. Finally, the research included Elliot Rodger's manifesto as well as a transcript of his final YouTube video. The analysis yielded 296 statements justifying the perpetrators' violent crimes. Two hundred fifty-eight of those statements were found in Elliot Rodger's manifesto titled *My Twisted World*. A further ten were extracted from the transcript of his final video called *My Day of Retribution*.

Table 1: Frequency Table

| Claim of Entitlement | 101 | 34.12 |
| Denial of the victim | 86  | 29.05 |
| Denial of Responsibility | 47  | 15.88 |
| Futility | 31  | 10.47 |
| Defense of Necessity | 26  | 8.78  |
| Appeal to Higher Loyalties | 2  | 0.68  |
| Condemnation of the Condemners | 2  | 0.68  |
| Appeal to a Higher Moral Law | 1  | 0.34  |
| Denial of injury | 0  | 0.00  |
| TOTAL (valid) | 296 | 100.00 |
| Missing | 0  | 0.00  |
| TOTAL | 296 | 100.00 |

Thirteen statements were found in George Sodini’s blog, and 15 justification techniques were identified in Christopher Harper-Mercer's online blog. Finally, there were no justification techniques identified in Alek Minassian's interview or his final Facebook post. However, that is not surprising given that the interview with Canadian police was a preliminary discussion regarding the crimes and was primarily focused on Minassian's life and logistics for the crime. Perhaps a better understanding of Minassian's motives and psychological use of justification techniques can be found in the transcripts of his long and detailed discussions with the court-appointed and defense psychiatrists who examined him following his arrest. It is also
unsurprising that most statements are from Elliot Rodger's manifesto, given that it is 130 pages long, whereas every other artifact is less than ten.

The most common justification technique was the Claim of Entitlement which appeared 101 times. Denial of the victim was the second most used technique with 86 statements identified, followed by Denial of Responsibility which appeared 47 times. These were followed by Claim of Necessity which was found 26 times. Condemnation of the Condemners and Appeal to Higher Loyalties were each found twice, whereas Liddick's Appeal to Higher Moral Law was only identified once. Finally, Denial of Injury was not recorded at all.

**Figure 1 Frequency Distribution Chart**

5.1 **Analysis**

5.1.1 **Denial of Responsibility:**

The neutralization technique of denying responsibility is used to deflect blame. When a perpetrator believes that his actions were not in his control but were caused by others' conduct, it is not hard to see how guilt is alleviated, and carrying out the crimes becomes psychologically less taxing.
"It was society's fault for rejecting me. It was women's fault for refusing to have sex with me" (p. 82).

The above Elliot Rodger quote is a straightforward example of that belief. He is explicitly stating that his rampage was not his fault. If society and women treated him the way he believed he deserved, he would not have to kill anyone.

Likewise, Christ Harper-Mercer also deflected responsibility from himself. In the statement below, his is essentially claiming that the crime he was about to commit was not on him. Instead, society is to blame for his actions.

“...society left us no recourse, no way to be good” (p.1).

5.1.2 Denial of Injury:

This was the only justification technique not recorded in any artifacts. However, this was anticipated given that all perpetrators explicitly sought to kill, not maim or injure, their victims.

5.1.3 Denial of the Victim:

Dehumanization of the victims of violence is not new and certainly not an Incel-specific technique. Nazis were adept at using dehumanizing rhetoric in their propaganda to create an image of Jews as parasites and less than human (Steizinger, 2018). Objectification and dehumanization of women are ubiquitous. These processes normalize the mistreatment of women by dismissing the moral proscription against aggression and violence.

Research has also shown that men who dehumanize women through animalization (comparing them to animals) and objectification are more likely to victimize them (Rudman & Mescher, 2012; Bevens & Loughman, 2019). Research has also demonstrated the link between
dehumanization and aggression (Bevens & Loughman, 2019). Given what we know about aggression and dehumanization, it is unsurprising that Incels objectify their victims. It is important to note here that Incels do not target women only. They kill both men and women, and in the artifacts, the technique of Denial of the victim was used to refer to both.

