

Connecting Neoliberal Ideology and Incel Ideology

by

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An oral defence of this thesis took place on August 15th, 2022 in front of the following examining committee:

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The above committee determined that the thesis is acceptable in form and content and that a satisfactory knowledge of the field covered by the thesis was demonstrated by the candidate during an oral examination. A signed copy of the Certificate of Approval is available from the School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies.

ABSTRACT

Incels are an online transgressive subculture holding misogynistic views of women, including the belief that women unfairly refuse them sex. While there have been few heinous physical attacks by individuals self-identifying as incels, their ideologies also pose a significant threat to the struggle to end misogyny. This thesis explores and identifies connections between neoliberalism and incel ideologies. A netnographic method was employed to collect qualitative data from a range of social media communities. Six major themes emerged from these data: resentment, hopelessness, coping with ontological insecurity, inauthentic women, significance of sexual relations, and the sexualization and objectification of women. These themes are connected to contemporary features of neoliberal ideology, and finds that incels either acknowledge but reject these neoliberal expectations or incorporate them into their own belief systems.

Keywords: incels; neoliberalism; ideologies; misogyny

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Beverly Allison". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a solid horizontal line.

Beverly Allison

STATEMENT OF CONTRIBUTIONS

I hereby certify that I am the sole author of this thesis and that no part of this thesis has been published or submitted for publication. I have used standard referencing practices to acknowledge ideas, research techniques, or other materials that belong to others. Furthermore, I hereby certify that I am the sole source of the creative works and/or inventive knowledge described in this thesis.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Neoliberalism is a political and economic practice that is defined by its entrepreneurial freedoms within Western societies; however, it has expanded beyond this and has become a cultural framework presenting modes of operation for individuals and their work, family, and social lives (Davies, 2014; Harvey, 2016; Springer et al., 2016). Our ideologies absorb neoliberal concepts because of its influences on our government and economic policies that market certain concepts and ways of life to us (Dowding, 2011). Ideologies are our social processes articulated through individuals' beliefs and behaviours (Dowding, 2011). Even though neoliberalism significantly impacts our ideologies, it is seldomly recognized as an ideology. It is unlikely the average person would be able to define neoliberalism when asked, which could result from many people not being aware or able to report the true cause of their behaviours and beliefs (Wilson & Brekke, 1994).

However, learning why people perceive certain things and behave in certain ways, like striving for specific goals and success, is vital in understanding our society. This understanding is particularly critical when transgressive ideologies occur, which are ideologies that violate socially accepted standards of behaviour and beliefs (Davies et al., 2022). A prime example of transgressive ideologies is those found within misogynistic groups, as Western society has come to see those behaviours as wrong due to the harm it does to women (Jane, 2017). One such group, which is recently gaining a lot of media attention, that holds these misogynistic transgressive ideologies is incels. Hence, incels ideologies and behaviours should be explored to help determine why they occur in the hopes of coming up with solutions to prevent these transgressions. However, it is important to look at all aspects of our ideologies that could create

these transgressive ideologies. Therefore, this paper will explore the effects of Western culture's overarching ideology, neoliberalism, on incel's transgressive ideologies. Thus, the objective of this paper is to explore and identify the connections between neoliberalism ideologies and incel's ideology.

To start this exploration, in Chapter 2, I explore topics critical to understanding neoliberalism and incels for a better comprehension of the current research on connecting neoliberal ideology and incels. In Chapter 3, I explain the methodological approach of observational netnography, a relatively new methodology in criminology. Additionally, this chapter will explain the ethical and trolling considerations needed for analyzing incels online. Then in Chapter 4, the results of that data are discussed, which have been divided into six themes: resentment, hopelessness, coping with ontological insecurity, women are responsible for being inauthentic, importance of sex, and the sexualization and objectification of women. Chapter 5 discusses these six themes, and I will then explain how neoliberal ideologies connect to incel ideologies. Finally, Chapter 6 discusses the research's limitations, followed by the conclusion of the research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Neoliberalism

What is Neoliberalism?

Many scholars have conceptualized and defined neoliberalism in several different ways since its origins in the 1920s and 1930s (Davies, 2014; Harvey, 2016; Springer et al., 2016).

Harvey (2016) defines it as “a theory of political economic practices proposing that human wellbeing can best be advanced by the maximization of entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework characterized by private property rights, individual liberty, unencumbered markets, and free trade” (p. 22). Similarly, Kergel (2020) defines neoliberalism “as an ideology which focuses on the beneficence of the free market” in order for individuals to unfold their greatest potential (p. 410). Additionally, Campbell and Pedersen (2001) define neoliberalism as including “formal institutions, such as minimalist welfare-state, taxation, and business regulation programs; flexible labor markets and decentralized capital–labor relations unencumbered by strong unions and collective bargaining; and the absence of barriers to international capital mobility. It includes institutionalized normative principles favoring freemarket solutions to economic problems, rather than bargaining or indicative planning, and a dedication to controlling inflation even at the expense of full employment. It includes institutionalized cognitive principles, notably a deep, taken-for-granted belief in neoclassical economics” (p. 5). All these definitions of neoliberalism share the idea that market and marketlike ideologies have been instituted across Western society and have transformed people and organizations’ way of thinking. An example of this transformation is causing people to think they must personally work on themselves and that everything in their life should be done with the one goal of succeeding economically (Davies, 2014; Harvey, 2016; Rottenberg, 2014).

The turn to the neoliberal model was not sudden; instead, it was a gradual evolution to this model as economic and political crises precipitated the shift to neoliberalism. One major event that triggered a change was the failings of global capitalism, which was the crisis of capital accumulation that occurred in the 1970s (Harvey, 2016; Volscho, 2015). This crisis is characterized by high inflation and low growth (Harvey, 2016; Hay, 2004; Volscho, 2015). With

inflation, many people are unable or unwilling to consume products, resulting in economic growth deflation (Harvey, 2016; Hay, 2004; Volscho, 2015). With no one buying things, companies were making less and, as a result, cut costs, which meant individuals lost their benefits, job security, and even their jobs (Harvey, 2016; Hay, 2004; Volscho, 2015).

This outcome of the crisis of capital accumulation resulted in socialist parties gaining significant support as they fought for widespread reform and state intervention to help with health, safety, and financial aid (Harvey, 2016). Additionally, these parties also campaigned to restrain the economic power of the ruling class and for those working under them to gain a greater share in profits, ultimately evening out the incomes of workers and management/owners. This increase in support meant that the ruling classes would lose political and economic power (Harvey, 2016). The Republican Party, with the financial support of these ruling classes, campaigned the concepts of neoliberalism to the middle and lower classes as the most attractive option because of the promises of prosperity during a time of significant financial problems. Furthermore, it was depicted as no other option would work, and this new model was made to seem like the most common-sense option available (Harvey, 2016).

Neoliberalism seemed the most attractive as it gave people the feeling that they could prosper financially. This view came as neoliberalism stated that individuals would be given individual liberty and freedom from the state's power to fix the global capital accumulation problem, meaning people would gain back jobs and prices would go down (Harvey, 2016). Additionally, this new model was presented as if everyone could one day achieve great wealth (Harvey, 2016). This presentation appealed to the lower and middle classes who were currently upset with their financial problems due to the capital accumulation crisis (Harvey, 2016). Not only was it appealing, but it was presented as if there were truly no other options. Margaret

Thatcher expressed that there was “no other alternative” as no longer could the government go on as they were, as it meant more spending, which would lead to more borrowing, higher taxes, higher interest rates, more inflation, and more unemployment (M. Thatcher, Speech to Conservative Women’s Conference, May 21, 1980). Thus, the neoliberal model was so financially appealing and campaigned as no other option, making this political and economic route seem like the most common-sense option. Therefore, in the 1990s, the Republic party took over Congress as it won over people with its campaign to change (Harvey, 2016, p.30).

The change to the neoliberal model created significant political and economic changes. Neoliberalism resulted in privatization; financialization; managing and manipulating crises; and state redistribution, where cutbacks to social expenditures and the welfare state occurred (Becker et al., 2021; Davies, 2014; Harvey, 2016). The neoliberal system also eroded prior powers and institutional frameworks, the division of labour, and the welfare provisions (Harvey, 2016).

Beyond a strictly economic and political ideology, neoliberalism has expanded into a cultural framework that conditions individual’s way of thinking and markets certain concepts and rituals for individuals and their lives. This expansion has occurred as neoliberal policy emulates certain messages, such as the message of consumerism and commodification, and puts tremendous pressure on social and financial success (Davies, 2014; Littler, 2017, as cited in Gill & Orgad, 2018). Where it is through this broadcasting that it has conditioned individuals in Western society to respond in a manner that is approved by these messages (Davies, 2014; Littler, 2017, as cited in Gill & Orgad, 2018; Rottenberg, 2014). Thus, the messages of social and financial success conditions individuals to perceive that these goals for success are how we live our lives and become happy (Davies, 2014; Littler, 2017, as cited in Gill & Orgad, 2018; Rottenberg, 2014). Additionally, this drive for success leads companies and individuals use

everything in their power to be successful, one way being to present their products as ways to help individuals be successful, creating this loop and reinforcing these messages of success (Davies, 2014; Littler, 2017, as cited in Gill & Orgad, 2018; Rottenberg, 2014). Thus, individuals are sold the idea that they should be focusing on themselves, their hobbies, friendships, and even intimate partners, as they have been transformed into forms of investment and value management (Davies, 2014; Littler, 2017, as cited in Gill & Orgad, 2018; Rottenberg, 2014). Even social actions, such as morality, education, sex, marriage, and leisure, are cast as rational entrepreneurial actions (Brown, 2003).

Yet, with the turn to neoliberalism, many researchers speak of how the neoliberal system is fundamentally broken (Birch & Mykhnenko, 2010; Harvey, 2016; Roberge & Seyfert, 2016; etc.). Neoliberalism has led to over-consumerism, environmental damage, and a disregard for inequalities (Birch & Mykhnenko, 2010; Harvey, 2016; Roberge & Seyfert, 2016). Thus, neoliberalism has fostered and amplified social divisions, where structural inequalities are held blameless for people's problems and obstacles; instead, the individual has only themselves to blame (Harvey, 2016).

Major Effects of Neoliberalism

As mentioned, the neoliberal model has many key principles that have led to cultural changes in ideologies and identities. It is important to note that within this thesis, when it says that neoliberalism “trains,” “instructs,” “enforces,” or any words similar to these, individuals are not told directly that this is how they should act and think. Rather, the neoliberal model emulates this message through policy changes concerning economics and politics (Lazzarato, 2009). Additionally, through advertisements, news, shows, and movies, mass media broadcasts certain ideologies, which “allow an ideology to penetrate individuals or masses” (Black, 2016, p. 134).

Furthermore, the broadcast of neoliberal ideologies through the media is reinforced by “inducting people into norms and rituals that not only reflect that ideology but make it the case that the ideology actually structures social life” (Kukla, 2018, pp. 11-12). These norms and rituals are the idea of individualism, the concept of competition, the concept of confidence, the creation of ontological insecurity, the commodification of sex and women, and the new wave of feminism. All these major changes will now be discussed in depth of what they are and how they look within our current Western culture. Though it is important to note that I approached this deductively based on your prior knowledge of incel ideology, where there is a focus on those features of neoliberalism that appeared most relevant to the subcultures' major themes.

Individualism.

