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# From “Incel” to “Saint”: Analyzing the violent worldview behind the 2018 Toronto attack

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## ABSTRACT

This paper combines qualitative and quantitative content analysis to map and analyze the “Incel” worldview shared by members of a misogynistic online community ideologically linked to several recent acts of politically motivated violence, including Alek Minassian’s van attack in Toronto (2018) and Elliot Rodger’s school shooting in Isla Vista (2014). Specifically, the paper analyses how support and motivation for violence results from the particular structure this worldview presents in terms of social categories and causal narratives.

## KEYWORDS

Incel; political violence; extremism; Alek Minassian; Elliot Rodger; manosphere; misogyny; internet; mixed methods; content analysis; worldview

## Introduction

On Monday 23 April 2018, Alek Minassian drove a van on the pavement of a Toronto street and killed ten people, injuring fourteen others. The press has extensively commented on this event, fascinated by the incongruous mindset of the attacker, who quickly appeared to be linked to the misogynistic subculture of “Incels” (for “*Involuntary Celibate*”). Media coverage highlighted two main points. First, while Minassian attacked alone, he was (at least intellectually) part of a broader community of like-minded individuals with a vivid online presence. Second, this community holds misogynistic views so extreme that violence is regularly advocated; participants in Incel online discussion groups see society as fundamentally hierarchized along sex and attractiveness lines that favor women and exclude men who are not good-looking from any romantic or sexual relationship (hence the Incel label). Some journalists offered presentations of the basic components of these views;<sup>1</sup> others linked them to earlier cases of violence, situating Minassian’s action in the lineage of past attacks on women<sup>2</sup> – from obvious cases (like Marc Lépine’s murder of female students in Montreal in 1989, George Sodini’s attack of a gym in Los Angeles in 2009, Elliot Rodger’s shooting in Isla Vista in 2014) to less clear ones (Seung-Hui Cho’s Virginia Tech mass killing in 2007). Since the Toronto event, another attack has been linked to the Incel community: Scott Beierle’s killings in a yoga studio in Tallahassee in 2018. Authorities increasingly consider the relationship between Incels or related online communities and violence seriously, and several criminal investigations have been conducted by law enforcement agencies.<sup>3</sup> One such investigation led to the recent arrest (January 2019), in Utah, of Christopher Wayne Cleary, on the presumption that he was about to engage in a mass killing.<sup>4</sup>

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The present paper aims to provide a deep-dive, fine-grained analysis of the worldview shared by participants of this “online misogynist underworld.” Specifically, *we analyze this worldview in a way that clarifies the cognitive-linguistic mechanisms that make it particularly conducive of violence*. In doing so, we *lay bare the conceptual and narrative structure of the Incel worldview to explain why support for violence is widespread and why occasional outbursts of violence are not surprising*. By doing so we not only enhance scientific knowledge but also provide useful insights for law enforcement.

We show that even though Incels’ ideas are thematically connected to those of larger communities holding and promoting gendered prejudice (in particular “men’s rights” movements),<sup>5</sup> they nonetheless constitute a very specific shared worldview that has all the features of an extremist mindset. In that sense, we do not claim that a direct cause exists between the Incel worldview and Minassian’s and others’ violence,<sup>6</sup> but rather we highlight features of this worldview that are known to be associated with an increased likelihood of support for, or engagement in, violence. While the dissemination and consolidation of other violent actors’ worldviews through online activity has been thoroughly scrutinized, this case has so far been almost totally ignored.

We proceed in three steps. First, we expose the theoretical foundations of our analysis, spelling out a working definition of “worldview” and explain the relevance and practical usefulness of this concept for the study of violent extremism. Understanding worldviews as interpretive lenses structured around limited sets of social categories bound up by narrative explanations, we suggest that extremist worldviews are characterized by a particular combination of these social categories and narrative explanations that encourages violence. Second, we present our mixed, qualitative and quantitative method to study the *Incels.me* online forum in a way that maps the Incel worldview, exposing its categories and narratives. Third, we present and discuss our results, highlighting the dynamics through which these categories and narratives feed and sustain the idea that violence is the only valid response to the environment Incels understand to face.

## **Studying extremist worldviews**

### ***A working definition of worldviews***

The “worldview” concept is paradoxical; both at once widely used and ill-defined.<sup>7</sup> We adopt here a cognition-oriented conceptualization of the term, understood as a set of interconnected beliefs and assumptions about the physical and social reality that together form a coherent interpretive lens through which this reality – and the worldview holder’s existence – is understood.<sup>8</sup> This definition aligns with most of those provided by social cognition scholars – for example, Peters and Slovic define worldviews as “generalized attitudes toward the world and its social organization, [...] orienting dispositions, serving to guide people’s responses in complex situations.”<sup>9</sup>

Every particular worldview rests on a *logic of social categorization* (which social groups exist, which individuals belong to them and according to what criteria), and also involves a *logic of explanation* (an account of the dynamic relations that exist between the social groups). In other words, social cognition not only works with static categories, but also involves certain folk causal theories about how these categories dynamically coexist and interact. As such, worldviews can be represented as “networks of nodes that are connected to each other by way of links.”<sup>10</sup> As Docherty explains,<sup>11</sup> worldviews are thus not only made

of “cognitive (psychological) processes such as categorization, boundary establishment” but also encompass “the creation and use of scripts or schema.” They are therefore not only descriptive but also prescriptive, in that they inevitably involve axiological (values, morals) as well as a praxeological (prescriptions for behaviors) dimensions.<sup>12</sup> Groups are understood to be more or less good or bad, constructive or nefarious, which helps orient the worldview holder’s action in his social environment. As Koltko-Rivera summarizes,<sup>13</sup> worldviews are both at once descriptive and always already prescriptive, they “describe the universe and life within it, both in terms of what is and what ought to be.”

As scholars like Lakoff<sup>14</sup> or Kahan<sup>15</sup> have documented, individuals’ worldviews are heavily dependent on their social-political environment, and the basic components and structures of worldviews tend to be shared by members of a social/political group. The more insular and closed a social group is, the more its members’ worldviews resemble one another, which fuels intergroup misunderstandings and polarization, sometimes playing a key role in conflictual dynamics.<sup>16</sup>

### ***Extremist worldviews: logics of categorization and explanation***

We follow this line of research by locating in worldviews the source of support for, and at times commitment to, violence. In particular, we suggest that extremist and violent political actors’ worldviews display distinct features in terms of both their logics of social categorization and explanation, and that these characteristics play a key role in violence.

To claim that the source of violence is located at the level of cognition is not new – indeed “substantial evidence exists that violent behavior is influenced by cognitive capacity and/or style.”<sup>17</sup> A rich discussion exists in psychology on the link between cognition and extremism,<sup>18</sup> the key conclusions of which are used here to systematically explore how the two main components of worldviews – categories and explanation – present themselves among extremists. Specifically, we follow Reicher and colleagues’ argument that “the orientation of an audience to a given target depends upon how ‘we’ are construed, how ‘they’ are construed, and on the relationship that is put together between these two constructions.”<sup>19</sup>

***Logic of categorization: sharply defined social categories.*** “Concepts are the building blocks of cognition,” as Kunda argued,<sup>20</sup> meaning that social categories form the backbone of any worldview. What specifically characterizes extremist worldviews is their structuration around highly impermeable, sharply differentiated social categories that reflect and further produce a “need for closure which motivates individuals to think in clear-cut dichotomous categories.”<sup>21</sup> Radically different groups are believed to exist, unambiguously defined by clear-cut criteria for belonging/exclusion, and constantly repeated and reified in linguistic interactions. Rhetorical moves further accentuate the perception that groups are objective and impermeable, such as naturalization (presenting group differences as natural, and not cultural).<sup>22</sup> As Schwartz, Dunkel, and Waterman explained,<sup>23</sup> it is this ‘authoritarian foreclosure’ that forms the “basis for dichotomized, ‘us versus them’ thinking” leading to violence.” Some groups are perceived as “friends” (ingroups), others as “enemies” (outgroups), with no possibility of a grey zone (which is by contrast a characteristic of nonextremist worldviews). Positive values are attached to homogenized ingroups, which are understood to be virtuous and working for the good, while negative traits are attributed to homogenized outgroups, which are understood to be nefarious and threatening,<sup>24</sup> thereby creating through metacontrast<sup>25</sup> what Strozier, Terman, Jones, and

Boyd call “radical dualism.”<sup>26</sup> In the most extreme cases, this radical dualism is further accentuated by dehumanizing language, which can take three different forms: the depiction of outgroup members as animals (e.g., Jews as “parasites” in Nazi propaganda, Tutsis as “cockroaches” in extremist Hutu messaging in 1993–1994 Rwanda), their equation to machines incapable of agency, and more subtly their presentation as individuals driven by simple emotions only (anger, sexual impulses, desire, etc.) and consistently displaying anti-social values (free-riding, stealing, lying, manipulating, etc.).<sup>27</sup>

**Logic of explanation: blame-attributing causal narratives.** We suggest that whereas folk causal theories linking social categories in normal worldviews tend to be *multi-directional* (multiple relationships going back and forth between all groups) and *not highly attributional* (problems are not particularly attributed to one single outgroup), in extremist worldviews they tend to be *unidirectional* (the ingroups are passive victims of top-down actions) and *highly blame-attributing* (all problems are solely caused by a few outgroups), partly as an effect of the underlying dichotomous categorical structure. As such, they tend to form a *narrative*, which can be defined as a “chrono-logical succession of events” that “disrupts an initial state of equilibrium that sets in motion an inversion of situation, a change of fortunes – from good to bad, from bad to good.”<sup>28</sup> In other words, ingroups and outgroups are not understood as isolated entities but as parties in a large story/plot that unites their respective fate in way of the outgroups oppressing the ingroup until the ingroup is restored to the initially better position thanks to a radical overthrow. Narratives, by reducing the world to such a single storyline, are convenient, simplistic heuristics when it comes to explaining one’s suffering,<sup>29</sup> and have therefore been used by a range of violent political actors, from the Nazis<sup>30</sup> to the so-called Islamic State.<sup>31</sup> In sum, an extremist worldview is characterized by a narrative offering a simplistic explanation of the positive ingroup suffering from the negative outgroups’ nefarious actions, thereby pointing to violent solutions to restore the initial condition of the ingroup.