For example, Christopher Harper-Mercer frequently rants against black men he calls "beasts" and "vaginal pirates." When discussing his desire for women, George Sodini writes that "young girls here look so beautiful as to not be human, very edible" (p. 3).

Likewise, Elliot Rodger frequently utilized dehumanizing and derogatory language to describe his future victims. From calling women “filthy scum” (p.84) and “animals” (p.117), to referring to men as “brutish” (p.117) and “barbaric, wild, beast-like” (p.117).

5.1.4 Condemnation of the Condemners:

Only Elliot Rodgers used this technique, and both times it co-occurred with Denial of Responsibility. For example, in his manifesto, Rogers states that:

"All I ever wanted was to love women, and in turn to be loved by them back. Their behavior towards me has only earned my hatred, and rightfully so! I am the true victim in all of this. I am the good guy” (p. 137).

Here, Rodgers condemns women for how they treated him, turning the spotlight on them, the people he expects to blame him. At the same time, he tries to evade responsibility for his crimes, once again redirecting attention to the people he blames for his suffering and subsequent offenses, namely women.
5.1.5 Appeal to Higher Loyalties:

Christopher Harper-Mercer offers an excellent example of the use of the Appeal to Higher Loyalties neutralization.

"For the Vistor Flanagans, Elliot Rodgers, Seung Cho, Adam Lanzas of the world, I do this” (p. 6).

Here, he talks about carrying out his crimes in the name of a particular group of men and other men like them, men who feel marginalized and excluded.

5.1.6 Claim of Entitlement:

The most frequently cited justification for the crimes was the perpetrators' belief that they were deprived of something they were entitled to, specifically, sex. For example, as evident in the following quote, Chris Harper-Mercer, while expressing his admiration for Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, he laments at all the things he has been deprived of, things he was convinced he was entitled to, things he “deserved.”

“Just like me those people were denied everything they deserved, everything they wanted” (p.1).

Sodini also seemed surprised at his inability to have sexual or romantic relationships with women because as he stated:
“I actually look good. I dress good, am clean-shaven, bathe, touch of cologne.”

From all the killers included in this research, no one exhibited entitlement as explicitly as Elliot Rodger. For example, he highlighted how enraged he would become when seeing couples because he believed that the women should be his since he was “a highly intelligent and magnificent person who is meant for great things” (p.70). Moreover, his rage would intensify when he came across interracial couples because, in his mind, as a half-white man he was entitled to beautiful white women, not the non-white men they chose as evident by the following quote:

“I am beautiful, and I am half white myself. I am descended from British aristocracy. He is descended from slaves. I deserve it more” (p.84).

5.1.7 Defense of Necessity:

The segments capturing the neutralization technique of Defense of Necessity display an urgency and an understanding that there truly is no alternative to violence. This way of thinking mitigates feelings of guilt since it makes the subsequent acts of violence seem almost out of the perpetrator's control (Chi-mei, 2008).

"Though we may have been born bad, society left us no recourse, no way to be good. I have been forced to align myself with demonic forces” (p. 1).
In the above quote, Christopher Harper-Mercer perfectly encapsulates the psychology behind the Defense of Necessity. He highlights how he had no other option, that he was "forced" to carry out his crimes, that his crimes were necessary.

Elliot Rodger also highlighted that he believed violence was necessary, he saw violence as “the final solution to dealing with all of the injustices” (p.101) he believed he was forced to endure “at the hands of women and society” (p.101). In another quote, he makes it clear that violent act is necessary, stating that revenge was the only thing left for him to do and lamenting how miserable his life would be otherwise. Continuing on with his life as it was no longer an option and highlighted:

“I have to do it. It’s the only thing I can do” (p.134).