With the rise of neoliberalism came the concept of individualism, which is the view that every individual is responsible for themselves and no longer will the government interfere or help (Harvey, 2016). With individuals now responsible for themselves it meant they alone had to work towards gaining their happiness and well-being (Adams et al., 2019). Within the neoliberal context, happiness is referred to as acquiring wealth and social status, and our well-being requires us to constantly take risks, change, and grow (Adams et al., 2019). These actions are accomplished by seeking new opportunities, acquiring new skills and talents, and competing with others (Adams et al., 2019). As a result, tremendous pressure is placed on the idea of hard work through self-help and self-improvement to gain success, as it is now people’s job to advance themselves as if they are human capital (Lazzarato, 2009).

In turn, this tremendous pressure on oneself leads to the idea that any problems a person faces or any negative things that happen to them are their fault even in social/economic inequalities are present (Adams et al., 2019; Gill & Orgad, 2018; Luxton & Braedley, 2010:

Yardley, 2021). Within this viewpoint, personal failures are seen as a person failing to not work hard enough, not trying hard enough, not being confident enough, not being competitive enough, or just being lazy (Adams et al., 2019; Gill & Orgad, 2018; Luxton & Braedley, 2010; Yardley, 2021).

Confidence.

Neoliberalism equates success with self-confidence, which comes from the belief that if you are not confident and assertive, you cannot endure life and tough times (Gill & Orgad, 2015). Thus, confidence is seen to be a vital part of the neoliberal social construct of the economy as it “is an independent fundamental driving force of the business cycle” (Farmer, 2010, p. 113).

With confidence being a vital part of our neoliberal social construct of the economy, it drives individuals to see themselves as human capital. This drive comes from the idea that individuals must advertise themselves to others for financial and social gain (Lazzarato, 2009). Where in order to promote yourself, you must be confident in what you are advertising, as confidence in yourself is identified as being projectable and instilling confidence in your abilities within others, leading to gathering better resources and status (Taylor, 2013). This process is also referred to as branding (Gershon, 2016). For example, if you are going to a job interview, being confident as you sell yourself shows the interviewer you are confident in your skills and ability to complete the tasks of the job (Taylor, 2013). This process is typically done in hiring, where individuals brand themselves by communicating how they are more valuable than other candidates by selling their skills and experiences (Gershon, 2016).

In addition, confidence in yourself not only will make others more confident in you, but it is marketed as making you a better performer (Morin, 2022). This belief strives from the idea

that if you are confident in yourself and your abilities, there will be less time spent worrying and more time spent doing (Morin, 2022). Additionally, with being confident in yourself, the belief is that you will look for more opportunities to show off your confidence, thus making you more productive and helping you achieve more (Taylor, 2013).

Lastly, there is also the expectation that individuals are confident in what they invest in (Abbott, 2018). This confidence causes people not to be concerned about investments being lost, losing their job, or being unsuccessful. Not being confident causes individuals to run the risk of never investing in things that could be beneficial (Abbott, 2018). Overall, the concept of confidence in oneself and one's ability to advertise themselves is how one becomes a productive member of society and gains resources and status (Abbott, 2018; Morin, 2022; Taylor, 2013).

Competition.

Neoliberalism contends that in order to preserve individual liberty, a competitive market must be established to allow people to freely choose their production and consumption activities and reward those for working hard (Bettache, 2020). Additionally, it is through this model that success and happiness are only achieved through competition with others (Becker et al., 2021). Thus, competition is seen as a definite characteristic of human relations, as neoliberal policies encourage individuals to see others as a source of competition (Becker et al., 2021). Competition, however, has extended into all aspects of life, whether political, economic, or social (Springer et al., 2016). Therefore, things like good jobs, relationships, popularity, or families are all things individuals must compete for in order to be successful.

To compete, neoliberalism requires people to strive to be the best they can be, so they must work hard and utilize themselves as human capital (Lazzarato, 2009). We see such orchestration through advertisements, where companies connect buying a suit to helping you in

an interview, taking a class to get an edge on your résumé, or going to events to meet new people and network (Lazzarato, 2009). Additionally, this strive to be the best, in turn, promotes individuals to be very self-centred (Becker et al., 2021). Overall, competition is seen as inevitable (Lazzarato, 2009) as everyone wants the same thing that is marketed as limited, the “good” life, where they are popular, wealthy, and have the happiest of families (Adams et al., 2019).

Post-Feminism.

Feminism is a social-political movement and set of principles that advocates for men and women to have equal rights and opportunities (Merriam-webster, n.d.a). The current feminist landscape, particularly in Western cultures, is much different than it was in the early 2000s (Rottenberg, 2019). Scholars have generally historicized the different periods of elevating women’s status in society and giving them equal rights as ‘waves’ (Molony & Nelson, 2017). The reference to ‘waves’ describes the process of certain eras and generations of feminism (Molony & Nelson, 2017). There are different waves of feminism because different social changes and changes in the views of women’s rights create new eras and generations of feminism (Molony & Nelson, 2017). Currently, Western society is on the fourth wave of feminism (Britannica, n.d.; Maclaran, 2015; Trier-Bieniek, 2015). This new wave is women addressing the major problems of sexual harassment, body shaming, intersexuality, and rape culture by utilizing the power of the internet and social media to challenge these gender inequalities (Britannica, n.d.; Maclaran, 2015; Trier-Bieniek, 2015).

However, the current wave of feminism has been interpreted differently, where some women are now presenting their feminism in neoliberal forms, which is referred to as “post-feminism” (Benet-Weiser et al., 2019). A well-known researcher on this topic, Rosalind Gill,

stated that the name post-feminism was used “as a way of speaking to the distinctiveness of circulating discourses and representations, and became a key part of the feminist lexicon” (Banet-Weiser et al., 2019, p. 3). Through this conceptualization of post-feminism, the notion of neoliberal feminism was formed (Banet-Weiser et al., 2019). Neoliberal feminism is the idea that women recognize there are inequalities between women and men (Rottenberg, 2014). However, simultaneously, women take full responsibility for their well-being, where they are expected to have a good work/family life balance, be successful, celebrate femininity, and look good (Banet-Weiser et al., 2019; Rottenberg, 2014).

Researchers perceive the modifications to feminism as individuals using the neoliberal spirit and using feminism and empowerment to capitalize on (Banet et al., 2019). This capitalization occurs as feminism and empowerment can be used to sell products; sell people’s ideas, which can come in the form of books and seminars; and sell classes, like workout classes, personal advancement classes, and so on (Banet et al., 2019; Rottenberg, 2018). Additionally, capitalization of feminism and empowerment can be used to make a person more likeable, aiding in their ability to gain popularity and advertise things to others (Rottenberg, 2018).

Rottenberg (2018) refers to this capitalization as a “double-edged sword,” as it has become popular to be a feminist, but at the same time is seen as displacing the key terms and standing that it once had. Being seen as a feminist is beneficial, as it has caused high-profile women to suddenly begin to publicly identify themselves as feminists, such as Hillary Clinton, Sheryl Sandberg (COO of Facebook), Ivanka Trump, etc. (Banet-Weiser et al. 2019). However, researchers have identified that these high-profile women were replacing key feminist terms like autonomy, rights, liberation and social justice with happiness, balance (between fun, work,

health, and family) and seeking challenges and opportunities (Banet-Weiser et al., 2019; Yardley, 2021). In addition, we see the transformation of the idea of choice within feminism, as these high-profile women state that they are feminists by “choosing” classical paths of femininity and family life (Gill, 2009).

An example of replacing key feminist terms is documented within Ivanka Trump's book *Women Who Work*. Ivanka states she is a feminist; however, the view of feminism she is spreading is neoliberal feminism (Rottenberg, 2018). Within it, Ivanka talks about how women must continuously work and persevere to create the life they desire (Rottenberg, 2018). In this book, she also encourages women to see themselves as stock, where their roles are their market value, meaning women must change themselves to raise their values (Rottenberg, 2018).

In the end, these high-profile women now publicly identifying themselves as feminists are more publicly visible than feminists of the past (Banet-Weiser et al., 2019). This increase in visibility is because they do not challenge deep structures of inequalities and instead appease to individuals' current ideologies (Banet-Weiser et al., 2019). These circumstances thus lead to the "new feminist subject," a woman who accepts full responsibility for her well-being and self-care crafted through a good work-family balance, while ignoring inequalities (Banet-Weiser et al., 2019). Overall, neoliberal feminism's balanced stance has positioned women as reproductive organisms and care workers while simultaneously making them responsible for their jobs (Banet-Weiser et al., 2019).

Through neoliberalism capitalizing on feminism came additional changes to how women view themselves and their lives. For example, neoliberalism affects feminism, where women's bodies are now used to measure their worth (Leve et al., 2011 as cited in Moran, 2017) as their appearance is also tied to their social power (Wolf, 1991 as cited in Moran, 2017). This

connection can be identified through the constant messages of self-improvement and personal responsibility pushed at women, particularly with the shape of their bodies and what is considered modern beauty (Raisborough, 2007 as cited in Moran, 2017; Gill, 2009). This change to women's views is also seen through examinations of current female magazines, as within them, women's primary value is depicted as their appearance and how desirable they are to men (Moran, 2017). This depiction is from the countless magazine articles and advertisements regarding diets, workouts, makeup, and fashion (Gill, 2009). In addition, everyday feminine things like makeup, hairstyles and fashion are tied to a woman's professional success within magazines and advertisements (Gill & Orgad, 2018).

Overall, this form of feminism depicts women's actions as a form of self-investment (Rottenberg, 2019). Women must focus on self-improvement and look to capitalize on themselves and make it within society (Rottenberg, 2019; Leve et al., 2011, as cited in Moran, 2017). Furthermore, what a woman consumes, her education, training, and even her partner choice, are all turned into a practice of self-investment (Rottenberg, 2018). All these self-investment practices are depicted as feminism, as it pushes women into believing it is their choice to self-invest and capitalize on themselves. This change in feminism affects how women see themselves and how others see them, ultimately leading to women's beauty myths and expectations (Gill, 2009; Rottenberg, 2018).

Ontological Insecurities.

With the turn to neoliberalism, there have also been numerous changes in how individuals see themselves and the world around them. This perception is also referred to as ontology, which is the nature of being and existence (Young, 2007). Some of these changes that we see neoliberalism has made to ontology are, as mentioned previously, individualism, where

individuals are responsible for themselves and their own success; individuals seeing themselves as human capital; the belief you must compete for happiness and success, even when the playing field is unfair; and the commodification of women and sex. However, these changes can generate widespread experiences of feelings of uncertainty and injustice, causing a struggle for identity (Young, 2007). This struggle for identity stems from the economic order, which stresses the creation of lifestyle and identity, which is partnered with the lack of building blocks to create one's identity (Young, 2007). As a result of this partnership, individuals have no idea where to form their identity from (Young, 2007).

Neoliberalism stresses the creation of lifestyle and identity through consumption and the commodification of relationships (Wrenn, 2012). Where identity comes from what clothes you wear, electronics you have, the property you own, relationships you have, and so on (Wrenn, 2012). Though in order to get these things, neoliberalism instructs that you must be economically successful, though “falling short of the neoliberal markers of success leads individuals to find fulfillment in identity outside the economic sphere through social groups or causes” (Wrenn, 2012, p. 409).