## Data and method

### Data

We combined quantitative and qualitative analyses of the textual content of the (now suspended) online forum *Incels.me*. *Incels.me* was not the only online space where the Incel worldview was expressed and constructed, but in its one-year lifespan (from its launch on November the 8<sup>th</sup>, 2017 [the very day the comparable Reddit thread “r/Incels” was banned], to its suspension from the .me domain on November the 20<sup>th</sup>, 2018),<sup>32</sup> it was the most prominent (voluminous) one after the 41,000-strong r/Incel community was banned from Reddit.<sup>33</sup> For the present study, we extracted the content of the forum from its inception day up until May the 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2018. On that timespan, the forum had 5,172 members and 2,399 active posters (or more accurately, different poster names), posting 769,854 messages contributing to 41,752 threads; this activity totaled no less than 32,495,331 words divided into more than 2.5 million sentences. As shown in [Figure 1](#), the number of posts appearing per day gradually increased during the period studied, with an average of 3,888 posts per day and several days at more than 5,000 posts. The figure also shows that Minassian’s attack, although quickly a hot discussion topic, did not dramatically alter the general activity of the forum. [Figure 2](#), which displays the top fifty posters, shows that most

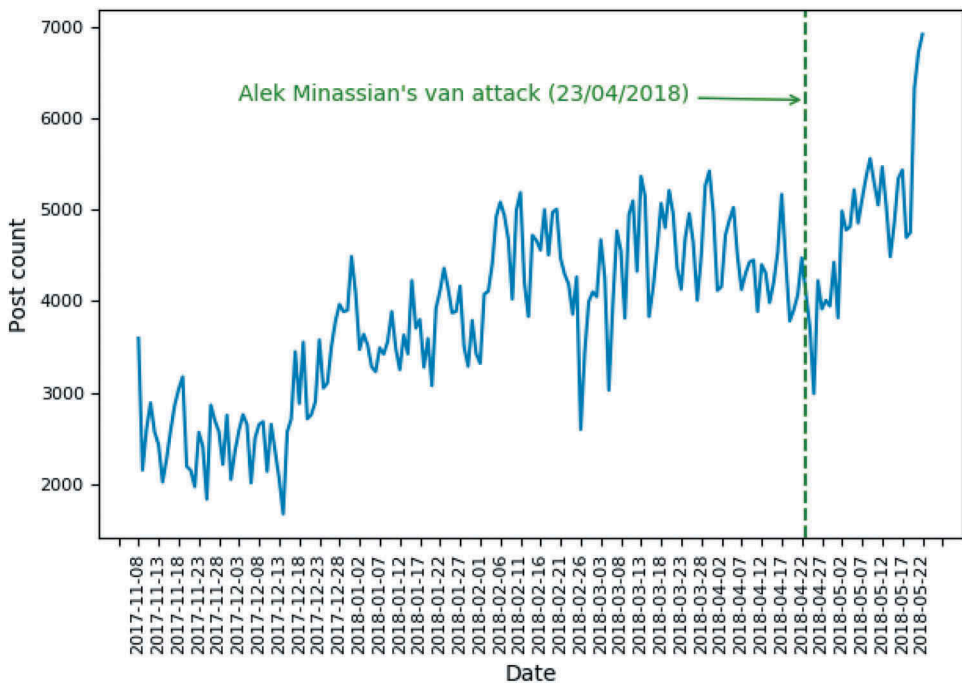


Figure 1. Chronological evolution of posts being published on *Incels.me*, 08-11-2017 to 23-05-2018.

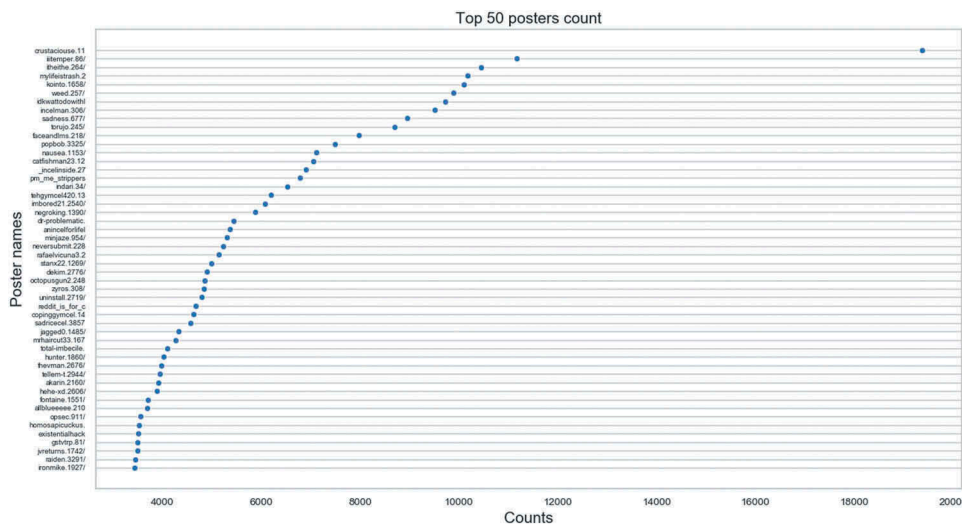


Figure 2. Number of posts published by the top 50 contributors to *Incels.me*, 08-11-2017 to 23-05-2018.

of them published somewhere between 4,000 and 5,000 posts (more than ten per day), while an extremely active group of nineteen members posted sometimes twice as much. How this leading group of posters influenced the discussion and thereby shaped the worldview described below is an important question whose elucidation is unfortunately beyond the scope of the present paper, which takes the whole forum as expressing a single worldview.

Since this structure probably constitutes a pattern across similar extremist online platforms, future research would be needed to model the dynamics involved.

The *Incels.me* forum hence constituted a quantitatively important location in the broader “manosphere”<sup>34</sup> evoked above,<sup>35</sup> a significant contributor to the “unabashedly masculinist [online] spaces” constituting a “veritable industry of resources for the ‘defence of men’ available at the click of a mouse.”<sup>36</sup> In this online ecosystem, *Incels.me* occupied a specific position in terms of the views that are expressed: a distinct, sealed-off echo chamber of extreme ideas at the very end of the continuum from “moderate” to radical misogynistic beliefs. As such, it was the home of a dedicated Incel community and not simply “men’s rights” advocates, making it the ideal place to map the Incel worldview. Incels were and are now also present on other forums (e.g., *Sluthate.com*, where Elliot Rodgers posted his videos), but in more diluted ways. Forums like these have been said to “radically increase the flow of antifeminist ideas and information across groups, platforms, and geographical boundaries [...] enabling the rapid spread and homogenization of Men’s Rights Activism (MRA) rhetoric.”<sup>37</sup> We thus conceptualize *Incels.me* as a place of (virtual) social interactions that radicalize its participants by producing an “increasing extremity of beliefs, feelings, and behaviors in support of intergroup conflict and violence.”<sup>38</sup>

To analyze the content of this website, we combined qualitative and quantitative approaches to text analysis. Following Bennett,<sup>39</sup> we advance that while the two are regularly presented as compatible their combination allows for a more complete analysis of long corpora. Specifically, our analysis implements what we believe are the most pertinent ways to use each one of the two approaches to get the best of the other. On the one hand, qualitative approaches to text allow to both engage with linguistic subtleties and meaning construction dynamics, in particular passages identified as potentially of interest by quantitative analyses, and to select pertinent linguistic parameters for computer-assisted targeted searches. On the other hand, quantitative approaches allow to both verify and amend observations about the linguistic patterns of a corpus gained by a qualitative reading of a limited sample, and to highlight general trends and patterns not visible from a close engagement with parts of the text.

### Qualitative approach

First, we conducted a qualitative exploratory screening of the forum, carefully reading the content of the messages in 300 randomly chosen discussion threads (the first thread of every other page in the first 600 pages appearing in the main chat called “Inceldom Discussion.”<sup>40</sup> In line with our theoretical framework, we (a) identified the most prominent in- and outgroup categories evoked by participants in the forum, together with their sometimes multiple labels, and (b) attempted to draw the main lines of the narrative binding these groups together. We copied the messages that best exemplified these dimensions – some of these posts are directly quoted in the paper (we do so verbatim, reproducing grammatical/orthographical errors as well as their aggravating language).