5.1.8 Appeal to a Higher Moral Law:

The one quote that seems to be justifying violence in the name of a higher cause was in Elliot Rodger's manifesto, stating:

"I am like a god, and my purpose is to exact ultimate Retribution on all of the impurities I see in the world” (p. 117).

Here Rodger claims that his upcoming crimes are justified because he is fighting for a better world. He is committing crimes only to cleanse the world. Interestingly, the shift to suggest a more important cause than personal vengeance is only discussed at the end of his manifesto.
5.2 Emergence of new theme:

Apart from the eight justification techniques extracted from existing literature, a new theme emerged while analyzing the artifacts. The theme - Futility - was sufficiently different from the existing ones to warrant its own individual code. The perpetrators used Futility to justify their crimes by highlighting that nothing is working for them, so they might as well go out in a hail of bullets.

Futility is different from the Defense of Necessity theme in that it is more nihilistic. On the other hand, Defense of Necessity is concerned with feeling as if you had no other choice but to resort to violence. As George Sodini states in the quote below, he has nothing to lose, and regardless of how hard he tries, his life will never not be pointless.

"I know nothing will change, no matter how hard I try or what goals I set" (p.4).

Roger also expressed feelings of hopelessness. In the following quote, he also highlights how pointless he thinks everything is, stating: “There was no point to my life anymore” (p.109), because as he saw it, he “was doomed to a life of lonely virginity” (p.115).

Among the 296 statements found, 31 were about Futility, ranking the new theme in third place.

5.3 Co-occurrence of neutralization techniques:

Certain statements in Elliot Rodger's manifesto exhibited more than one neutralization technique. The reason why more segments in Rodger's writing have overlapping techniques is
most likely due to the sheer volume of the document. In total, 60 statements across all five artifacts included more than one neutralization technique. Of those, 22 had both the Claim of Entitlement and Denial of the Victim techniques. For example, Elliot Rodger stated that:

"The most beautiful of women choose to mate with the most brutal of men, instead of magnificent gentlemen like myself” (p. 136).

Here, Rodger refers to men as "brutal," denying their humanity. He also highlights that women have refused to have sexual relationships with him even though he is convinced that as a "magnificent gentleman," he is entitled to them.

Nineteen statements had both the technique of Denial of Responsibility and Denial of the Victim overlapped. Finally, there were 17 instances when the perpetrators used the Claim of Entitlement and the Denial of Responsibility justifications. Below are some examples of overlapping neutralizations.

**Denial of Responsibility and Denial of the victim:**

"Only now, I was ready and capable of fighting back against the cruelty of women” (p. 124).

In this quote, Rodgers calls women cruel (Denial of the Victim). He also suggests that their cruelty is responsible for his decision to go on a rampage, not himself.
Claim of Entitlement and Denial of Responsibility: The following excerpt is from Elliot Rodger’s final YouTube video transcript.

“If I can't have you, girls, I will destroy you. [laughs] You denied me a happy life, and in turn, I will deny all of your life” (p. 1).

In this statement, Rodger’s sense of entitlement is evident in the first part of the statement when he highlights that if he cannot have these women, then he will eliminate them. This is followed by him denying responsibility for the crimes he was about to commit by claiming that the women who refused him sex were responsible because they rejected him.

All in all, 20% of the statements found included more than one neutralization technique. This finding is not uncommon. In fact, other researchers applying Sykes and Matza’s theory have frequently found that perpetrators often use more than one justification within a single statement or comment (Liddick, 2013; Bryant, Schimke, Brehm, & Uggen, 2018).

6 DISCUSSION

The study has sought to understand how violent Incel perpetrators justify and sanitize their crimes by thoroughly examining their own words. Though this was an exploratory study, a lot can be gleaned from the types of justifications Incels have used for their crimes and how often they occur and overlap. An important finding from this study is that Incels do indeed use neutralization techniques to sanitize and justify their views and subsequent crimes.