Finding identity in social groups or causes may help individuals find identity but do not eliminate the feeling of disembeddedness. Disembeddedness is the feeling of separation from the rest of society and creates insecurity surrounding one's ontology of their nature of being (Giddens, 1990; Young, 2007). This feeling leads to the process of ‘othering,’ which is where individuals attribute negative characteristics to groups, they consider the “other” (Young, 2007). This process is done in order for them to feel as if they have a superior ontology, which in the case of neoliberalism is those that can meet the neoliberal markers for success (Young, 2007). Within

‘othering,’ individuals project demonizing images of a group and only focus on their negative characteristics (Young, 2007). For example, incels demonize women, where they see women as foul creatures that only care about looks and money (Ging, 2017; Jaki et al., 2018).

However, when individuals project negative attributes on those they are ‘othering,’ they simultaneously project positive attributes on themselves (Young, 2007). Furthermore, ‘othering’ can make individuals see others as lacking their qualities and virtues (Young, 2007).

There are three stages to the identity crisis. The first is the insistence that some essential and valued qualities are associated with themselves. The second stage is the demonization of others who they identify as lacking these virtues and qualities. Finally, the third stage is through the process of ‘othering,’ which creates the ability of the individual to combat their humiliation and exclusion from society (Young, 2007).

Commodification, Sexualization, and Objectification of Women.

Finally, the last distinctive feature of the neoliberal model discussed is the commodification of everything. Laxer & Soron (2019, p. 17) define commodification as “the production of a good or service for profit.” Consequently, since the turn to the neoliberal model, almost all aspects of our lives have been turned into something that can make a profit (Mosco, 2016). How you talk to people, your education, your relationships, and your appearance are all commodified (Mosco, 2016). However, this thesis will focus on one area, particularly the commodification of women’s bodies and sex as it relates to the major themes found within incel ideology. Both these forms of commodification are found to lead to the sexualization and objectification of women (Hatton & Trautner, 2011; Jochen & Valkenberg, 2007; Moran, 2017).

As discussed earlier, women are constantly positioned within neoliberalism as commodities, where their values are founded on their looks (Gill, 2009; Rottenberg, 2018). This positionality has led to an increase in women being sexualized and objectified (Bernard et al., 2020; Coy, 2012; Duits & van Zoonen. 2011; Gill, 2007; Moran, 2017). Sexualization is when an individual's value is based solely on their sexual appeal/potential, and they are held to a standard of attractiveness that equals sexiness; thus, they are seen as an item for another person's sexual pleasure even without their consent ("American Psychological Association," 2007). This sexualization is accomplished by commodifying items that focus on women's looks and by commodifying women's bodies in order to advertise anything from food, drinks, cologne, clothes, etc. (Bernard et al., 2020; Duits & van Zoonen. 2011; Gill, 2007; Moran, 2017).

Studies have also found that the sexualization of women has occurred more frequently and intensely due to the commodification of sex (Hatton & Trautner, 2011; Jochen & Valkenberg, 2007; Moran, 2017). Sex has become an aspect of our everyday lives, as imagery and representations of sex plastered throughout media, such as on social media, in music videos, everywhere we look television shows, advertisements, and even through the cultural importance assigned to sex (Maclaran, 2015). For example, Hatton and Trautner (2011) completed a longitude study of the magazine Rolling Stones and found that the sexualization of individuals increased over time. Moreover, they found that women were portrayed in sexualized manners within advertisements more than men (Hatton & Trautner, 2011).

Sexualization in mass media is proposed to be the main cause of objectification of women, for "images of sexualized bodies are appraised as objects rather than as persons" (Bernard et al., 2020, p. 134). Many scholars have found that the sexualization of others, particularly women, changes how people see, think and behave toward those that are sexualized

and correlates to them being seen as objects (Cikara et al., 2011; Cogoni et al., 2018; Vaes et al., 2019). When sexualization leads to objectification, it prompts certain negative behaviours towards those objectified, like social exclusion and violence (Benard et al., 2020). These behaviours occur as those sexualized are no longer seen as human beings that are equals or have feelings; rather, they are seen as their bodies or body parts (Benard et al., 2020).

Misogyny

There is considerable debate around the definition of misogyny. Some dictionaries define it as the “hatred of, aversion to, or prejudice against women,” which promotes violence towards women (Merriam-Webster, n.d.b). Likewise, the *SAGE Encyclopedia of Psychology and Gender* states that misogyny is “hatred, bias, or prejudice towards women” (LeRoy, 2017, p. 1199). Most definitions of misogyny imply that it is individuals' thoughts, feelings, words, and behaviours, but those definitions are ignorant of the structural aspect of misogyny. Thus, I draw upon the research of Kate Manne (2019) as her definition is more comprehensive and points to an overlooked but centrally important aspect of misogyny. Manne’s (2019) definition of misogyny is that it is “primarily a property of social systems or environments as a whole, in which women will tend to face hostility of various kinds because they are women in a man’s world (i.e., a patriarchy), who are held to be failing to live up to patriarchal standards” (Manne, 2019, pp. 3233).

Manne (2019) argues that misogyny should not be understood primarily as hatred or hostility towards women. Instead, Manne (2019) states it should be understood primarily for its controlling, policing, punishing, and exiling of women who do not meet patriarchal expectations and are seen as challenging male dominance. It is her understanding that helps differentiate sexism from misogyny. As Manne states (2019), misogyny is what enforces the patriarchal social

relations when a threat to them occurs and is seen as the “law enforcement” branch. In contrast, sexism is the ideology that reinforces patriarchal social relations, which is seen as the “judiciary” branch (Manne, 2019).

Furthermore, Manne (2019) clarifies that misogyny is not the hatred of all women. Rather, Manne (2019) specifies that it is the hatred of a specific “type of woman,” one that does not meet the traditional social roles of a woman (i.e., nurturing, caring, attentive, giving, etc.). Overall, Manne’s definition of misogyny makes the most theoretical sense. This definition makes the most theoretical sense as it aids in better encapsulating what misogyny is and why it is directed towards women. This definition also provides the structural aspects of misogyny, as it aids in explaining why it still occurs within Western culture when it harms women and equality. Thus, this definition best explains this phenomenon, making it more practical in use.

Misogyny online

Over time, Western culture has made great strides in women’s rights through gender equality, cultural shifts, legal reform banning discrimination, education, and policy changes (Jane, 2017; Manne, 2019). However, despite these strides, misogyny has continued to be something that women face daily, where violence against women is still considered the most prevalent human rights violation in the world (Antonijevic, 2016). One place in particular where women face misogyny is online.

The internet has grown and become a part of our everyday lives exponentially. Currently, most individuals do not go a day without using the internet in some form, whether in their social, personal, or work-life (Fuchs & Dyer-Witford, 2012; Castells, 2013). A 2022 report revealed that, on average, people spend almost 7 hours a day online (We Are Social & Hootsuite, 2022).

With being such a major part of our lives, the internet has also incorporated aspects found within offline life, such as misogyny (Jane, 2017). Where by 2015, the “UN Broadband Commission” (2015) reported that 73 percent of women and girls experience online violence.

Many researchers identify that the aspects of the internet can cause misogyny to thrive within it (Ging, 2017; Jane, 2017; Nettleton, 2018). Jane (2017) argues that “the internet was not the one to create sexism; rather, it amplifies it in unprecedented ways” (p. 2). Many other researchers support this argument and identify the internet as a breeding ground for misogyny, as it allows individuals to spout their beliefs and harass women without any risk of punishment due to the anonymity and freedom of speech allowed on it (Ging, 2017; Jane, 2017; Nettleton, 2018). Ging (2017) found that the internet is a breeding ground for misogyny as technological advances allow the increased flow of misogynistic ideas and information across groups, platforms, and geographic boundaries. Furthermore, both Jane (2017) and Nettleton (2018), within their research, found that the internet shelters and protects those that are misogynistic due to the internet’s anonymity and ubiquity, where harassers can not be found and punished for their wrongdoings. Additionally, when women do report harassment, the actions taken are to hold them responsible, such as telling them to not take what is said online seriously, to stop posting things that target them, or to either take a break or stop using the internet (Jane, 2017; Nettleton, 2018). Hence, cyberspace has created subcultural norms which facilitate, allow, and protect aggressive and toxic misogyny (Ging, 2017; Jane, 2017; Nettleton, 2018).

A large majority of these aggressive and toxic misogynistic subcultural norms can be found within what is known as the manosphere (Blommaert, 2017). The manosphere is a place men can reassert their greater social status, as, in the real world, theirs is diminishing due to the rise in feminism (Blommaert, 2017). The manosphere is an online phenomenon where men

gather to exchange misogynistic experiences and views (Blommaert, 2017). Unlike other social movements with marches, petitions, political actions, and so on, the manosphere is a strictly online activity with no real offline equivalents (Blommaert, 2017). There is no tangible offline equivalent because feminism has helped advocate for equality for women, as it is now considered taboo in Western society to see them as less than equal to men (Blommaert, 2017). With their beliefs being taboo, the internet and its subcultural norms have allowed for a place these men can find like-minded individuals and share their thoughts without fear of being crucified by others in real life (Blommaert, 2017).

It is important to note that the manosphere is not just one group of misogynistic males; rather, it is a multitude of different interconnected groups that make a network of misogyny online (Bratich & Benet-Weiser, 2019). All these groups have different viewpoints and different centres of belonging for these males. However, all these groups within the manosphere have one central view: men are at risk of losing their rights and becoming targets because of feminism (Markwick & Lewis, 2015).

Groups within the manosphere once were something only specific individuals would encounter online (Ging, 2017). However, these groups are now gaining a great deal of media and journalist attention because of the high-profile criminal actions in recent years (Ging, 2017). Some of these actions are #gamergate, a cyber harassment campaign launched against women; the mass killing done by Elliot Rodger; and the Toronto van killer Alek Minassian (Ging, 2017; Hoffman et al., 2020). In addition, the manosphere has become more popular with the radical advances of social media and the internet, which has exponentially aided in the increased flow and publication of anti-feminism ideas and information (Ging, 2017; Markwick & Lewis, 2015).

Nevertheless, one group within the manosphere that is beginning to accumulate more attention than others is incels.

Incels

Who are Incels?

Researchers are beginning to learn more about incels; however, while there are multiple media accounts, few systematic studies have been conducted on this group. This group is a particularly hard group of individuals to study, as outsiders to the group are considered to be unwelcome and actively avoided (Beauchamp, 2019; Sugiura, 2021). Outsiders are unwelcome, as many incels see outsiders as not being able to properly understand their ideology and their hardships as researchers do not live through what they do (Beauchamp, 2019; Sugiura, 2021). Thus, this group is unwilling to talk to researchers and answer their questions as many incels feel researchers' work will not properly represent them (Sugiura, 2021).

Even with the expansion of research on this group, an agreed-upon definition of them does not presently exist. Bratich and Banet-Weiser (2019) define incels as individuals “who create homosocial bonds over their inability to become a Pick-Up Artist.” Baele, Brace and Coan (2019) refer to them as “a misogynistic subculture”; a form of extremist subculture. Here, I define incels as an online transgressive subculture¹, where it is a group of men who believe they have been wronged by society and, more specifically, by women as they prevent them from their right to have sex. This definition is derived from them being an online group, known to violate social boundaries, and having characteristics of a subculture. The transgressive part of this

¹ This term transpired during a discussion with Dr. Shahid Alvi.

definition is constructed from the fact that this group has misogynistic ideologies and conversations, which violate socially accepted standards of behaviour and beliefs. Furthermore, incels have subculture characteristics as they are a group with beliefs that are divergent from the rest of society; they believe that women should be controlled and commodified for men's sexual pleasure.