### Quantitative approach

Second, we conducted a computer-assisted quantitative step aimed at gaining an overarching, “bird’s-eye” view of the forum in terms of linguistic trends and patterns. We harvested the textual content of the entire *Incels.me* website, compiling all posts into a text-database,<sup>41</sup> thus conceptualizing the entire forum as the expression of a single



worldview expressed collectively. We then extracted relevant parts of speech (nouns, proper nouns, adjectives, adverbs, verbs) and established their frequency (to determine which words appear more often and when) and co-occurrence statistics (to identify which words co-occur frequently, e.g., which adjectives tend to co-occur with which nouns). We tagged in our search the group labels found to be prominent during the qualitative step, and designed consistent rules of text-cleaning and formatting to avoid problems such as duplicates, especially with these key group labels (e.g., merging “ALPHA” with “Alpha”).<sup>42</sup> While sheer term frequency can provide a useful indication of the importance of some themes in the discussion (e.g., Minassian’s attack, women, suicide), potentially countering preconceptions, unveiling unanticipated topics, and highlighting particularly relevant passages for further qualitative work or illustration (some quotes below result from such work), two less crude techniques allowed us to better represent the Incel worldview.

On the one hand, with the text content in hand, we estimated the core topics or themes present in Incel discussion using the semi-supervised topic-model introduced in Jagerlamudi et al.<sup>43</sup> and implemented by Singh.<sup>44</sup> Topic modeling is “an increasingly useful tool for analyzing large unstructured text collections,”<sup>45</sup> including large forums<sup>46</sup> such as our corpus. The SeededLDA employed below builds directly on the standard, unsupervised latent Dirichlet allocation (LDA) model where “documents are represented as random mixtures over latent topics, where each topic is characterized by a distribution over words.”<sup>47</sup> However, unlike the standard LDA model, the SeededLDA combines unsupervised topic extraction (where topics are detected without direction from the researcher) with a set of “seeded” topics (where the researcher provides seed words to direct the search for the topics to which these words participate) identified *a priori* by the researchers to be important. In this sense, the SeededLDA combines a common feature of lexicon-based approaches – that is, the identification of dictionary keywords – with an additional phase of learning to “guide” the model to themes believed to be important by the researcher. This allowed us, in line with our conceptualization of the benefits of combining qualitative and quantitative text analysis spelled out above, to build on our qualitative research to establish which adjectives and verbs are commonly associated with Incel’s various in- and outgroups.

On the other hand, we built semantic networks, that is, networks representing the recurring associations of words within a linguistic corpus. Semantic networks, we argue, constitute a powerful way to genuinely represent and map the worldview expressed through the ideologically coherent corpora: the production of semantic networks indeed allows for the visual representation of the most frequent terms and their regular association in ways that constitute meaning, directly projecting the categorical and narrative dimensions of the worldview reflected by the text under scrutiny (cf. Kunda’s above mentioned definition of worldviews as networks of nodes connected by links). As Steyvers and Tennenbaum explained,<sup>48</sup> “meaning is inseparable from the structure: the meaning of a concept is, at least in part, constituted by its connections to other concepts” (McNamara concurred,<sup>49</sup> “the meaning of words is in the company they keep”). By using semantic networks to study extremist language, we follow the call from Morris<sup>50</sup> and the example set by Baele, Boyd, and Coan.<sup>51</sup>

Full details on the generation of networks and topic models through a joint use of Python coding and the KHCoder,<sup>52</sup> are available upon demand to the authors.

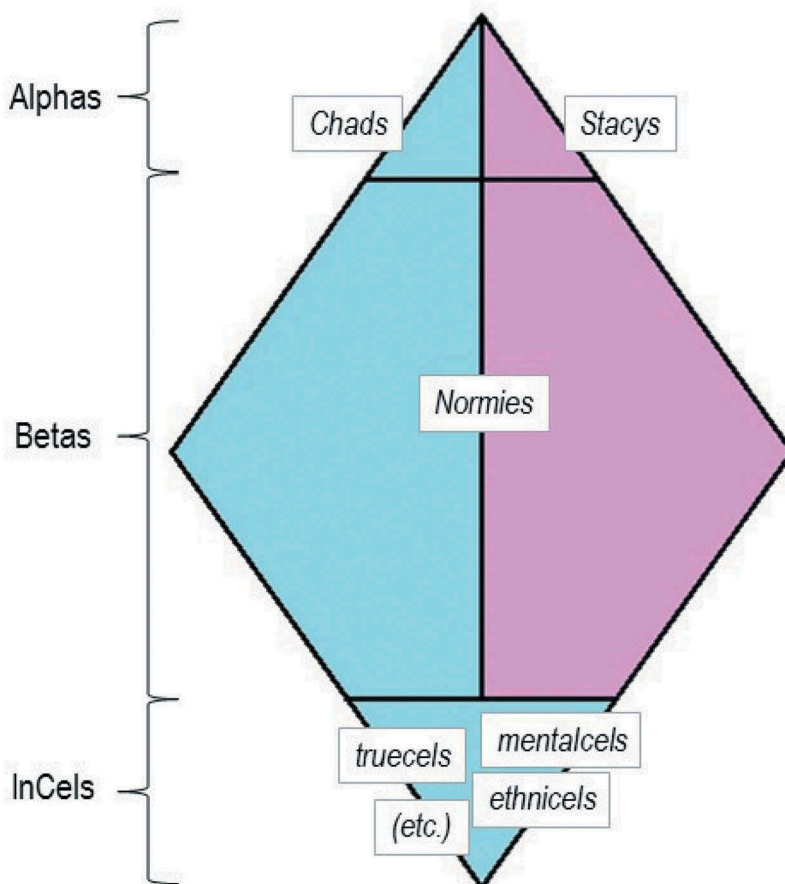


### ***Analysis: how perceptions of “total hypergamy” create support for violence***

#### ***Logic of categorization: the Incel ingroup(s) and its outgroups***

Discussions on *Incels.me* involve a set of very specific recurring group categories, and more generally a highly particular lingo. Based on our qualitative analysis, we suggest that the categorical structure of the Incel worldview is a rigid three-tier social hierarchy exclusively based on physical appearance where a minority of “Alpha” males (“Chads”) and females (“Stacys”) stand on top, a majority of average-looking “Betas” (“normies”) follow, and a minority of physically unpleasant “Incel” individuals – exclusively males – is stuck at the bottom, victims of “involuntary celibacy.” As one member summarizes, “it’s all about attractiveness and popularity (especially among femoids) that makes one alpha. personality or size have little to do with this.” Another member defines “Betas” as those who “are second place in anything, picking up chicks, running, fighting, arm wrestling.” This hierarchical structure is schematically represented in [Figure 3](#).

This structure is common among related but less extreme groups who consider “lookism” as the organizing principle of social life; what is specific about Incels is their understanding



**Figure 3.** Schematic representation of the categorical structure of the InCel worldview. Size of shapes represent population size; color represent gender (blue = men; purple = women)

that this hierarchy is absolutely immutable; categories are impermeable, no-one is able to move from one to another.<sup>53</sup> As highlighted earlier, such a *rigid and impermeable categorical structure* is the first key feature of extremist worldviews. This rigidity is achieved in the forum through two main linguistic practices.

First, categories are reified by a particular Incel use of the “pill” vocabulary, which is “central to the politics of the manosphere” and found in other online environments.<sup>54</sup> Drawing on the Matrix movie whose hero can either swallow a blue pill that artificially disconnects him from reality into a delusional agreeable world or take a red pill that makes him aware of reality and its anxieties, Incels have introduced a third, “black pill” that, if one symbolically swallows it makes him aware of the immutability of reality. Here lies a crucial difference between Incels and less extreme misogynistic forums: the “black pill” means that they consider it impossible to escape the social hierarchy that supposedly excludes them, whereas other proponents of the lookism thesis who think in terms of the “blue pill/red pill” duality hope that they can take advantage of knowing how society really works to escape their predicament (e.g., invest in aesthetic surgery or gym membership, become “pickup artists”).<sup>55</sup> Whereas the “red pill” keeps category boundaries permeable and permits hope, the “black pill” closes them and only produces nihilistic despair.

The second way categories are reified is through naturalization, specifically the use of (fallacious) biological arguments. Members regularly post statistics and “scientific” data to “prove” the inescapability of Incel’s predicaments, creating a sense of “turbocharged genetic determinism.”<sup>56</sup> For example, one participant claims that “the bottom 80% of men (in terms of attractiveness) are competing for the bottom 22% of women and the top 78% of women are competing for the top 20% of men,” while another cites genetics research to proclaim that “women are programmed to get pregnant with the best possible DNA that she can find. Despite this simple concept, it actually has brutally devastating consequences. When you look at the genetic history of humankind, you’ll see that roughly 50% of men didn’t reproduce, whereas 100% of women did reproduce. What does this mean? It means that the top 10% of men get 90% of the women.”