The data analysis also showed that Incels are very much aware of the illegality of their actions. They understand that our society does not sanction their beliefs or planned crimes.
However, the neutralization techniques they employ are not only psychologically practical and alleviate feelings of guilt, but they also function as a defense. These techniques act as a powerful mental shield against societal proscriptions on violence and provide Incels the moral justification they seek for their crimes. Specifically, they all understood what they were planning was illegal. Still, through various neutralization techniques, they were able to articulate rationales for their crimes based on universally accepted concepts, such as justice and fairness.

The Claim of Entitlement is the most frequent justification technique violent Incels have utilized so far to justify their crimes. This finding is unsurprising given that the crux of the Incel belief system is that men are entitled to sex. In this sense, Incels seem to psychologically resemble school shooters, like Eric Harris, who are motivated by aggrieved entitlement (Katisch & Kimmel, 2010; Flannery, Modzeleski, & Kretschmar, 2013; Vito, Admire, & Hughes, 2017; Keskinen, 2018; Silverman, 2020), not violent extremists as some suggest.

Sociologist Michael Kimmel (2013), who coined the term aggrieved entitlement, asserts that a sense of entitlement coupled with feeling aggrieved or marginalized can lead men to use violence to get what they believe is rightfully theirs. Furthermore, he explains that men are socialized to be aggressive and violent. In other words, as psychiatrist James Gilligan (1997) succinctly stated: "[the] patriarchal code of honor and shame [which] generates and obligates male violence." Incels have not created the societal standards they are trying to achieve. Instead, they operate within a system highlighting rotten norms, norms that marginalize women, and norms that are frequently harmful to men as well (Kimmel, 2013).

Kimmel (2013) also highlights that preconceived ideas regarding women's roles plus a belief that they are entitled to sex might also lead men to retaliate violently. When reading the writings of violent Incels, it becomes apparent that they all believed that men are indeed entitled
to sex. Still, powers beyond their control, such as lookism and eugenics, have taken that privilege away from them, so they feel entitled to right this humiliating wrong by retaliating.

It is also crucial to remember that the beliefs and ideas expressed by Incels online are not in any way fringe. Our culture is dominated by men; it was built by men, for men. Because of that, it is vital to contextualize Incels and their ideas and understand that they do not exist in a vacuum. The oppression and subjugation of women is not a novel idea. Though feminism has made great strides in the last few decades, men, by virtue of being men, still maintain certain privileges and advantages that other groups do not enjoy. As a result, there is a subsection of men who feel entitled to certain benefits that men have been traditionally blessed with, including access to women.

Here is where the concept of hegemonic masculinity can provide some insight and perhaps explain Incels' motivations and behaviors. According to Connell (1995), though there are several different masculinities, there also exists a dominant or hegemonic masculinity that represents the status quo (at a particular time and space). It's what maintains the status quo, specifically, the patriarchy. It is also important to note that the term *dominant men* represents a nuanced conception of what a man is supposed to be and display. In other words, not all men are created equal. Men who exhibit feminine characteristics, for example, are not considered as manly and are to be dominated by ‘real men.’ Connell & Messerschmidt (2005) also assert that essential attributes of hegemonic masculinity include violence, dominance, and feelings of superiority.

The men who identify as Incels are angry because the changing demographics and shifts in the traditional power structures that always benefited men no longer serve them. They are also aggrieved because they do not fit into the hegemonic masculinity mold, i.e., being white,
straight, and heterosexual (Frank, 1987), which guarantees men certain privileges. Because even within the category of men, there is a hierarchy in which Incels find themselves at the bottom. This hierarchy divides men into levels of manliness, with what Incels describe as the Chads being at the top, while men who resemble what Incels think they look like, skinny and physically unattractive, are near the bottom. However, Incels believe that hegemonic masculinity is focused on the wrong attributes. Personality, not physical characteristics, they assert, should be cherished. If only society could see how amazing they really are, despite not fitting the alpha male mold. As Christopher Harper-Mercer put it:

"And here I am, 26, with no friends, no job, no girlfriend, a virgin. I long ago realized that society likes to deny people like me these things. People who are elite, people who stand with the gods” (p. 1).