Incels see women as selfish individuals who only do what is best for them and seek romantic and sexual relationships with a minority of men seen as the most attractive (Jaki et al., 2018; Baele et al., 2019; Sugiura, 2021). The majority of incels believe that because women only go after the most attractive males, the majority of men considered less attractive or unattractive are left to either fight for the remaining women or be forever alone. This negative view that incels have of women has been identified in research done by examining incels' forums (Ging, 2017; Hoffman, 2020; Jaki et al., 2018; Sugiura, 2021). For example, Jaki et al. (2018) found that terms such as "shallow," "immoral," "promiscuous," and "responsible for incels" have been given to women by incels. References to women's shallowness are made, where comments of men being willing to "date down" but women unwilling to are made frequently (Jaki et al., 2018). Dating down means that men are ready to date women who are seen as being below them in attractiveness or social status (Jaki et al., 2018). Additionally, many incels believe that women are not as evolved as men are, as they are believed to be still animalistic in their thinking (Ging, 2017; Hoffman, 2020; Van Valkenburg, 2018). This belief comes from the idea that women only care about finding the best DNA to reproduce with and the most resources they can from men, hence why incels believe women to only go after attractive and wealthy men (Ging, 2017; Hoffman, 2020; Lindsay, 2021; Van Valkenburg, 2018).

It is through this recognized divergence from the rest of society that incels state they are either redpilled or blackpilled, and other men are bluepilled. Redpilled and bluepilled is in reference to the dystopian science fiction film the Matrix, where the main character, Neo, is given a choice of either swallowing the red pill or the blue pill (Ging, 2017; Baele et al., 2019). By swallowing the red pill, Neo would be enlightened and understand the hard truth of what is happening within his society (Ging, 2017; Baele et al., 2019). In contrast, swallowing the blue pill meant Neo would be disconnected from reality by allowing him to switch off and ignore the hardships of the truth (Ging, 2017; Baele et al., 2019). Thus, incels believe that they have swallowed the redpill and genuinely understand the true nature of women and how them having rights has negatively affected Western society by causing hardships for males, such as increasing male suicide and depression due to loneliness (Baele et al., 2019; Ging, 2017). Incels had also introduced a new pill, called blackpilled, where when swallowed, it makes them aware of the permanence of reality, meaning it is impossible to change their situation, and they will forever be treated poorly and be alone (Baele et al., 2019).

The group incels were not always regarded as a misogynistic group. Before incels became the group it is now, it was a help group for both males and females having difficulty gaining relationships. The term incel was first used in 1993 by a Toronto woman named Alana (Taylor, 2018). She created the online community called Alana's Involuntary Celibacy Project as she wanted to help people like herself who were having difficulty obtaining intimate relationships (Taylor, 2018). This forum was established to connect individuals struggling to find loving relationships and give these individuals a place to talk and support one another through these times (Taylor, 2018). However, when Alana left the group in 2000, incels soon changed drastically (Kelly & Aunspach, 2021). Soon enough, this once support group where individuals

worked on themselves became a male-only misogynistic group that blamed women for their problems (Kelly & Aunspach, 2021).

The Hierarchy They Believe In

Incels also maintain that there is a fixed hierarchy based on physical attractiveness (Ging, 2017; Baele et al., 2019). The top of this hierarchy are the most attractive individuals and have significant power in their social life due to their looks (Baele et al., 2019). The top tier of this hierarchy is considered Alphas and Staceys. Alphas are men, also referred to as Chads, and are seen as the most attractive men. Alphas/Chads are considered by incels men that all women want and fantasize about, even if they are in a relationship with a non-Chad. On the top of the hierarchy with Chads are Staceys; these are what incels consider the top tier of women who are the most attractive. Second down on the incel hierarchy are those they refer to as Betas. Incels also refer to Betas as normies, and they are average-looking men and women. The last tier of the hierarchy is those considered ugly, incels, which incels see as exclusively made up of males. In this hierarchy, an essential aspect of these categories is that incels consider these to be set categories, meaning that individuals can not move from one to another as it is believed that people can not improve looks (Baele et al., 2019).

Non-Homogenous Group

Even though incels might have similar ideologies, like the redpill/bluepill ideology, they are not a homogenous group of individuals, meaning they are not all the same. For starters, incels are comprised of countless individuals of different ages, races, and geographics (Beauchamp, 2019; Jaki et al., 2018). In an informal poll of the subreddit r/braincels, a subreddit of self-identifying incels, 1,267 individuals were polled (Beauchamp, 2019). Through this poll, it was

identified that 90% of them were under the age of 30, 80% lived in Europe or North America, only 55% were white, and a large percent identified as East Asian, South Asian, Black, and Latino (Beauchamp, 2019). Another poll that was taken on incels.co, the largest incel site, came back with similar percentages of their members' ages, races, and geographics (Beauchamp, 2019).

In addition to the different demographics that make this a non-homogeneous group, this group also has different beliefs. Incels have a consensus that women are the problem for their lack of sexual success and that their looks also play a factor in it. However, there are certain subjects that there are varying options on, like politics, cultural norms, women's nature, other men, values, morals, and how society works. In summary, though the majority of incels may agree on certain overarching ideas, they can be divided on the basic elements of these beliefs and ideas.

Do Incels Hate All Women?

Not all incels truly hate women; in fact, the majority still want to be with women even though they despise the way women are. Instead, incels want to be with a certain "kind" of woman. Incels see this "kind" of woman as one that follows traditional roles of women, such as loving, caring, nurturing, giving, and not focused on looks (Baele et al., 2019; Sugiura, 2021).

Though this ideal woman that incels fantasize about, as I mentioned previously, is believed by them to be non-existent in our current culture. Instead, incels believe that to get this type of woman, women should be controlled like they were in the past. As with being controlled, women would no longer have a chance to choose their partners, which they believe prevents hypergamy, promiscuity, and greediness, all negative traits they consider women to have. In

addition, control would allow men to prevent and punish women's misbehaviours, which incels believe their current partners are letting women get away with. Overall, incels believe that if people in society were more traditionalistic, it would solve all society's problems, such as loneliness, suicide, and finances (Jubilee, 2019).

Not Your Typical Extremist/Terrorist Group

As a result of the lack of systematic/theoretical research on this group of men, there is still controversy on whether or not this group is considered an extremist/terrorist group that individuals should fear. Currently, the media has taken the stories of incels, self-identifying or those said to be affiliated with them, who have committed mass killings and have portrayed them as other extremist/terrorist groups, which has created moral panic. However, when analyzing this group of men, with confidence, it can be said that this group is not as simple as it may seem and may not easily fit into that category.

There are a handful of reasons why incels are not regarded as your typical extremist/terrorist group; for starters, unlike other hate groups, their hate is only focused on one area: women and those that give women their "power." Other extremist/terrorist groups, like far-right extremists, tend to focus on multiple political issues. Examples of these political issues are non-traditional women, immigration, patriot, religion, and abortions (Perry & Scrivens, 2019).

Secondly, another aspect that can be seen to position incels apart from other extremist/terrorist groups is that they also acknowledge negative aspects of themselves and do not see themselves as superior to others (Baele et al., 2019). Instead, incels constantly recognize their lack of physical attractiveness and their lack of social skills, and even their lack of intelligence (Baele et al., 2019). On the contrary, other extremist/terrorist groups believe that they are superior to all others in every aspect, hence why their ideologies should rein.

In addition, incels can be seen as less dangerous than other extremist/terrorist groups. I have come to this conclusion for a couple of different reasons. Firstly, when examining incel forums, there is no actual consensus on matters pertaining to the group, as mentioned previously. The lack of consensus ultimately means there is a lack of agenda for the group like other extremist/terrorist groups. Another aspect of this group that makes them less dangerous is that most of these individuals do not want to leave their homes or suffer from social anxiety. When reading incel forums, you see that these individuals tend to stay secluded from the rest of society and spend most of their time online. Many incels also discuss how they hate going out and hate interacting with others as it makes them depressed or angry. In addition, some speak of how they genuinely fear the world outside their home.

Lastly, a prominent aspect of incels that sets them apart from other extremist/terrorist groups is that the majority of them do not believe their situation will get better or can be fixed. Hence, most incels believe that regardless of actions taken, these actions will not fix the problems they believe society has (Baele et al., 2019). Hence, there is a widespread desire to commit suicide by incels as they see no way to escape their situation (Baele et al., 2019; Sugiura, 2021). Thus, we see an overall lack of action taken by incels compared to other extremist/terrorist groups, where the ones we see tend to be plastered over the media and shown in a way to create moral panic. In actuality, the chances of an incel attack are fewer.

Overall, these aspects help set incels apart from mainstream extremist/terrorist groups. Though the purpose of this section is not to say that incels are not dangerous, as their misogynistic ideologies pose a threat to the fight against misogyny, and unfortunately, some incels do act out in horrendous ways, making them a threat to women. Instead, this section says that this is a difficult group to classify and fit into categories that we already have and

understand. Rather, you need to approach incels differently than other extremist groups to better understand their ideologies.

Chapter 3

Methods

Methodological Approach

Incels are a complex group of individuals to study as there is no sample list to get participants from, they are uncooperative with researchers, and I am the object of their disdain, a woman. Furthermore, individuals are generally less likely to participate in a study online when given a choice. Research conducted by Hudson and Bruckman (2004) found that when people were given the option to opt into a study, only 4 out of 766 potential participants agreed. In addition, they found when their presence as researchers was revealed, they were met with hostility and were frequently kicked out of chat rooms (Hudson & Bruckman, 2004). Overall, this makes the group practically impossible to interview or interact with to gain data. Thus, to overcome these impediments, this thesis uses the approach of observational netnography.

As mentioned, observational netnography was the best methodological approach to gathering data from incels. Netnography is ethnography redefined in that it conducts “ethical and through ethnographic research that combines archival and online communications work, participation and observation, with new forms of digital and network data collection, analysis and research” (Kozinets, 2015, p. 1). Netnography is useful in revealing “interaction styles, personal narratives, communal exchanges, online rules, practices, and rituals, discursive style, innovative forms of collaboration and reorganization, and manifestation of creativity” (Kozinets, 2015, p.3). Additionally, observational netnography is considered to be more rapid and cost-effective, giving the research longer time to analyze and interpret the data (De Valck et al., 2009). Furthermore, Gupta (2009) stated this method aids in avoiding the limitation of quantitative survey research, as there is no reliance on a participant’s memory. Hence, in the case

of my research, observational netnography is beneficial as it allows me to understand the personal ideologies and identities of incels by immersing myself in the environment of their website incels.co/incels.is, gives me longer with the data, and helps prevent reliance on participant's memory.

Through the observational netnography approach, I have been able to immerse thoroughly in the incel environment by spending hours a day reading, analyzing, noting, and coding their posts and comments. I have collected 113 discussion posts from both incels.co/incels.is and the subreddit called [r/incelexit](https://www.reddit.com/r/incelexit), of which were randomly selected. In addition, I gained approximately 900 discussion post (1000 pages) from Dr. Shahid Alvi, which are posts and comments collected from incels.co and referenced in Ribeiro et al. (2020).

Analysis

This significant amount of data allowed for a proper understanding of incels and their ideologies. To analyze this data, I utilized thematic analysis through the principles of Grounded Theory. This principle meant that when engaging with the data, data were grouped together into recurring themes, where theory can be generated from the data (Gibson & Hartman, 2014). Through this process, I adopted Corbin & Strauss' (1990) three-stage approach: open, axial, and selective coding.