The second key feature of extremist worldviews in terms of categorical structure – *radical dualism* – is also at play: outgroups (“Alphas” and “Betas,” chiefly women) are extremely negatively depicted while the ingroup is positively talked about (ugliness notwithstanding). This is already evident in the use of alternative, derogatory group labels, accompanied by negative adjectives: women, both “Alpha” and “Beta,” are for example commonly dehumanized as “femoids” (or “foids”) or “roasties.”<sup>57</sup> Women are also dehumanized through their presentation as only capable of simple emotions (such as sexual desire) and guided by antisocial values (cheating their husbands, “leeching” the welfare state, manipulating romantic men for sex or money, etc.). For instance, one member observes that women “are disgusting parasites whose only purpose is to leech as much as possible and get pleasure,” while another alleges that “these cunts don’t even acknowledge different personality traits, they only want good looking chads.”

A range of subcategories exist within outgroups, often in terms of ethnicity, and a common debate in the forum is to establish rankings in terms of how despicable they are, and what their particular traits are. Consider this example of a discussion:

- “I hate all females, but I think I hate Egyptian females the most”
- “Curry women are just as bad but uglier”
- “All Asian females should be aborted”
- “Both noodle and curry whores are self-hating scum”

The ingroup, by contrast, is recurrently presented as the only group capable of pro-social values and intelligent enough (“high IQ”) to see the truth about the social world. Members tend to present themselves as a romantic population capable of true love and (paradoxically) not solely guided by prospects of sexual intercourse and looks. While incessantly advocating violence against women (see below “From worldview to violence”), they nonetheless consider this as the unfortunate result of women’s nature and a series of societal changes (see below “The Incel narrative”) without which they would have been able to realize their pure nature. As one participant laments, “I always had the dream of the loving wife, the family and all that. The harsh reality of course is that women are all hypergamous whores.”

It also appears, however, that the Incel ingroup acknowledges its “subhuman” nature, with frequent reminders to the group of how ugly they are. This feature somewhat challenges the view of extremist worldviews as made of a positive ingroup facing negative outgroups: both in- and outgroups are here negatively depicted. However, in line with the literature on dehumanization, Incels present themselves as having positive psychological traits and prosocial values that outgroups, especially women, don’t have.

Table 1, Table 2, and Figure 4 offer a quantitative representation of the categorical structure of the Incel worldview; they confirm our qualitative analysis and add a few important insights. Table 1 presents the results of a topic modeling filtering only nouns and adjectives. The first eight topics took the main in- and outgroups highlighted in the qualitative analysis as seed words, to see which other nouns and adjectives tend to occur in the discussion when they are talked about. Although derogatory adjectives appear across the topics, evidencing a general negative portrayal of the outgroups, there are visible differences in the type of adjectives that are used. The “Alpha” population is even positively characterized (“cute,” “hot,” “high,” “pretty”), while the “Betas”/“normies” appear in discussions that are not necessarily overtly negative (“high,” “average,” or “good,” but also “autistic,” “ugly,” or “low”). Importantly, the differences between labels describing women are sharp. The very term “women” seems to be a general descriptive term, while dehumanizing labels such as “femoids” and “roasties” seem to be used in discussions on physical appearance and social interactions, and the term “bitch” is very distinct in its association with highly aggressive and insulting adjectives; “girlfriends” seems to appear in positive discussions. These differences indicate that Incels’ main outgroup – women – is in fact composed of various subgroups which are more or less negatively portrayed and talked about. Table 2, listing the adjectives most likely to appear in sentences containing one of the six most frequent women labels, confirms this finding. The most likely adjective to occur with “Stacy,” for example, is “prime,” while for “girlfriend,” it is “cute” and for “bitch,” it is “dumb.”

In addition, we ran a series of eleven unseeded models, again filtering only nouns and adjectives, to check the prominent topics being discussed in the forum. These eleven additional topics resemble each other and are certainly intertwined, as they all broadly relate to “lookist” consideration. They nonetheless present subtle differences; for instance, topics 17 and 18 are more directly concerned with physical appearance, topics 10 and 15 are more focused on societal issues, and topic 14 seems more centered around individual Incel experiences. Topic 12 clearly stands out as a topic focused on the question of race and ethnicity, revealing the salience of that issue in the Incel subculture in a way that a qualitative approach would not necessarily do.

**Table 1.** Topic model results (8 seeded models and 11 unseeded models), filtering only nouns and adjectives. This table provides the top 20 most probable keywords (nouns and adjectives) based on the SeededLDA model.

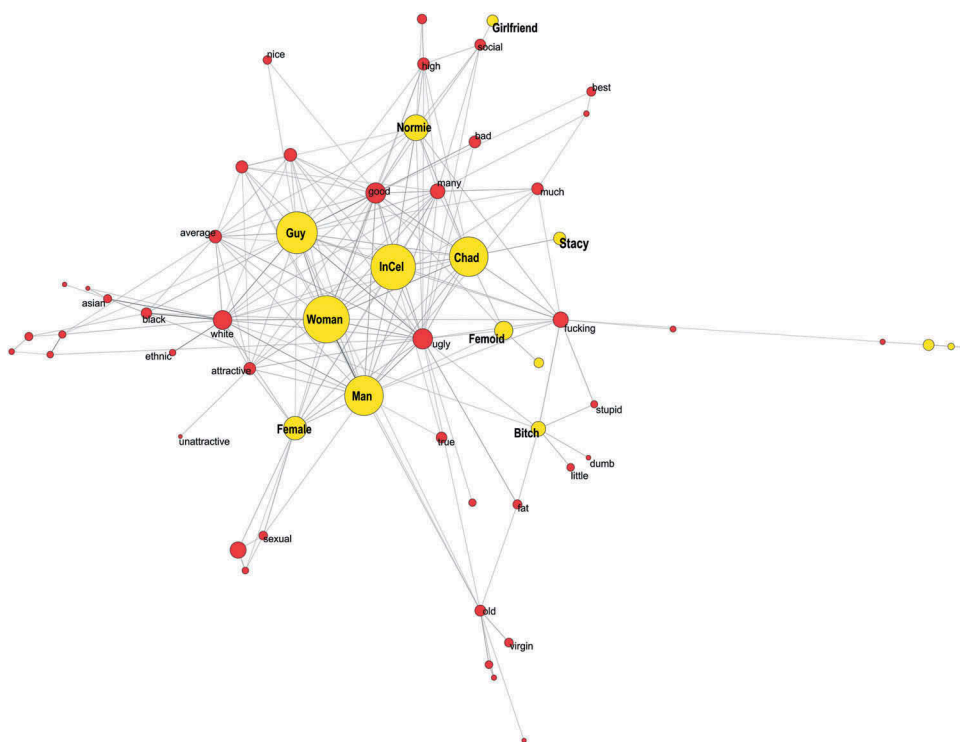
Topic number and seed words (for topics 0-8)	Words (adjectives in italics)
Topic 0 "Incel"	incel <i>many</i> posts blackpill <i>fucking</i> normie site shit threads <i>good</i> reddit <i>true</i> time lookism users <i>female</i> <i>new</i> <i>real</i> place guys
Topic 1 "Alpha" + "Chad" + "Stacy"	chad girls school <i>high</i> girl <i>ugly</i> guy guys women stacy <i>old</i> <i>hot</i> <i>good</i> <i>average</i> incel year <i>cute</i> <i>pretty</i> normie <i>many</i>
Topic 2 "Beta" + "Normie"	<i>low</i> social <i>high</i> iq normie <i>ugly</i> incel <i>good</i> inhib life looks personality chad women shit <i>average</i> skills <i>autistic</i> tier <i>fucking</i>
Topic 3 "Man" + "Male(s)" + "Guy"	<i>white</i> women <i>black</i> guys men <i>average</i> <i>ugly</i> girls guy <i>asian</i> <i>tall</i> <i>ethnic</i> <i>attractive</i> girl <i>good</i> <i>short</i> race incel man height
Topic 4 "Woman" + "Female(s)"	women men <i>sexual</i> sex society <i>female</i> males females <i>white</i> <i>male</i> chad <i>ugly</i> incel <i>many</i> <i>attractive</i> man woman <i>high</i> standards male
Topic 5 "Femoid"	sex <i>ugly</i> femoid women <i>good</i> chad girl incel life guy way <i>female</i> <i>attractive</i> woman guys <i>real</i> girls <i>sexual</i> <i>nice</i> <i>fucking</i>
Topic 6 "Roastie"	<i>old</i> year women sex men chad <i>fucking</i> girl woman girls man <i>young</i> years incel <i>good</i> roastie <i>single</i> age shit <i>virgin</i>
Topic 7 "Bitch"	<i>fucking</i> shit ass dick <i>big</i> <i>fat</i> little bitch fuck girl <i>ugly</i> women <i>stupid</i> <i>disgusting</i> <i>hot</i> gay face girls <i>black</i> <i>nice</i>
Topic 8 "gf"	life time friends social years <i>good</i> incel school girl day sex <i>happy</i> girls <i>first</i> <i>least</i> gf <i>many</i> <i>old</i> <i>long</i> <i>real</i>
Topic 9	<i>old</i> <i>good</i> <i>ugly</i> face time <i>bad</i> years shit year girl <i>fucking</i> <i>better</i> <i>worse</i> hair girls guys <i>little</i> <i>nice</i> day women
Topic 10	world <i>white</i> country western countries men women <i>many</i> society <i>right</i> <i>rich</i> <i>non</i> incel <i>poor</i> shit class jews <i>black</i> <i>good</i> culture
Topic 11	<i>ugly</i> <i>good</i> guy <i>fucking</i> incel shit life fuck face <i>looking</i> man girl <i>subhuman</i> <i>holy</i> <i>average</i> chad <i>bad</i> <i>old</i> tbh <i>virgin</i>
Topic 12	<i>white</i> <i>black</i> women <i>asian</i> curry <i>middle</i> girls <i>ethnic</i> whites curries iq race countries skin <i>average</i> country european blacks <i>eastern</i> <i>indian</i>
Topic 13	life sex women men size <i>human</i> <i>good</i> chad incel <i>better</i> <i>sexual</i> man woman things love <i>ugly</i> <i>true</i> world time way
Topic 14	<i>mental</i> life <i>good</i> way incel things world <i>bad</i> something time <i>physical</i> thing <i>many</i> social health <i>sure</i> <i>real</i> <i>human</i> anything <i>true</i>
Topic 15	world <i>good</i> <i>many</i> incel <i>fucking</i> human life society different <i>true</i> god shit thing women war <i>right</i> way things <i>religious</i> <i>bad</i>
Topic 16	<i>good</i> time school job <i>first</i> shit high <i>last</i> day games <i>new</i> year money game <i>best</i> years next <i>fucking</i> life <i>much</i>
Topic 17	hair eyes face <i>good</i> nose eye <i>big</i> facial area skin <i>long</i> <i>bad</i> features view <i>ugly</i> attachment <i>blue</i> jaw chin <i>tall</i>
Topic 18	<i>good</i> face body fat <i>facial</i> surgery height <i>fat</i> weight <i>better</i> <i>low</i> <i>average</i> <i>bad</i> <i>much</i> <i>high</i> frame <i>least</i> jaw lower muscle
Topic 19	<i>good</i> time life social <i>high</i> <i>many</i> <i>better</i> <i>much</i> things incel <i>low</i> lot <i>hard</i> something years sex <i>real</i> <i>least</i> work way