In this quote, Harper-Mercer highlights how society has mistreated him but also how he does not deserve such treatment seeing as he is a superior being. Superior beings, "elite" beings, as he put it, are entitled to much more.

Moreover, perhaps the emergence of the new theme - Futility - is also unsurprising. Nihilism, as explained earlier, is a focal belief of those Incels who have ‘swallowed the Black Pill,’ and though violence is not part of the Black pill point of view, some black pilled individuals have resorted to violence. In other words, when you have nothing to lose, you are not concerned with the consequences of your actions. Futility is also not something expressed by all Incels, only the subsection of those who have been blackpilled.
Futility perfectly encapsulates the Black Pill belief that life is pointless. It makes sense that someone who believes that also thinks he has nothing to lose. Feeling as if you have nothing to lose can at times predict greater involvement in risky conduct (Harris, Duncan, & Boisjoly, 2002).

The artifacts analyzed for this study also show that violent Incels do not seem to be fighting for a higher moral cause, a cause or belief bigger than themselves, which Liddick (2013) identified as possibly being a technique unique to terrorists and extremists who are usually fighting for a sacred principle. Instead, the perpetrators were angry and preoccupied with their personal setbacks. Rarely did they mention men as a whole being victims or fighting for the patriarchy or against feminism, which is understandable given that they believe that men are complicit in their marginalization and harm. When they did, it was usually tied to themselves and what they deserved.

To be clear, the absence of a justification resting on a cause more significant than themselves does not necessarily mean that Incels are not psychologically similar to extremists. It could also mean that Liddick's justification technique is not necessarily unique or suited to violent extremists. Liddick (2013) also concedes that the neutralization technique he identified might not necessarily be a distinct technique but rather part of Sykes and Matza's original Appeal to Higher Loyalties technique and warns researchers to apply it cautiously.

Moreover, it could also mean that these particular perpetrators were more concerned with their personal issues. In contrast, others, and especially as Inceldom grows, might express their discomfort with this perceived inequality and discrimination in different terms, i.e., political.

11 The artifacts analyzed in this study never mention the word ‘feminism,’ which is interesting seeing as Incel dogma seems to blame men’s oppression and lack of sexual relationships on the progress achieved by feminism.
7 CONCLUSION

7.1 Limitations

Several limitations ought to be highlighted. First of all, as stated earlier, this is an exploratory study of a relatively new phenomenon, i.e., Incel crimes. Also, there is disagreement regarding the nature of their crimes, Incel's mental health, and whether they pose any risk to public safety.

The current study includes a small sample size. This low number is because there have been few cases of what could be interpreted as Incel-related violence, or at least public acts of Incel violence. Specifically, only four perpetrators, Elliot Rodger, Alek Minassian, Chris Harper-Mercer, and George Sodini, have left detailed artifacts offering explanations of their motivations. Though it will be hard to draw general conclusions regarding violent Incels (let alone Incels more broadly) from the current study, it is still essential to understand how those few violent Incels justified and sanitized their actions. If we learn how these violent actors think about their victims and their crimes, we can also move towards a better understanding of what might be done to prevent these attacks and stop people from being drawn into this belief system.

Moreover, there exists an ongoing debate surrounding Elliot Rodgers' mental health. Rodgers and his parents claimed he had Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Based on his videos and manifesto, others contended that Rodgers exhibited clear signs of Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) as well as psychopathic traits (Langman, 2016; Allely & Faccini, 2017; Bushman, 2018). Of course, Rodgers was never assessed for NPD and the experts asserting he was narcissistic are merely speculating. Furthermore, Alek Minassian also had an ASD diagnosis. There is no evidence suggesting that their ASD drove them to violence, which Alek Minassian's team claimed. In fact, several advocacy groups, including Autism Canada (2020),
chastised Minassian's defense team for blaming ASD for the attack, highlighting that doing so only worked to further stigmatize individuals with ASD. In the end, however, the presiding judge categorically rejected the defense’s ASD defense and stated that it was clear from subsequent interviews with mental health professionals that Minassian potentially having ASD had nothing to do with his decision to commit mass violence (R v. Minassian, 2021). This information is not included here to suggest any connections between autism and violent behavior. But it is essential to acknowledge that some of the perpetrators might have had underlying mental health issues that could have affected their thinking about their crimes.