Open coding was used to open up the data to new theoretical possibilities (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). This process allowed me to break up my data and label them with codes in order for me to continuously compare and contrast similar events in my data (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Thus, these codes were made from the key repeating themes that emerged from the data, so when multiple incels repeated the same ideas or beliefs, I would identify that as a code (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

Axis coding consisted of a second pass-through of the codes, where I identified similarities in substance, tone and style within the codes and combined related themes together (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). In the selective phase, a final passthrough of the combined themes, where I selected the core themes, systematically related them to other themes, and edited themes that needed further development into what now consists of the thesis's key themes (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

Ethics

This research took into account the ethical implications of using online user-generated content. My methods entailed systematic reading of posts on websites that are open to the public, meaning anyone can see their posts and user-names are utilized instead of real names. Additionally, the vast majority of these individuals recognize that what they are saying is public, as numerous discussion posts discuss what r/incelsteers (a subreddit that takes what incels say and makes fun of them) say about them. Thus, ethical issues around privacy and anonymity were not considered problematic as the data are from public sites where usernames substitute for real names.

Trolling Consideration

When examining the collected data, it is important to note that the ideologies manifested are authentic rather than just individuals trolling. I acknowledge that it is impossible to catch every post that may be trolling, but by labelling a rude, antisocial, or threatening post as “an individual just trolling” removes any notion of accountability (Lindsay, 2021; Sugiura, 2021). Additionally, it is important to note that trolling is an intentional strategy that many individuals do to reject any notion of accountability for misogyny or racism while simultaneously spreading their ideologies (Lindsay, 2021; Sugiura, 2021). So even though what they say can be called

trolling, it can still be taken at face value, as they are still spreading misogynistic views that are openly endorsing discrimination, harassment, and violence toward women.

Furthermore, those who are seen to post on these incel forums are mainly posting for other incels, so many do not tend to attempt to try to get a reaction from others since these are like-minded individuals and considered an ally to their cause. Additionally, those that can post on these incel forums must have an account on the website, meaning individuals must go through the process of creating an account to post. On top of that, admins constantly monitor these forums, so if something you say is considered suspicious or trolling, you can be banned. With all the factors of having to make an account and the motorization of the website, it prevents individuals coming on to these forums with the sole purpose of trolling.

More importantly, by immersing myself in the data, I have been able to better identify when individuals are intentionally antagonizing others. When trolling occurs on these forums, they tend to be combined with images representing what they say is trolling or sarcastic. An example of this is the very common use of Pepe frog images that represent someone responding in a way that is inflammatory, irrelevant, offensive, or disruptive to the discussion. Therefore, these themes that emerge are identified as authentic incel ideologies. The following is an attempt to identify neoliberal ideologies within incel ideologies.

Chapter 4

Results

During a close textual analysis of the data, six key themes emerged. These key themes are hopelessness, resentment, coping with ontological insecurity, women are responsible for inauthenticity, importance of sex, and the sexualization and objectification of women. The following will be a analysis of the result of these key themes found within incel ideology.

Hopelessness

The first major theme seen to emerge throughout the incel discussion is hopelessness. Hopelessness is the feeling of despair (Alloy & Rubenstein, 2017), which within the data I saw emerge through three incel beliefs that are affected by neoliberal ideology. These three beliefs are: incels believe they are rejected and mistreated by others, where no amount of hard work will help; incels believe they face unfair disadvantages in a competitive world; and finally, incels are told by Western culture and others that confidence will help them, but they feel as if nothing will help them.

No Amount of Hard Work Will Help

Within incels' discussions, incels mainly focus on the perceived hardships they face and why they face such hardships. The most discussed hardships they face is the rejection and mistreatment by women and other males. Incels state that the mistreatment and rejection they face result from their personalities, social status, and, more specifically, the way they look. The following posts are examples of these statements: "They give people who are different, nerdy, socially awkward shit for just breathing..." and "im too ugly for friends, or happiness or to be treated like a human."

Incels are seen to discuss how they are constantly told by media and others to work harder on self-improvement if they want to be more successful with women. Posters state they are told they need to work out, be more confident, bathe or get a haircut, change the way they dress, take some classes on how to speak to women, to be kinder, etc. However, in response to this, many incels comment that their current situation of not retaining any intimate relationships is unfixable, where the idea of hard work has no impact. Incels' comments depict the idea that their current circumstance of being rejected and mistreated is mainly blamed on their looks, whereas many regularly say there is nothing they can do to change it. An example of this is shown in the following: "'why are you so fucking afraid of hard work' is a typical bluepill delusion. It's literally by putting in hard work, effort and a positive mentality - and inevitably failing miserably that someone sees the blackpill."

Rather, incels refer to their situation as blackpill, which is the view that nothing can change their situation. So even though others within Western society might believe hard work can help anything, incels within this mindset believe nothing will help.

Unfair Disadvantages in the Competitive World

A further example of the theme of hopelessness is the concept of competition and incels' believed disadvantages in it. My analysis indicates that many incels believe all men compete for resources like wealth, status, and women. As many incels recognize competition as a key structure within a society, so much so that many incels make numerous comments similar to these:

"The conflict between nations/religions/ideologies was thereby replaced by a competition between all individuals on the planet where all people are natural enemies and fight for the scraps while the mighty corporations/politicians and on a more local level the chads/women flourish in excess. The aggressions that were canalized into a competition between groups and therefore expressed in a controlled manner are nowadays

uncontrollably expressed against everyone by everyone (in jobs/in relationships/etc.), the implementation of freedom meant nothing more than the total destruction of the individual worth (unless that individual belongs to a protected class or to the A-class).”

“People do not want to impress people's graceful side because the world doesn't run/ rule on that dynamic. The cold world runs on the dynamic of primal/ competitive value.”

Incels discuss how individuals must compete to succeed in life, where you do everything in your power to gain resources that are considered to be limited, one of these being women. Many incels continuously comment on the importance of raising their “value,” through jobs, money, and looks in order to compete for a woman. However, many incels have identified that competition is racked up against them, as everything comes down to how you look, making it nearly impossible for them to compete fairly. An example of these posts is:

“If you are good looking the world is willing to help you everytime. Just look at all the HOMELESS good looking young guys who live dream lives anyways because they get support from everyone, many times even landing high paying low effort model jobs. A GL bartender is higher in the status and social ladder than an average/ugly engineer.”

Incels make it clear countless times within their discussions that those seen as unattractive have a disadvantage when it comes to gaining a partner. Where many state just that: “The problem with this \"competition\" in dating is that people who were born with good looks start with a huge advantage.” This view is further demonstrated with many incels mentioning how they would make good boyfriends or would make a woman very happy if she only focused on who they were rather than what they look like. Ultimately, with this view that they face unfair disadvantages within this competitive work, it leaves them with the view they will be forever alone.

Ineffectiveness of Confidence

Another aspect of the hopelessness theme identified in these discussions was that most incels do not believe that confidence can help their situation. Incels remarked on how they feel

they are worthless, going nowhere in life, or that they are “human garbage.” Thus, many incels feel as if they have nothing to be confident about. Where some posters have identified confidence as doing more hindrance than good as they will always be in this constant despair state: “When it's obvious you have no reason to be confident, people will know right away your confidence is fake, and it will make you look even more insecure.”

Additionally, many incels are seen to associate confidence with a way for “normies” to cope if they are unattractive or have no luck with women others to try and combat the feeling of hopelessness. For example, in a conversation about a male stating that confidence is what helped him get women, an incel noted this: “the point of the whole post is that he thought it was the increase in confidence that caused his increase of success rate with the females. that is what makes him bluepilled.” Furthermore, other posts are seen to demonstrate that the idea of confidence does not help an incel’s situation, as discussed previously, incels perceive that women only care about how men look and do not care about their personality; thus, making confidence not important to gaining relationships.

Resentment

On top of the ever feeling of hopelessness, the other major theme in incel discussions is resentment. Incels are seen holding a lot of resentment towards many things, such as women, other men, and society. The three major things that cause this resentment are: the view that they have to work harder than good-looking men due to their looks, that women have it easier than men, and that it is a dog-eat-dog-world.

Work Harder Than Everyone

One way I observed resentment in my study was in numerous incels commenting on the burden of having to work harder than attractive men. This conviction is represented in incels' comments that demonstrate their disdain towards good-looking men, as many see these men as not having to work hard like them in order to be successful with wealth or women.

“Being a male model is not something that can be learned through hard work, it's all about genetics. The fact that male models are on the top of the current hierarchy literally kills your motivation to participate in the society.”

Through this quote and many similar to this, it is evident that incels are upset that these good-looking men are not following the practice of hard work for them to be successful. In these discussions, incels comment on how good-looking men can do “easy jobs” like modelling and acting, while incels are left to do all the labour-intensive jobs. Incels are further upset by the fact that they still get paid less than good-looking men in these more labour-intensive jobs.

Women Have It Easy

Similar frustration is also seen in incel discussions on the belief that women have it easier compared to men. This topic of conversation is often seen along with the idea that women do not have to work hard due to the believed privileges their gender brings.

“If men had an easy way to live, like fooids² do, fooids would starve to death. Fooids only have the things they have, and the comfort they enjoy, because there are men out there doing the dirt and hard work, necessary for society to function.”

“Women live on easy mode but still call those less privileged than them, the privileged ones.”

² Fooids and femoids is a derogatory term used in the incel community to refer to a woman. Fooids and Femoids comes from the contraction of the word "female" and "android" (robot), to emphasize the allegedly icy nature of women.

In incel forum posts, comments like the above quotes are made, making it evident that the majority of incels believe women do not have to work hard as they are seen to “leech” off men. This leeching is described in numerous comments as women are believed to seek wealthy partners, so they do not have to work to get everything they want.

Additionally, further examples suggest that incels resent women as they are seen as having no problem getting what incels want most, and that is intimate relationships.

“If a foid says she's single is because she's too picky and wants the top 0000.1% gigachads³. Even the ugliest hole gets more attention than the average man. This hole is pretending to be alone in order to get attention and validation from men.”

Comments like this one demonstrate that the majority of incels see women as capable of getting a relationship without having to struggle like they do. A further example of this is when incels are seen talking about tinder, where multiple have made fake profiles as a woman to see the vast difference in matches compared to their own. This view of women, no matter how they look, having to not work hard towards gaining intimate relationships is believed by many incels to be because women are considered a limited resource and have a higher sexual market value than men.

Dog-Eat-Dog-World

Further, many incels communicated bitterness towards how people in the world focus too much on competition and the extent people will go to get ahead. Incel posters have numerous discussions on how people are not kind to one another or caring; instead, incels view people as individualistic and willing to do anything to gain a competitive edge. “People do not want to

³ Gigachad is an exceptionally attractive Chad.

impress people's graceful side because the world doesn't run/ rule on that dynamic. The cold world runs on the dynamic of primal/ competitive value.”

Discussions on how others are individualist occur in unison when incels talk about how they have been treated unfairly by others and many state that it is a result of competitive nature. This type of explanation is especially seen in discussions about competing for women. Many incels have identified men fighting for women as being deeply rooted within society, where men are expected to do anything to compete for a woman. This view is seen in such things as an incel questioning another for wanting to make friends in order to meet women: “Making male friends to meet females ? sure if you wanna get thrown under the bus.” Thus, many incels hold resentment towards not being able to trust others to help with their struggles.