**Table 2.** Adjectives most likely to appear in sentences containing one of the six most frequent women labels (ordered by Jaccard coefficient).

Women labels	Most commonly associated adjectives
"Stacy"	<i>prime</i> , <i>blonde</i> , <i>hot</i> , <i>high</i> , <i>average</i> , <i>ugly</i> , <i>fucking</i> , <i>full</i> , <i>typical</i> , <i>white</i>
"Girl"	<i>white</i> , <i>ugly</i> , <i>hot</i> , <i>cute</i> , <i>attractive</i> , <i>black</i> , <i>Asian</i> , <i>good</i> , <i>average</i> , <i>high</i>
"Girlfriend" (+ "gf")	<i>cute</i> , <i>ugly</i> , <i>hot</i> , <i>virgin</i> , <i>social</i> , <i>average</i> , <i>white</i> , <i>many</i> , <i>asian</i> , <i>able</i>
"Woman"	<i>white</i> , <i>ugly</i> , <i>attractive</i> , <i>good</i> , <i>black</i> , <i>many</i> , <i>Asian</i> , <i>average</i> , <i>fucking</i> , <i>sexual</i>
"Roasties" + "femoids"	<i>ugly</i> , <i>white</i> , <i>average</i> , <i>fucking</i> , <i>attractive</i> , <i>old</i> , <i>least</i> , <i>many</i> , <i>good</i> , <i>fat</i>
"Bitch"	<i>dumb</i> , <i>little</i> , <i>fat</i> , <i>stupid</i> , <i>fucking</i> , <i>white</i> , <i>ugly</i> , <i>hot</i> , <i>crazy</i> , <i>black</i>

See KHCoder Manual for details on this ordering (<http://khcoder.net/en/>).

A further qualitative look at the forum confirmed the importance of racial considerations and the use of derogatory words such as "curry" (for Indian people) or "noodle" (for Asian people).



**Figure 4.** Network visualization of the adjectives most frequently co-occurring with group labels.

Figure 4 confirms these insights from a different perspective. It offers a visual representation of the semantic network centered on the topic model seed words, displaying the network linking these nouns and the adjectives most frequently co-occurring with them.<sup>58</sup> The network is quite dense, with no communities of terms sharply distinct, which evidences the linguistic homogeneity already observed in the topic model (most adjectives relate to physical appearance and sexual considerations). Also in line with the topic model, we see the centrality of “women” as a frequent, general umbrella label for all types of women, but also the specific use of the term “bitch” (which chiefly co-occur with the “fat,” “dumb,” “stupid,” and “little” adjectives, in contrast to “girlfriend”) and the presence of a range of adjectives related to race and ethnicity (“white,” “black,” “ethnic,” and “Asian”). Incel’s positive characterization does not appear clearly, although there are among the nodes close to “Incel” more positive adjectives such as “aware” (alleged result of the blue or black “pill”).

To sum up, it appears from our qualitative and quantitative approaches that the Incel worldview is characterized by a categorical structure typical of extremist worldviews: sharply separated social groups are claimed to objectively exist and be immutable. Some of these groups are clearly signposted as outgroups and given highly negative essential traits, while other ones are identified as ingroups and are by contrast given positive traits, with the particularity that the Incel acknowledge their alleged physical inferiority while stressing their psychological superiority. Diverse reifying linguistic practices, chiefly naturalization, construct the perception that intergroup boundaries are impermeable and the whole social hierarchy immutable.

***Logic of explanation: Incels as oppressed outcasts of “femoid hypergamy”***

Each of these social groups occupies a particular role in the narrative running through *Incels.me*. To expose this logic of explanation and highlight the mechanisms through which it produces both symbolic and real violence, we follow the classic structure of narrative analysis: initial situation/intervention of actors/final situation.<sup>59</sup>

***Initial situation: patriarchal monogamy.*** The Incel worldview rests on the evocation of a past golden age, and as such presents the kind of “politics of profound nostalgia” that characterizes the broader mens’ rights movements.<sup>60</sup> This golden age is that of a patriarchal society where monogamy is the rule, traditional gender roles are accepted and followed, women and men marry early, and adultery is prohibited. All men have thus “access” to women and their “entitlement” to sex is never “denied” by women. Look and pleasure are largely irrelevant as romantic practices guide interactions. This state of affairs corresponds to the Incel conception of women as inferior to men and fulfilling their “natural” functions. As one member for instance claims, “femoids are nothing but sexual objects and thus should be second-class citizens”; another participant concurs: “women are for fucking and raising families, not for having ‘rights’.” That system supposedly “gave privileges, duties and chores to both sexes, in equity, according to their natural propensity.”

Yet under this state of affairs laid the seeds of its potential subversion: women, it is argued, have another “natural” tendency, which is to seek the best genes for children. They therefore prefer to reproduce with men who can pass on good genes – a tendency referred to as “female hypergamy.” As one member explains, again using some kind of biological determinism, “female hypergamy, put simply, is a woman’s tendency to marry the best possible man that she can find. This stems from the biological imperative for her to get pregnant with the best genes possible.” Put simply, “the best thing a foid can do is get pregnant by Chad so his superior genes can get passed on.” According to the Incel worldview, women are ready to experience abuse to secure these genes, and might even consider it as evidence of having “baited” a dominant male, and hence seek and enjoy it. One participant explains that women are “hypergamous whores deep down that need to be dominated and treated like shit to keep them attracted to you.” Another member agrees that “the ideal male for a woman would be a Chad who will rape her and beat her on a daily basis, talk shit to her,” to which someone replies that “women love being abused by good-looking men. Rarely do you see rape accusations against good looking guys.” Yet it is argued that in the golden age these tendencies were efficiently tamed: laws and strong social conventions kept social norms enforced, supposedly ensuring the “fair” and “universal” distribution of relationships.

***Intervention of actor: feminists’ nefarious actions.*** *Incels.me* contains many debates about how truly universal this distribution actually was across time (comparing ancient Rome, Bronze Age, Victorian times, etc. with specious “evidence”). However, the consensus seems to be that while “inceldom” has always existed but was rare, it expanded and worsened significantly from the 1960s onwards. A range of explanations is given, all blaming feminists for the gradual erosion of the rules, norms and laws that characterized the golden age. As one member summarizes, “Incel is a natural category but it has been broadened greatly in the past generation by hypergamy and the destruction of marriage,” while another blames “the fallout from Women’s liberation/the Sexual revolution (late 1960’s/early 70’s till today) [...] combining



with female harem-forming behavior.” A slippery slope was established, with more and more of women’s demands being accepted.<sup>61</sup> Another participant offers a lengthy genealogy, echoing the widespread opinion in the broader manosphere that masculinity has been feminized and gradually eroded:<sup>62</sup>

“Such a development wasn’t originally foreseen and only developed gradually. It takes time, generations even, for a female creature of habit to break entirely free from the ingrained behaviour and values of a patriarchal and monogamous past even if the moral state of the civilization is a virtual Gomorrah (like the western world in the late 70s/early 80s). During this period, I’d say there could even exist potential windows of opportunity for those who today are condemned to unrelenting Incelhood (there actually used to be something as compassionate femininity). Nevertheless, the train had been set in motion [...]. The 80’s indicated a marginal thawing period [...]. The 90s feminist and leftwing retro-wave, in combination with systematic political correctness, multiculturalism etc, stopped the 80s in its tracks however, and provided a decisive turn to the worse. And on that road we’ve been on ever since, only augmented by certain instances of technological change.”