Another limitation is that some of the perpetrators, including Elliot Rodgers and George Sodini, never explicitly referred to themselves as Incels. In fact, Rodgers frequented forums and websites associated with Pick Up artists, not Incels. Furthermore, Sodini's 2009 attack precedes Elliot Rodgers' 2014 rampage, which brought Inceldom at the forefront. Sodini was never associated with any Incel forums or explicitly called himself an Incel either.

Both attackers, however, were explicit about their hatred for women and often posted misogynistic rants online, blaming women for their loneliness and lack of sexual and romantic relationships (Koziol, 2014). Furthermore, they are always included in discussions about Incels and Incels themselves have canonized both online and therefore, were also included in the current study.

### 7.2 Future Research

The popularity and rise of Incel-related forums online and the identification of Incels as a long-term threat by law enforcement agencies make it clear that we must understand the
movement and their worldview. There has been an influx in Incel- and Manosphere-related research, particularly after Elliot Rodgers' attack in 2014.

There has also been fierce debate regarding the nature of Incel crimes and whether or not they should be classified as terrorism. This study has found that violent Incels are motivated by entitlement and do not seem to be fighting for a higher moral or political cause other than what they see as their birthright to sexual and romantic relationships with women. Further research could compare Incel and violent extremist and terrorist artifacts to ascertain whether the two groups share motivations and whether they use the same justifications to sanitize their violence. Future research could also compare Incels to school shooters, explicitly looking at aggrieved entitlement and toxic masculinity.

Experts should also examine violent and non-violent Incels' mental health issues. Incels online and some of the violent perpetrators examined in this study are explicit about the mental health issues they face. Some go as far as self-diagnosing themselves as having ASD, anxiety, or substance use disorder. Understanding how their mental health might encourage or impede participation in Incel forums, as well as help-seeking behavior, could have implications for treatment.

Moreover, though there is a debate online regarding who is and who is not an Incel, more and more individuals identify as involuntary celibates. Such groups include gaycels and femcels, and though they might not always share the same beliefs as Incels, more research should examine their rhetoric and belief systems as well.
7.3 Final Thoughts

Though the subsection of individuals who identify as Incels who have mobilized to violence is tiny, there is a need to counter the Incel narratives around women, masculinity, and feminism. However, we cannot counter Incel beliefs if we do not understand precisely how they explain, sanitize, and justify their worldview and violence. This exploratory study aimed to take a first step into the psychology of violent Incels and explore how they psychologically prepared themselves to carry out their crimes. Though this study is one of the first to analyze violent Incels' words, far more research is needed to understand the Incel phenomenon, what motivates these individuals, and how much of a risk to public safety they actually pose.
REFERENCES


ADL (2018). When Women are the Enemy: The Intersection of Misogyny and White Supremacy. *ADL – Center on Extremism.* Retrieved from:


Alana (2019, October 8). My history with involuntary celibacy. *Love Not Anger.* Retrieved from:


AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON THE USE OF NEUTRALIZATION TECHNIQUES IN INCEL MANIFESTOS


AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON THE USE OF NEUTRALIZATION TECHNIQUES IN INCEL MANIFESTOS

MadMamboRodentShitHead (2006, September 16). When will you go on a killing spree? [Discussion group comment]. Retrieved from: https://groups.google.com/g/alt.support.shyness/c/_iOfk7I3BKQ/m/54tNn-EhxgcJ.