Coping with Ontological Insecurity

Incel discussions that we see in the themes of hopelessness and resentment show that they do not feel as if they are like everyone else, as they can not succeed in gaining wealth, status, or intimate relationships, which many recognize as how other's within Western society use to identify themselves. Where some have recognized that how people form their identity has changed, which some regard as causing their problems:

“... In the past eras there were groups like nations, religions, ideologies like capitalism/communism, etc. and people who belonged to a group had a certain worth automatically and most aggressions were done to members of the outgroup, with the abolishment of all orders and the group identity we devolved into a state where we nowadays have an expanded battle zone in every aspect of life (e.g. romance, jobs, etc.)...”

Within this quote, the idea is that identity no longer comes from a group you are from but rather from the worth placed on you as an individual or your relationship. In addition, this quote also ties in the idea that identity is from your financial success (jobs), where people are characterized

and identified by their success. Thus, if they are unsuccessful, many believe they do not meet these markers for identity. Another example of this insecurity of identity is:

“Imagine being a rich famous cardiologist. You leave your own office which brings in thousands of dollars per week. In front of your office there's a homeless guy. He stands up and is one head taller than you. You achieved so much in your life, but you will still feel inferior to a guy who has achieved nothing in his life just because of looks. I feel like I can only focus on my goals once I feel comfortable in my own skin.”

This quote and similar ones to this shows that many incels identify that they are struggling to find their identity and, ultimately, their self-worth. From this struggle, the confusion on how one identifies themselves is demonstrated, as this incel, like many others, believes that looks and relationships are what makes you identifiable.

Within discussions, we see the process of ‘othering’ occur where incels project negative characteristics on others in order for them to feel more secure with their own identity. For starters, we see this ‘othering’ occur within these discussions of other males that do not recognize or are considered ignorant of the incel ideology. This ideology is that you need good looks to succeed in life and relationships.

“There’s lots of incels in the world but most are bluepilled copers. They can’t handle the blackpill so they live a life of ignorance. They are either unaware of the blackpill or just disregard it to keep themselves sane. Most would probably rope if they swallowed the blackpill tbh”

Through this projection in this quote and many similar statements that incels make, incels see those who do not see their worldview as ignorant and weak, for if they knew what was “really going on,” they would not be able to handle it. By making these posts that project negative characteristics on others, we see a projection of positive ones on incels. For example, through that quote, it is clear this incel is stating incels themselves are more observant and intelligent as

they recognize the “true” aspect of society and women. In addition, this incel is also projecting the idea that incels are mentally stronger as they go on living after being blackpilled.

Comments made in incel forums that demonstrate the process of ‘othering’ also occur to men specifically labelled Chads. Through analysis, it is identified that incels see Chads as having it the easiest in life due to their good looks. With these good looks, as previously mentioned, incels cite that Chads do not have to work hard, as their looks give them better treatment by others, better job opportunities, and better advantages in gaining intimate relationships.

“Chad has nothing to vent about, even if blackpilled they can always get validation when they seek it not only from foids and normies but from incels as well, at this point i'm not ashamed to admit that i am really really jealous of chad, he gets everything without any effort while i struggle half my life to get the table scraps of chad's meal and then get rejected.”

Once again, with incels projecting these negative characteristics on Chads, like them being lazy and sliding through life, they are projecting positive ones on themselves. Through quotes like this, we see that incels represent themselves as very hard workers, that fight through perceived inequalities. In addition, we see that due to the way Chads are treated affects how many incels see themselves:

“I have seen Chadlites with zero social skills, autistic from a 50 meters, are getting attention continuously on their weird social media profiles, be popular in groups etc. Seeing this might cause truecels to go literally insane, mentally fucked badly So I don't know if it is an excuse but I see I cannot function normally anymore in any social setting even I want. Already an outcast. I feel like hating everyone right from the beginning.”

Through the analysis of discussions, it was transparent that those who get ‘othered’ the most by incels are women. Within these forums, women are constantly talked about negatively, whether from being called cum dumpsters, worthless, leeches, self-centred, or having the mind of a child.

“I don't think women are capable of rational thought. They just go after whoever makes their pussy wet. No matter the consequences.”

“You're not wrong there, mostly because foids argue emotionally not logically.”

Comments like these demonstrate that many incels ‘other’ women to the extent that they consider women to be uncaring, vial, and below them. Once again, due to this projection, they are then projecting on themselves that they are caring, intelligent, and superior to women. This superiority comes from certain views about women and how they should act and look.

Women Are Responsible for Inauthenticity

As seen in the process of ‘othering’ women, incels tend to have certain views of women, which are very traditionalistic. Thus, women who go outside these traditional women roles are seen as being inauthentic to a “woman’s nature.” This theme is broken down into three major claims that incels believe women are being inauthentic. These three claims are: women are greedy and will do anything to gain a competitive edge, women are not meant to work as they are meant to be at home, and women should focus on their looks.

Women are Greedy and Manipulative

Incels have many different views of women, whether it be on a woman’s “nature,” how they should act, and how they should be controlled. In particular, most incels are seen making comments that women are very greedy individuals who would do anything to gain a competitive edge when it comes to gaining success, money, and Chads. An example of these comments is: “Anyone with half of brain should have known by now foids use makeup and dress sexy in order to gain a competitive edge.” In similar comments, it can be identified that many of these men see

women's greed as pushing them to use their looks, so they do not have to work hard for success and help give them an unfair advantage. Another example of this is:

“A forum user actually made a fake Stacy LinkedIn profile and despite her qualifications and lack of job experience, she received way more replies and sexual requests from employers compared to a man having an elite degree, or having tons of job experience in STEM.”

Additionally, some incel discussions within the incel forum state that women are greedy as they enter the workforce, even though they should be home making a family. An example is as follows: “Women already had the fruit of fertility, and by forcefully getting the fruit of economics now, they basically became gods in society. The genders are unbalanced. That's the main reason birth rates are plummeting”.

Distaste For Working Women

Like the quote before, most incels believe that women should meet their natural “nurturer” role and should be home, not working. Many incels comment on how women should meet traditional roles and be loving, caring, and giving towards a man and his kids.

Incels are seen to have many different views of why women are currently working instead of staying home and being a housewife—one of these matches the concept of greediness, which was spoken about previously. As mentioned, the majority of incels are seen conversing about how women are greedy and manipulative, which causes them to go into the workforce so they can get paid on top of the money they get from men.

Greediness is one reason incels are seen to comment on why women go into the workforce; however, a large number of incels are seen stating that women are pushed into working. The incels that are seen making these comments say that it is feminism that is brainwashing women to believe that they need to go into the workforce and become independent.

An example of these comments: “The elites want women working and going to college to be brainwashed by feminism, not marrying as soon as puberty and becoming amenable, fruitful, submissive, fulfilled mothers and wives.”

Importance of Women Focusing on Looks

Not only do many incels think women should be focusing on having a family, but they also believe that women should focus on their looks. There is a common belief in these discussions that women should look good for men’s pleasure. Comments are made that a woman’s natural role is to please a man, so she should focus on her looks and do everything in her power to look her best. Examples of this are demonstrated when incels make comments similar to this: “The only real asset of a woman is her attractiveness.”

This belief that women should focus on their looks is also demonstrated in the constant berating that women who do not meet Western beauty standards receive, such as those overweight, those that have tattoos or even those that do not wear makeup. These women are berated in these forums, where there are comments about them being worthless, pathetic, disgusting, failing at the one thing they should be good at, and the list goes on. Further examples of these are as shown:

“Fat women would be prohibited and criminalized to the point they would go to jail if they don't do exercise and become fit in a reasonable period of time.” and “...Honestly it's just so pathetic that I ~nd it borderline insulting. You've been granted a life on easy mode, you literally have one asset to keep up, and you just refuse to do this one thing, which is not getting fat. Fat girls just suck and I hate them.” Thus, demonstrating the resentment women receive when they go outside what is believed to be the roles of an authentic woman.

Importance of Sex

After going through these discussion posts, it is clear that incels grant a significant amount of importance to sex. Incels comment on how their central notion is the view that they are prevented from sexual success. Hence, it is no surprise then that a significant portion of their forum discussions has some correlation with the topic of sex. One example of incels granting great importance to sex is an incel commenting this during a discussion on sex: “Everything in life revolves around sex when you get to the root of things.” This incel, like many others within this forum, post about how sex has a great standing in Western society. Comments are made that demonstrate this belief is when sex is tied to granting women power, being a right of passage, granting manhood, and so on. Another prime example of this is seen as follows:

“Every truecel is obsessed with sex; sex is the best thing possible you can experience, that's why we have a community of people willing to kill others because they can't get it. Women are the gatekeepers of sex, and therefore are held in high regard. Why do you think the world is the way it is with women living on easy mode? It's because they control the means of sex.”

Overall, through incel comments like these, it is evident that incels position sex as a significant milestone and right for a man.

Sexualization and Objectification of Women

With the constant conversations about sex, the majority of these conversations come back to how women prevent them from getting it. When incels are seen discussing women, they have a particular way of talking about them and use a specific vocabulary that presents women as sexualized objects for men's pleasure.

Women are seen to be sexualized within these forums by constantly being referred to as “whores”, “holes,” “ sex objects,” and with what was previously mentioned, their looks are their only asset. Another example that represents the fact that incels sexualize women is as follows:

“This is what I despise the most. They think they can wear what ever they want and they declare it as "that is only my business." Where the idea that is projected through these comments is that a woman can not wear what she wants, as her body is seen to exist, first and foremost, for male sexual and viewing pleasure.

Furthermore, comments that are found to sexualize women most times simultaneously objectify them. Where women are objectified to the point that their only purpose is seen as objects for men’s sexual pleasure, and they are seen as “a resource, similar to iron or coal deposits.”

This objectification is also seen through the language that incels use in their forums, where they refer to women as “femoids” and “foids.” In referring to women in this way, they are dehumanizing women and thus, objectifying them.

Though some incels go a step further with their objectification and sexualization of women by commenting on ways in which a “women’s only purpose” should be utilized:

“Only if women's rights were taken away (as every civilization did in the past), and the sexuality of women was used to reward law-abiding men, will crime (among all races) go down, and young men will no longer glorify gangs. But there isn't much chance of that happening given how cucked both sides of the political spectrum are.”

“Imagine how advanced society would be if foids rewarded GOOD behavior.”

Comments like these demonstrate the sheer extent to which incels will go with objectifying women, where they see them no longer as human beings but tools that can be utilized.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The results help articulate the key themes of incel ideologies found within the data. Through the discussion, connections will be made to demonstrate how these incel ideologies have been conditioned by neoliberal ideologies.

Hopelessness

No Amount of Self-Improvement Will Help

Through the media, advertisements, and the economic and social market, the neoliberal message that success is important and that individuals just need to work hard and work on themselves to succeed is passed on (Adams et al., 2019; Lazzarato, 2009). It is because of this believed importance of success and drive for wealth, that many individuals and companies advertise ways to be successful (Lazzarato, 2009). These advertisements sell workouts, outfits, haircuts, and courses as something that will help individuals succeed. Therefore, these advertisements make it seem like all it takes is hard work in the form of self-improvement to achieve success in anything.