Feminists are not the only ones presented as guilty, however. While “Alphas” are presented as being unaware of the whole development and consequently do not actually get a lot of blame, “Beta” men are frequently portrayed as complicit of feminists’ actions. To be sure, “Chads” and “Stacys” are hated, but “normies,” especially men, are despised for their feeble authorization of the feminist agenda and their naïve, active endorsement of lookism (“Betas” allegedly wish to look like “Alphas,” so they try to improve physically, admire “Stacys” and offer them money). For one participant, “while I do believe that there are Stacy whores that wouldn’t fuck us for shit I also think that beta men have a share in the blame for our current predicament.” In other words, “Beta” men are traitors who, as one member explains, “turned the sexual market upside down”: “all women are, or should be is slaves to men, cook, clean, and spreading legs when they’re told to. Letting women get educated and have careers was a HUGE mistake.” In sum, “femenism has always been the same: Increase acces to Chad.”

These blame-attributing claims, which constitute the central, pivotal moment in the narrative structure of Incels’ worldview, crucially locate the actors who are mostly responsible for the crisis and who should subsequently be violently punished. Women are the most hated category for a direct reason,<sup>63</sup> while “Beta” men come second because of their indirect actions.<sup>64</sup>

**Final situation: total hypergamy.** This evolution, further accelerated by technological progress,<sup>65</sup> reached a situation of crisis where the suffering of the supposedly excluded Incel group has become too intense to bear. Female “hypergamy has reached its zenith,” is total and unrestrained; lookism has fully developed into the overarching, unique and undisputed logic of social interactions. “Most western societies,” laments a participant, “are degenerate shitholes rife with hypergamy now.” Women do not seek to complement their genetic pool with good additions any more (e.g., small women seeking big men to have bigger children) – they all seek “Alpha” men: “instead of seeking males with traits to counter their negative ones, femoids only want Chad.” This increases competition in the sexual market and consequently the pressure for “Betas” to look fit and the further marginalization of Incels. Women do not even want “long term relationships with a loving partner, [...] it became acceptable to be a slut, it just proves that women want



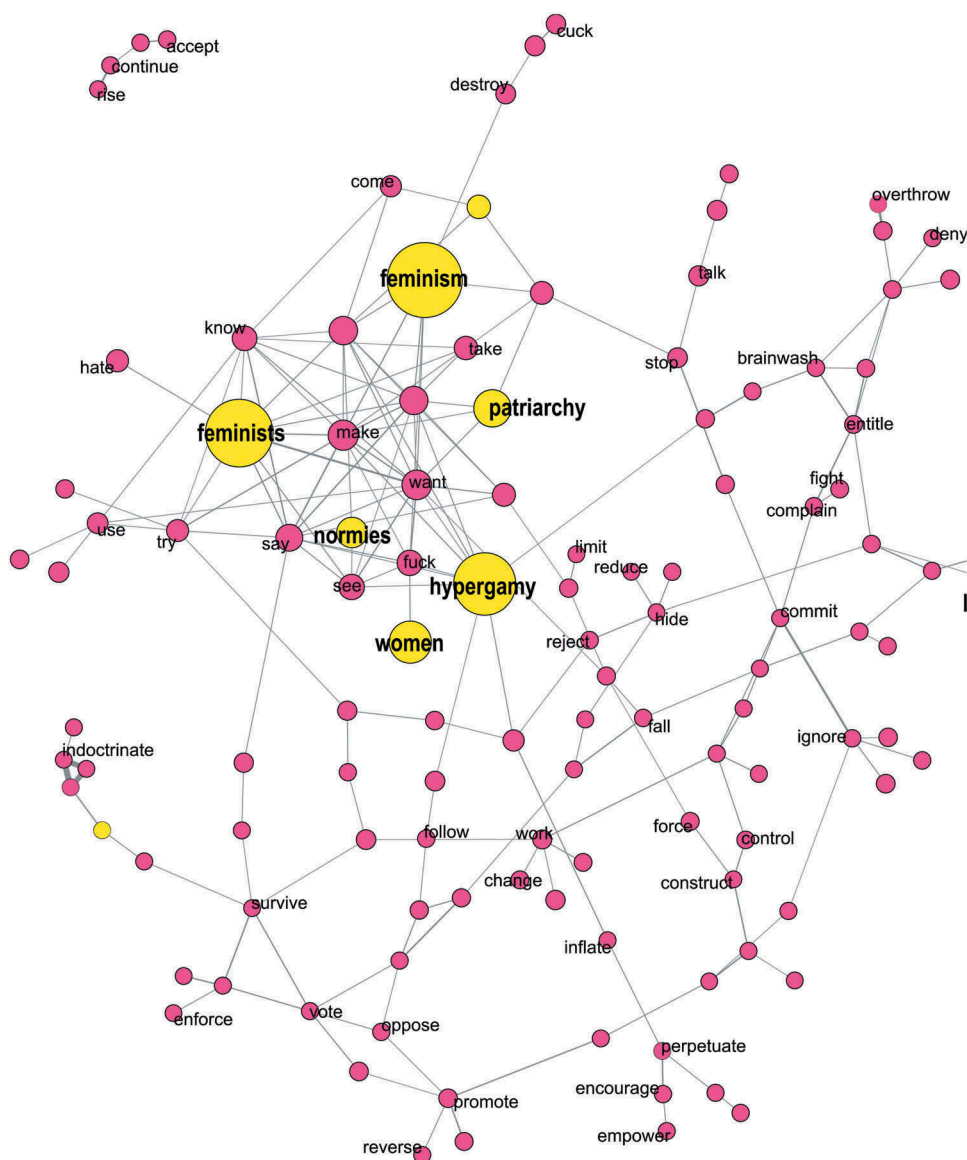
nothing but casual sex.” In this state of affairs, women who are in relationships with “Betas” (for financial reasons) try to access “Chads” for casual sex and deceive their partners as for who the father of their offspring is.<sup>66</sup> The situation is too severe to last;<sup>67</sup> as in all extremist worldviews, it can only be escaped through violence (cf. next section).

Table 3 and Figure 5 constitute an attempt to quantitatively represent the way discussions forming the overall Incel narrative are constructed and organized. Table 3 presents the results of the same seeded topic models as in Table 1, but this time filtering only the verbs, in a bid to display the actions that tend to be specifically discussed along with the particular seeded words. This table displays one striking feature: the predominance, across all topics, of the verbs “look,” “get,” and “want.” While the verb “look” confirms the chronic availability and all-importance of the “lookist” frame, “get,” and “want” highlight the description of groups’ actions in instrumental terms – women wanting and getting sex with “Chads” and good genes, Incels wanting but not getting sex, etc.

With Table 3 skewed by the predominance of these three verbs, a more fine-grained analysis is warranted. Figure 5 provides a visual representation of the semantic network centered on the central moments and actors of the Incel narrative as highlighted by the qualitative approach: the network includes the verbs most frequently co-occurring with the words “patriarchy,” “hypergammy,” “feminism” (and “feminists”), “women,” and “normies.”

**Table 3.** Topic model results (8 seeded models and 11 unseeded models), filtering only nouns and verbs. This table provides the top 15 most probable keywords (nouns and verbs) based on the SeededLDA model.

Topic number and seed words (for topics 0-8)	Words (verbs in italics)
Topic 0 “Incel”	incel <i>banned</i> reddit posts site <i>get</i> threads <i>think</i> lookism <i>got</i> mods <i>make</i> blackpill inceltears fakecel
Topic 1 “Alpha” + “Chad” + “Stacy”	chad <i>get</i> fuck incel girls girl stacy <i>want</i> women guy <i>getting</i> normie <i>gets</i> dick femoid
Topic 2 “Beta” + “Normie”	normie incel shit blackpill <i>think</i> chad <i>get</i> bluepill <i>hate</i> stop <i>say</i> fuck cuck women <i>want</i>
Topic 3 “Man” + “Male(s)” + “Guy”	<i>get</i> women guys girls guy men <i>looking</i> incel <i>think</i> girl <i>laid</i> chad woman <i>see</i> <i>seen</i>
Topic 4 “Woman” + “Female(s)”	women men sex <i>want</i> females chad society <i>get</i> incel <i>think</i> males <i>hate</i> man woman way
Topic 5 “Femoid”	sex <i>get</i> <i>want</i> femoid women incel <i>think</i> life <i>feel</i> girl chad <i>give</i> woman <i>fuck</i> <i>make</i>
Topic 6 “Roastie”	<i>get</i> <i>got</i> go money time shit <i>make</i> girls <i>could</i> <i>going</i> girl <i>want</i> day <i>see</i> <i>said</i>
Topic 7 “Bitch”	<i>get</i> shit girl <i>go</i> <i>want</i> dick <i>fuck</i> time ass <i>fuck</i> bitch <i>got</i> day <i>could</i> guy
Topic 8 “gf”	<i>get</i> school life years redditisforcucks friends time <i>got</i> year girl sex <i>could</i> go college girls
Topic 9	life <i>feel</i> <i>think</i> <i>want</i> incel <i>make</i> man things blackpill something <i>could</i> way <i>say</i> god <i>makes</i>
Topic 10	face <i>see</i> <i>look</i> time shit incel <i>think</i> <i>get</i> <i>make</i> <i>feel</i> guy <i>say</i> porn videos
Topic 11	pic guy pics <i>looks</i> <i>look</i> fuck tinder <i>got</i> incel <i>see</i> <i>posted</i> picture <i>think</i> tbh op
Topic 12	<i>live</i> life <i>get</i> incel country <i>go</i> world <i>want</i> <i>living</i> money women shit <i>think</i> <i>could</i> countries
Topic 13	face <i>get</i> height looks surgery <i>think</i> <i>need</i> hair body personality <i>make</i> looks incel <i>look</i>
Topic 14	<i>look</i> face eyes <i>looks</i> eye hair nose area guy chad shit skin chin <i>think</i> <i>looking</i>
Topic 15	<i>cope</i> life incel fuel <i>think</i> suicide cope blackpill game iq shit anime problems theory time
Topic 16	<i>get</i> go attachment view shit elliotrodger <i>want</i> incel game <i>could</i> <i>going</i> <i>think</i> death <i>kill</i> life
Topic 17	world incel society jews <i>think</i> men women race iq degeneracy god war religion islam <i>believe</i>
Topic 18	<i>look</i> <i>get</i> face girls girl hair <i>got</i> chad guy <i>see</i> women <i>wear</i> looks <i>could</i> time
Topic 19	<i>get</i> day time <i>go</i> eat games <i>play</i> shit food lot <i>need</i> years <i>going</i> <i>could</i> <i>make</i>



**Figure 5.** Network visualization of the verbs most frequently co-occurring with group labels.

Like for the topic model, our inclusion of verbs in the network serves to highlight the actions discussed when these moments and actors are mentioned. One major observation can be made from the graph: most verbs pertain to the lexical field of power politics, evidencing the presence of a discussion on the political – if not conspiratorial – dynamics sustaining the evolution of society from patriarchy to “total hypergamy.” Verbs like “force,” “control,” “construct,” “fight,” “use,” “take,” “enforce,” “indoctrinate,” or “brainwash,” clearly indicate the presence not only of a logic of categorization but also a deeply political logic of explanation whereby Incel members rationalize their predicament in a narrative way, with nefarious actors involved in a conspiratorial agenda against them.

In sum, our qualitative and quantitative analysis together show that the Incel worldview rests on a clear, overarching narrative linking the ingroup with its outgroups in a chronological succession of events that gradually aggravated the situation of the ingroup up to an extreme point.

### *From worldview to violence*

This final section unpacks in a more precise way the link between Incels' worldview and violence. We have already shown that the Incel discussions demonstrate clear traits of an extremist worldview whereby violence is not only seen as acceptable but also as the only possible way to solve the crisis endpoint in which society is supposedly stuck. The major components of the Incel worldview are indeed those that are present in other extremist worldviews: the existence of impermeable group boundaries, the immutability of an oppressive social hierarchy, and a crisis narrative pointing unambiguously to a nefarious group and reaching its crisis end-point. For Incels like for most violent political actors, violence would only be a legitimate reaction to the outgroup's constant and increasing oppression and abuse. Victims of Rodgers, Lépine, Sodini, or Minassian are deemed to "deserve it quite frankly" – indeed as one member considers, "by having sex with the guy [Minassian] you [girls] couldve saved 10 lives." Without positing a direct link between the Incel worldview and violent action, we consider below the specific forms taken by Incels' support for violence and the ways through which this worldview is particularly conducive of particular kinds of aggression, some of which are unusual in comparison to most extremist groups.

We first notice that uprisings and revolts are frequently evoked, and violent events such as the Toronto attack elicit hope that they might perhaps trigger a chain reaction leading to society's recognition of either the alleged excesses of feminism (with a "return" to the golden age of monogamy and patriarchy) or the Incel predicament (with policies designed to force women to fulfil all men's alleged sexual entitlement).<sup>68</sup>

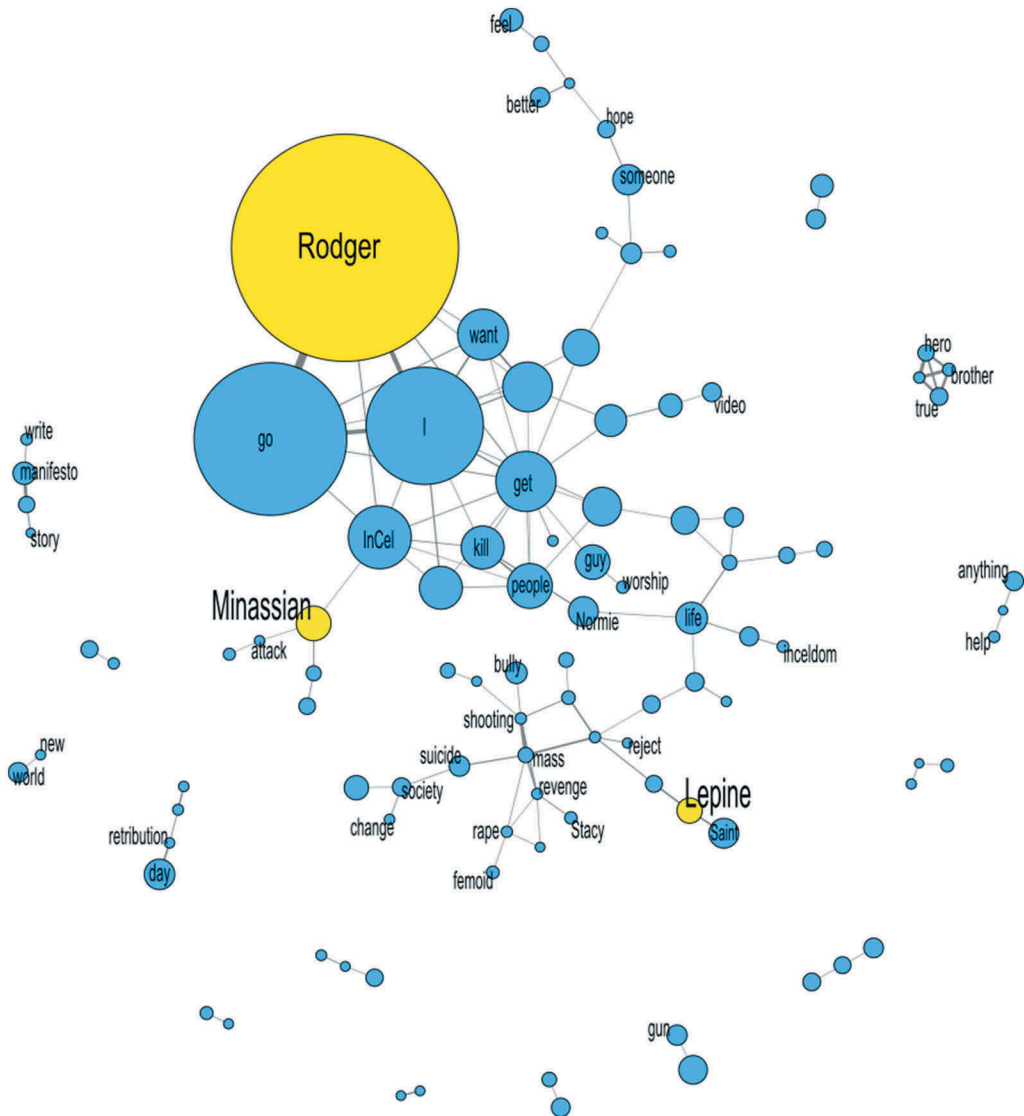
However, because of the nihilistic nature of the "blackpill" and the insistence that Incels are a natural category, many members actually reject the idea that the situation might possibly improve, even through violence. A recurring pattern is where a member cuts these discussions short, claiming that hopes of system change through violence are "copes" to help deal with a hopeless situation. "Not gonna happen," writes for instance one member, "this is wishful thinking at its's max. Absolute cope. Just take the real blackpill and stop thinking you live in a Democracy." Another one adds: "they will continue to reject us, bash us, and use the state to further oppress us. Don't expect any different no matter how many ticking timebombs go off in the future." This is a notable characteristic of the Incel worldview that sets it apart from many extremist projects, which usually consider some sort of societal change not only desirable but also possible in order to restore the group's positive initial situation. This trait explains the omnipresence of discussions and glorification of suicide. Countless avatar images represent characters killing themselves, while members regularly write that they consider or would desire suicide,<sup>69</sup> laud cases of suicide they read in the press, or even suggest mass suicides to attract attention to their cause.<sup>70</sup>

Violence, however, is nonetheless ubiquitous and supported, yet this backing comes in a quite unusual way as a sort of pure cathartic exhilaration: members imagine multiple graphic scenarios wherein women suffer, encourage each other to do so to become "hERoes" (Elliot Rodger's initials are capitalized), and rejoice when a real case occurs – such as