Though what can be seen is that the neoliberal thought process that all it takes is hard work ignores any inequalities that stand in individuals' way of success. When examining incels, the majority of incels are seen rejecting the notion that all it takes is hard work to gain success, as many believe the way they look is causing them to be unsuccessful in gaining wealth and, more importantly, a relationship. Hence, comments are seen acknowledging that there is no hope for them, as there is a belief that no amount of hard work, in the form of self-help or self-improvement, can fix their ugly features. This belief is further amplified by the topic discussed in the resentment theme, which is the belief that good-looking individuals do not have to work hard

for success. With incels identifying this unfairness, it further demonstrates that many incels do not believe that hard work helps individuals succeed as other factors play a role in gaining success.

Overall, despite hard work through self-improvement being articulated to individuals through advertisements and the economic and social market as the way to succeed, the majority of incels reject this notion. These incels recognize that it does not come down to just working hard that brings them success, as other factors, like perceived inequalities, can affect them from gaining success.

Unfair Disadvantages in the Competitive World

Within the message that in order to be successful, you must work hard in the form of self-help and self-improvement, also comes the message that this self-help and self-improvement can help individuals gain a competitive edge. As mentioned earlier, everything from clothes, makeup, hairstyles, and classes are all advertised to people as a way to be successful (Lazzarato, 2009). Often these things are advertised as a way for individuals to gain a competitive edge over someone else (Lazzarato, 2009). This need for gaining a competitive edge is made apparent through the believed way that the economy is set up, that resources in every aspect of life are limited, may they be economical or even social (Becker et al., 2021).

After going through incel discussion posts, it is clear that the idea of needing to compete for resources has seeped into incel ideology. Many incels are seen acknowledging that competitions occur for resources such as wealth and status, though most focus on the competition that arises for women. The majority of incels see women as a resource for men, for which all men must compete. This conviction leads many incels to think that men focus on their looks, get

good jobs, gain high social standings, and become wealthy, which are all methods of self-improvement to raise their values to compete to gain women.

However, many incels feel as if they have a disadvantage in the competitive world, as they believe it all comes down to looks. Many of these forum posts talk about how employers are more likely to hire good-looking individuals over themselves, who they state are less qualified for the job. Additionally, incels are seen on countless occasions talking about how women only go after the most attractive males due to women being animalistic and only going for the best genes. So even though incels believe they are nice guys and would make a woman very happy, they are passed over as they are not good-looking. Overall, even though the neoliberal concept of competition has conditioned incel ideologies, they identify that the competition is unfair as disadvantages prevent success, creating the feeling that even though they might meet the criteria to compete for work or women, they have no hope of succeeding.

Ineffectiveness of Confidence

Within the idea of competition is the idea that being confident in yourself will help you shine above others by helping you better advertise yourself and your abilities to others; thus, helping you be more successful (Farmer, 2010; Lazzarato, 2009; Taylor, 2013). With confidence being held in high regard by the greater part of Western society, it is not surprising that the majority of incels have heard that they just need to be more confident to be successful with women. However, even though neoliberalism has conditioned others to view confidence as beneficial, the majority of incels are seen to reject this notion, as it once again comes back to the perceived inequalities that they are facing as a result of their looks. So there is the belief among incels that even if they presented themselves confidently to women, they would still be rejected

as they are unattractive. Furthermore, incels are constantly seen putting themselves down, and the majority believe that everyone in the world is disgusted by them. Thus, with this viewpoint, many do not feel they have anything to be confident about; therefore, how could they properly advertise themselves to others?

Incels' focus on their lack of looks makes them reject the neoliberal notion that confidence is key to success. Rather, the majority of incels see that there is no help for their situation. Moreover, there is the belief held that no amount of confidence will help them out of their situation, as there are other factors at play that affect a person's success. So even though confidence might be advertised as an aid to help someone else, many incels do not see it as the fix-all solution as it is advertised to be.

Hopelessness' Connection to Neoliberalism

Overall, the theme of hopelessness can be seen to be directly impacted by neoliberal ideology. With neoliberalism pressure for success, it puts expectations on individuals that they are working hard and being confident in order to get this success. However, incels have made it apparent that this is not the way to success, that no amount of self-help, self-improvement, confidence, or hard work will help them be successful. The majority of incels instead see their situation as having no solution, as there are inequalities that prevent them from this success like everyone else. Thus, with neoliberalism's ability to ignore inequalities, it leaves incels with the sensation of hopelessness as there is no way to gain success.

Resentment

Work Harder than Other Men

As we saw within the theme of hopelessness, there is the view that hard work is the key to success, as those that work hard are considered to be rewarded for it (Lazzarato, 2009). With this belief so ingrained in the major part of Western culture, it is not surprising that it has also conditioned incels' view on hard work as well. Where, even though in other aspects they may reject the notion of hard work as being a way to success, they are still seen as holding the view that hard work should result in rewards (Bettache, 2020). Hence, this view within incel ideology causes them to resent those they feel do not work hard for their success. This belief is depicted in the comments that many incels make on their disdain for good-looking men and how they perceive they have it the easiest, as they can rely on their looks to help them get jobs, wealth, and intimate partners. Incels brings up many examples, including the example of Chads being paid to model or act, which to incels are considered easy jobs that individuals are over-rewarded for. Whereas incels, on the other hand, believe that they must do hard labour to get a fraction of what these Chads make.

The idea of good-looking people not having to work hard is considered by many incels to be unfair. Within Western society, there is the neoliberal view that those who work hard should be rewarded appropriately (Lazzarato, 2009). Thus, with this unfairness, many incels resent those they feel do not have to work as hard as them. This resentment is therefore demonstrated in incels discussions, where many incels are seen making negative remarks about good-looking individuals being lazy or weak.

Women Have It Easy

Similarly, this frustration towards others not working hard enough is also directed towards women, as the majority, if not all, of incels, see women as not having to work as hard as them for wealth or relationships. Once again, we see that neoliberalism has conditioned incels' view of hard work, where hard work results in rewards. As it can be seen that many incels have identified women as having it the easiest, as there is the view that women are successful because they are women. This view comes from the idea that women get jobs or help because they are women, not because of qualifications, experience, or a need for help. Thus, women are seen by many incels as receiving rewards meant for those who work hard and taking them away from those deserving.

Additionally, most incels hold great resentment for women for having it the easiest at what incels struggle with the most, and that is having intimate relationships. Many incels see women as not having to work hard to gain any form of relationship, as incels identify women as having a greater sexual market value. This greater sexual market value means that women are more desirable, making gaining intimate relationships easier and faster. On the other hand, incels see that they can not have this same privilege, as they have the worst sexual market value, meaning they cannot gain these intimate relations. Thus, this neoliberal view that hard work equals reward has conditioned many incels to believe that them working hard towards intimate relationships means they should be receiving them, unlike women, who they view do not work hard for them.

Dog-Eat-Dog-World

As mentioned earlier, it is within the concept of hard work that there is the belief that individuals must work hard in order to compete (Bettache, 2020). Where competition is so driven

in Western culture, it has conditioned individuals to do anything to get an edge over others, even if it means trampling them in the process (Becker et al., 2021). This lack of consideration for others is because neoliberalism came the concept of individualism, where we are supposed to focus on ourselves and gain our success (Becker et al., 2021).

As previously mentioned, many incels in the forums consistently bring up that there is competition for limited resources, one of which is women. Therefore, men are identified by incels as having to do anything in their power to compete in order to gain a partner. With neoliberalism conditioning individuals to see and drive for competition, many incels in this study saw other men as untrustworthy and conniving when it came to winning over a woman. Instead of helping one another, many incels identified men as trying their best to outshine one another to gain women's attention. Whereas in this competition, incels believed they were easily outshined. Hence, these incels hold great resentment towards other men as they are perceived as being too self-centred and inhumane, believing they are willing to throw their fellow man under the bus. So even though these other men follow the neoliberal view of competition set up through the economic, political, and social system, incels hold resentment towards them for doing just that.

Resentments' Connection to Neoliberalism

Overall, a large portion of incels' resentment can be seen coming from the effects of neoliberal ideology. For starters, this neoliberal has conditioned individuals to expect that everyone must work hard to be successful; thus, it can be seen that incels hold resentment towards those they feel do not work hard or as hard as they do. This resentment results from many incels seeing good-looking men and women having an unfair advantage when it comes to gaining the success that incels wish they had, as they see these individuals as being born with all

the things they need to succeed. Whereas incels are left working hard towards these successes and are still unsuccessful.

Additionally, the neoliberal view on competition is also present within incel ideology, as incels are seen identifying competitions for wealth, social status, and women. However, within these discussions, we see that what neoliberal competition drives individuals to do, such as being individualistic or hurting others in order to get ahead, causes incels to hold resentment towards others and this drive for competition. This competitive drive that has been instilled in individuals by neoliberalism is suggested to have led incels to see others as untrustworthy and manipulative, believing no one is willing to help them. Furthermore, many incels are seen resenting competition because they see themselves as unable to compete with other men. This thought process is all because of what is advertised and implied to us from the neoliberal model, making it seem that resources are limited and there is a limited amount of space to succeed, so you have to fight for it.

Coping with Ontological Insecurity

Neoliberalism puts great pressure on financial and social success, as it is marketed as how people live, set their goals, and be happy (Davies, 2014; Littler, 2017, as cited in Gill & Orgad, 2018; Rottenberg, 2014; Wrenn, 2022). Thus, this pressure has conditioned individuals' views on identity and has led to individuals perceiving it as the successes that they have. We see this idea of identity represented in the media, advertisements, and politics, where things like material wealth, houses, jobs, relationships, and family are all positioned as a way for someone to show success and form their identity. Hence, there are expectations that you do everything in your power to succeed, which are set out in neoliberal norms and rituals of gaining success, such as hard work, confidence, and competition.

However, as we saw within the data, incels feel as if they can not reach these markers for success, as their looks prevent them from such successes. Additionally, it is through the data that it can be seen that incels perceived looks and intimate relationships as a significant way to be “successful” and form one’s identity. This perception, as later will be discussed further, is done through good-looking people and intimate relationships posted throughout media and advertisements. The general media’s broadcasting of good-looking individuals in relationships leads the vast majority of incels to believe that it is important to identity; if they do not have good looks or relationships, they can not be like everyone else.

As a result of these perceived shortcomings in identity, there is a strong sense of ontological insecurity among incels because they do not know where to form their identity, as they perceive that they can not form it through how others in Western society do. Furthermore, this ontological security causes individuals to search for identity through social groups or causes to help them feel less alone and displaced in society (Wrenn, 2012). Hence, they feel comfortable in such transgressive online subcultures as they meet others struggling with the same lack of identity.

Although these groups help some with the insecurity of identity, there is still the feeling of disembeddedness, which results in the process of ‘othering’ (Wrenn, 2012; Young, 2007). The process of ‘othering’ is seen to be a common practice within incel ideology, which within the data was identified by how they look at other men, Chads, and women.

Coping with Ontological Insecurities’ Connection to Neoliberalism

Overall, it is clear that incels feel a sense of ontological insecurity as they believe that, unlike the rest of society, they can not succeed in what is considered important within our

society, which is conditioned by neoliberalism. The markers for success are seen as wealth, status, looks, and intimate relationships. Hence, to cope with these insecurities of identity, they ‘other’ individuals to make them feel better and more secure with their identity. Furthermore, the incels that demonize females do it as a way to cope with their lack of intimate relationships. Demonizing women makes it seem as if they are the problem rather than incels themselves being the problem. Therefore, the method of ‘othering’ is done as a way to cope with the effects that neoliberalism has on individuals’ ontologies. As neoliberalism leaves many people, like the incels, with the idea that there are certain criteria they must fill in order to be successful and form their identity from.

Neoliberalism Leads Incels to See Women as Responsible for Inauthenticity

Women are Greedy and Manipulative

As discussed, neoliberal concepts have conditioned our ideologies, which as a result, also affect movements and other social structures and ideologies, such as feminism (Banet-Weiser et al., 2019; Rottenberg, 2015). When examining the new wave of feminism, it can be identified that neoliberalism has posed some challenges to its current structure and due to its commodification, has led to changes within it (Banet-Weiser et al., 2019; Gill, 2009; Moran, 2017). One such change, that researchers have discovered is that women are instructed to use their bodies and looks to be successful, as their bodies and looks are being measured as their primary value and give them a competitive edge (Banet-Weiser et al., 2019; Gill, 2009; Moran, 2017). However, as identified, incels have a different view of women; where they see women as being inauthentic to what their “nature” is when they are seen as focusing on competition. In these instances, many incels view women as being greedy and manipulative when they should be giving and caring. Throughout the posts, many incels comment on how women will use men or

their bodies to get what they want. Additionally, many incels comment that women show no sign of caring if other individuals get hurt while getting what they want. Thus, neoliberalism is seen as aggravating the current negative views that incels have of women.

Distaste For Women Working

Another aspect of neoliberalism, like women using their looks to gain a competitive edge, posing a threat to feminism's progress is the belief in a family-work balance (Banet-Weiser et al., 2019). This theme is seen to occur in neoliberal feminism numerous times, where the idea of balancing work and family life is expressed to women (Banet-Weiser et al., 2019). This expression is seen in articles within women's magazines that persistently bring up the importance of balance between the two, where there is an expectation for women to go to work but an equal or greater expectation that they have a family (Banet-Weiser et al., 2019). This expectation demonstrates the view that a working woman is not having a "good life" or "a balanced life" if she is not having a family, as there is an expectation that females have kids, and it is still taboo for women to choose not to.

Throughout incel forums, there is a consensus that the best type of woman is the one that meets the traditional role of females. This role is a woman who is always trying to meet her husband's needs, is loving, caring, nurturing, takes care of the kids, and does all the house chores and cooking. With these "womanly" duties, many incels believe there is no time for a woman to go out and work, as her role is in the house. Hence, women going into the workforce are seen by many incels as going against their natural role. Overall, it can be seen that these views incels have of women working, being for greed or being brainwashed, can be correlated with how

neoliberal feminism is conditioning women to act and think, and it is suggested that it has even added to their view of women being traditionalistic.

Importance of Women Focusing on Looks

Neoliberalism feminism, as explained earlier, instructs women to use their bodies to help them gain a competitive edge. Thus, there is a certain beauty standard for women to meet, and this standard is depicted as the way women will succeed.

Incels are also seen focusing on the way women look, as many incels see women as naturally beautiful and delicate creatures, where essentially women's only asset is seen as their looks. Consequently, this view of women means that many incels view those that do not meet what incels consider "beautiful" and "delicate" as disgusting and seen as worthless because they are failing at being authentic women.

Once again, it can be suggested that neoliberal feminism has conditioned incels' view of women as seeing them traditionally beautiful. Where we can also see that women who fail to meet these traditional standards, are seen by many incels as not working hard enough, which also correlates to what was previously discussed about the neoliberal concept of hard work. For example, this view is seen countless times within incel discussions on women and women's weight. Within these discussions, incels are seen as referring to overweight women as "landwhales" that do not even deserve to be looked at by the opposite sex and are looked at in disgust.

Women as Responsible for Inauthenticity's Connection to Neoliberalism

Within the data it is clear that many incels have certain views of women, which are verily traditionalistic, like there is the expectation that women are nurturing, caring, loving, giving, and

beautiful. Thus, women who go outside of these traditional roles are seen by many incels as being inauthentic to a “woman’s nature.” Ultimately, it is suggested that these traditional views that incels have of women are conditioned by neoliberal ideology, such as the belief that women should be having families and should be beautiful. Additionally, it is suggested that neoliberalism also aggravates many incels' current views of women, by conditioning women to act out in manners, like using their looks or even to gain success, which is seen by many incels as going against women’s natural nurturing and caring roles.

Commodification of Intimate Relationships Leads to Believed Importance of Sex

As mentioned in the other themes, neoliberalism believes that individuals must be successful, and one way of success is seen through wealth. In order to achieve wealth, many people and companies use anything to gain it, and one way is by commodifying anything and everything to make a profit (Mosco, 2016). Thus, sex has been commodified, which is why it is seen to be prevalent in media, as sex sells.

With the images of sex being everywhere, it is no surprise that we also see it within incel’s discussions, where it is identified by many incels as an important milestone of a person’s life, and a rite of passage for young adults in Western society must go through. Therefore, Incels feel disconnected from others in Western society, as they feel they have not gone through the rite of passage that everyone else goes through when going into adulthood. This disconnect, as mentioned previously when discussing ontological insecurities, causes them to act out in order to cope with the feelings of disembeddedness.

Connection to Neoliberalism

Overall, neoliberalism's drive for success, in the form of financial wealth, has led individuals and companies to commodify intimate relationships. Through this commodification, it is suggested that it has conditioned incels' view of intimate relationships, leading them to perceive it as significantly important. Consequently, as a result of this conditioning, it has led the majority of incels to feel certain negative ways when they can not meet what is advertised to them as something important to have.

Commodification of Women Leads to Their Sexualization and Objectification

Simultaneously, with the commodification of intimate relationships, there is also the commodification of women and their bodies. When examining women in the media, women's bodies are constantly sexualized in order to aid in selling products (Bernard et al., 2020; Coy, 2012; Duits & van Zoonen, 2011; Gill, 2007; Moran, 2017). Women being portrayed sexually in the media has led to the objectification of women, as women are being used as objects to sell products (Cikara et al., 2011; Cogoni et al., 2018; Vaes et al., 2019). On top of that, like within neoliberal feminism, women's bodies and looks are now considered their competitive edge, so they are instructed to objectify themselves to be successful (Banet-Weiser et al., 2019).

When many incels are seen discussing women, women are sexualized down to the body they have and its ability to give men sexual success and gratification. Within the data, we also see that many incels objectify women to the point that see women as a resource and a tool for profit, as is done through the media and advertisements. With them seeing women as a resource, it changes the way they see the world and women. Causing many incels to think then how much better the world would be if women were controlled and used to reward the most productive men.

Connecting to Neoliberalism

On the whole, due to the neoliberal model driving individuals to gain as much wealth as possible for consumption, we commodify people. Unfortunately, women are getting the brunt of that commodification, where they are used as tools because sex sells. From the use of sexualizing and objectifying women within advertisements and even telling women to sexualize and objectify themselves to be successful, it is suggested it has conditioned incels' views. Similar to the way women are presented in the media, many incels see women as just the bodies they have and how those bodies can be used to pleasure men, rather than seeing women as human beings deserving of respect.

Chapter 6

Limitations

One limitation that should be considered is the generalizability of the data collected. This thesis does not represent all incels as a small amount of data was analyzed, and the data only came from two sources. Furthermore, there is also general limitations of online research to be aware of. These online limitations being: trolling, unable to gather data from actively seeing body language or hearing tone of voice when they made these comments, and unable to ask clarification questions. Another impediment to be aware of is my gender as a woman, as I am still the object of their disdain. I did my best to avoid biases because of this, but some underlying biases may still be present. Finally, this project did not have an additional individual to look over the data in order to blind code; this means inter-rater reliability could not be tested.

Conclusion

This study set out to explore the connections between neoliberalism and incel ideologies. To do this, the methodological approach of observational netnography was utilized, where immersion and analysis of incel forums discussion posts took place. Through this approach, six themes were discovered. They were hopelessness, resentment, coping with ontological insecurities, women as responsible for inauthenticity, the importance of sex, and the sexualization and objectification of women.

For starters, my data is consistent with what other researchers have said about incels; they are very misogynistic, which conditions how they see others and society (Baele et al., 2019; Gill, 2017; Hoffman, 2020; Jaki et al., 2018). Though to answer my thesis questions, what I found is that there are aspects of neoliberalism that have conditioned incel views: such as their views on success, competition, hard work, market value, looking good, and women's roles.

For starters, it is clear that neoliberalism puts great pressure on financial and social success, as it is marketed as a way in which individuals live and how they become happy (Davies, 2014; Littler, 2017, as cited in Gill & Orgad, 2018). Where there are expectations that you do everything in your power to succeed, which are set out in neoliberal norms and rituals of how to gain success (Davies, 2014; Littler, 2017, as cited in Gill & Orgad, 2018). However, as seen, incels feel as if they can not reach these markers for success, resulting in them othering those they feel can, as it is done as a coping mechanism for them to feel more secure with failing to meet these proposed markers for identity and success, of which are conditioned by neoliberalism. Where more specifically these norms and rituals that are identified are competition, hard work, confidence, and commodification.

For starters, with competition, in the data, many incels identify that competition is within society, where they see it for women and success. However, many incels feel as if they can not compete fairly with others causing resentment and the feeling of hopelessness. Another neoliberal concept seen within incel ideology is hard work, as it is discussed that those that work hard should get rewarded for it (Bettache, 2020). Thus, many incels are seen to consider it unfair that good-looking individuals and women do not have to work hard to be successful causing resentment. Though simultaneously, it is seen that many incels perceive hard work as incorrect at being marketed as something that can help individuals be successful, as other things, like inequalities, may stand in their way to meeting neoliberalism's markers for success, which once again causes the feeling of hopelessness.

Also, like hard work, another part of the neoliberal brand is confidence, which within neoliberalism is positioned as a way which aids in helping people advertise themselves to others and become successful (Taylor, 2013). Once again, however, we see that many incels reject the

notion of confidence as something that can help, as many do not feel as if they have anything to be confident about; thus, are unable to advertise themselves properly and are left feeling hopeless.

In addition, there is the neoliberal concept of commodification, which with the neoliberal drive for success has driven individuals and companies to commodify intimate relationships, looks, women, and other social structures and ideologies, like feminism. Firstly, the commodification of intimate relationships and looks could have conditioned incels' view of them, by positing a greater significance to them. As well, the commodification of women has resulted in media and advertisements sexualizing and objectifying women, which could also have conditioned incels' view of them too. Finally, neoliberal's commodification of feminism has posed a challenge to women and feminism, as it has taken away progress of past feminism by still holding and pushing for traditional values for women, where there is the expectation that women should be having families and focusing on their looks. This view of women is also connected to how incels see women and it is suggested that it has added to conditioning incels' view of women as being traditionalistic and beautiful. Additionally, it is this neoliberals' commodification of feminism that has led to women using looks and others to get ahead which is suggested to have aggravated incels' views of women as being inauthentic. Overall, what is found from the data is a case of neoliberalism as a world view has conditioned how these young men perceive this rapidly changing world, where it is seen that an even playing field to success is non-existent for them.

Recognizing the connections between neoliberal ideologies and incel ideologies allows for a better understanding of where incel ideology might strive from and where future research can aid in coming up with solutions to these ideological problems. Furthermore, future research

should look at what other factors play a role in the creation of incel ideology, such as the effects of the aspects and subculture of the internet. Additionally, correlating neoliberalism to this online transgressive subculture's ideologies opens up the idea that research on other groups and situations should also examine how neoliberalism has affected them.

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