Minassian's van attack, or accounts of rape in the media. Violence is seen as a gratuitous, liberating act of revenge without any hope of gaining something. While an official statement from *Incels.me* administrators published shortly after Minassian's attack denied any link between being an Incel and violence,<sup>71</sup> and in spite of the deleting of posts advocating violence in the aftermath of the attack, messages explicitly endorsing or calling for violence remained extremely frequent, confirming the widespread support for violence produced by this worldview. The flurry of ecstatic messages prompted by Minassian's attacked contained invitations to more cruel actions.<sup>72</sup> For example, one member concedes that he is "happy to see dead normies but hope the next shooter throws in a rape or two. I mean I like a little spice of life when it comes to my mass tragedies (tragedies for you, hilarious joke to me). We need to see a little bit of variety. I'm tired of the same ol death count. How bout a rape count or an acid-in-her-fucking-face count?" Another one shares his feeling that "the only part that sucks is that this disgusting whore [the youngest victim] died a quick death. I wish it had gotten its legs decapitated instead only to slowly bleed out." Such an endorsement of cruel violence is amplified by the central role that repressed entitlement plays in their narratives: violence is a valid solution because sex, which is what Incels are supposedly entitled to (as men), is denied (research in psychology indeed clearly shows the centrality of such reasoning among rape offenders and supporters).<sup>73</sup> Relatedly, many participants play down the severity of Minassian's attack, depicting it as a negligible damage to a powerful group compared to their own suffering. "At least 100 Sub8 males across the globe have committed suicide since the 24/04/18 Toronto attack," someone for example claims, while another suggests that "for every homicide carried out by an incel, there are 5,000 incel suicides," and yet another member adds that "normies are a bunch of hypocrites. Only nine people died and they're going nuts over this." Like other types of extremist language, violence is "legitimated as 'self-defence' against the perceived aggression of the target and atrocity is generally represented as a noble and even virtuous act."<sup>74</sup>

As a further evidence of the normalization of violence produced by the Incel's worldview, Minassian has quickly been included in the community's lineup of "saints," that is, Incels who "fight back" and "risk their life for the cause," alongside individuals such as Marc Lépine or Elliot Rodger. Although some consider that "he is not on the same level as Saint Elliot Rodger (pbuh), didn't even write a Manifesto or give sermons on youtube," most applaud "that moment when this random dude killed more people than the supreme gentleman Elliot. I hope this guy wrote a manifesto because he could be our next new saint." This glorification of violent individuals presented as prototypical members of the ingroup is a particularly dangerous feature of the forum that makes the underlying worldview particularly conducive to violence.

Figure 6 below uses a quantitative approach to visually represent the discussion on these "Saints." The semantic network displays the three most discussed violent individuals – Rodger, Minassian, Lépine – and their most frequently co-occurring adjectives, nouns, and verbs. This visualization confirms the main observations of the qualitative approach. We directly notice the quantitative importance of Elliot Rodger, who remains by far the most discussed and "worshipped" "Saint" four years after his attack in California. The words that most frequently co-occur with Rodger – "go," "I," and "want" – correspond to the extremely common expression *to go* (or *to do an*) *Elliot Rodger*, meaning to carry out a "retribution" attack against the nefarious outgroup. Other terms directly relate to violence, such as "rape," "attack," "revenge," "suicide," "gun," or "mass shooting," while words like "hero," "saint," or



**Figure 6.** Network representation of the terms most frequently co-occurring with the three “Saints.”

“brother” unambiguously demonstrate the Incel community’s support for these figures. Lépine and Minassian appear, but are less frequent. The network also provides evidence, once again, of the prominence of the core group labels discussed above in the Incel discussion: “Incel,” “Stacy,” “femoid,” or “normie,” appear in the graph.

## Conclusions

Whether we judge the Incel worldview to be pathetic, sad, ridiculous, laughable, or else, the fact is that some of those who interpret their life and environment through its prism have killed. The present paper attempted to make sense of this reality, demonstrating that the Incel

worldview as expressed in online spaces like *Incels.me* is an extremist one in terms of its logics of categorization and explanation. As such, while the Incel online community is part of broader misogynistic movement that already regularly defends crimes on women,<sup>75</sup> it nonetheless occupies a very specific, extreme position in this ideological landscape. Its nihilistic “blackpill” component might make its members more likely to self-harm than to undertake violent actions to change their social environment, the Incel worldview is nonetheless prone to drive some of them to carry out cathartic violence against women, “Betas,” or people and things representing the supposedly unescapable and oppressive grip of “lookism.”

The role of the Internet in enabling the formation and radicalization of this community through echo-chamber dynamics is evident: without a way to relate and discuss, these individuals would have had no way to recognize themselves as “Incels” and learn the culture and particular idiom that cements the Incel worldview. The very narrow lexical field characterizing the discussions on *Incels.me*, evidenced by both our qualitative and quantitative approaches, exposes the highly constricted character of the Incel worldview, which produces a very one-sided, obsessive perception of the social environment and similarly simplistic appraisals of everyday situations. This echoes the narrow intergroup language being used by extremist groups in general, in which central group categories keep on occurring to prime particular aspects of social reality, consistently frame them in a single way, and hence narrow the lens through which the world is understood and presented.

The present paper leaves many questions unexplored, constituting a starting point for further research. We see seven avenues for further research. First, our analysis concentrated on the linguistic dimension of the interactions taking place on *Incels.me*, whereas images are significant vectors of meaning. The forum (like its successors) was packed with GIFs and avatar pictures that displayed regularities that might be worth measuring and explaining. Second, while our analysis aimed to show the linguistic structure underpinning the Incel worldview and to explain how this structure relates to violence, we did not pay attention to the emotional dimension of this language and how it might also contribute to endorse violence. Further work could study the emotional dynamics at play in the forum and evaluate how, in line with the literature on social emotions and aggression/conflict, these dynamics sustain violent action tendencies. Third, scholars could attempt to map and mine more comprehensively the online Incel territory, beyond the *Incels.me* forum. Fourth, the Incel worldview appears to share a series of traits, both in its narrative and its categorical structure, with radical conservative and white supremacist groups, and further research could elucidate the history behind these shared traits as well as dynamics of linguistic spillover between these seemingly disconnected groups. Fifth, much remains to be done to better understand noncommunicational dynamics involved in people’s decision to take part in these forums and the processes that shape their interactions on them. Sixth, as already observed, it appears that a group of participants was extremely active, and much remains to be understood in terms of their influence in leading discussions and shaping the underlying worldview. Research could check if such a phenomenon occurs in other extremist online platforms, and model this kind of influence and interaction. Seventh and finally, more comparative work is needed to theorize how violence becomes ingrained within particular worldviews as they constitute, sometimes through separation from more mainstream ones. For instance in the Incel case, a fine-grained genealogy of the evolution of linguistic patterns across misogynistic online platforms, combined with a chronological tracing of when these platforms have emerged, gained popularity, restricted their membership, etc., would lead to a sharper understanding of the social



and linguistic dynamics at play in the emergence of extremist variants of more mainstream worldview, particularly in the growing acceptance or endorsement of violence.

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## Notes

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  53. Not even "Betas." Consider for example this comment: "‘acting alpha’ really just means being loud and dominant; usually it is just a cope practiced by big ugly males. This is a big difference from actually being alpha however (again, a guy that all the girls want to fuck)."
  54. Ging (2017) "Alphas, Betas, and Incels", 3.
  55. Ibid.
  56. Ibid, p.13.
  57. As one member explains, "white Femoids by the age of 24, will have fucked hundreds of dudes, and their vaginas will probably look like roast beef by that time."
  58. The network is based on the 150 adjectives with the highest "differential" co-occurrence factor (difference between occurring in the same sentence as a seed label and occurring in a sentence without one).
  59. For instance Franzosi "Narrative Analysis"; for an example of narrative analysis applied to politics, see Radaelli Claudio (1999) "Harmful Tax Competition in the EU: Policy Narratives and Advocacy Coalitions", *Journal of Common Market Studies* 37(4) (1998), 661-682.
  60. Menzies (2007) "Virtual Backlash", p.68.
  61. For example, one participant observes: "First females wanted to be allowed to whore around before marriage, then they wanted to whore around \*without judgement\*"
  62. Read Ducat Stephen. *The Wimp Factor: Gender Gaps, Holy Wars, and the Politics of Anxious Masculinity*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2004.
  63. "We are rejected males," laments a participant, "being incel is not our fault, it's a decision made by women that affected us, making all of us the incels that we are now."
  64. Consider the following post: "So who do you blame more for the absolute state of women? Do you blame the beta enablers? The guys that's flippantly ignore a Stacy's defects because she's attractive, the kind of guys that pile over each other in order to just talk to her. The guys that openly pine for and admire her skimpy clothes and shitty attitude? Her frequent and devoted orbiters for allowing her ego and vanity to grow to mythic proportions. The guys that vehemently defend every essence of her being because they believe it will land them sex. Or do you blame the Stacy herself for setting her aspirations no higher than being aimlessly and poorly skilled in a saturated market and allowing herself to cruise through it due to her looks and willingness to utilize sexuality in order to get whatever she wants. To sink deeper and deeper into a self servicing life of hedonism with the only goal to 'Life fast and die young' or some other overused motto ... to willingly and adamantly refuse to develop an interesting or reflective personality beyond that of whimsical and two dimensional traits that only exist to feed her need for attention and admiration for merely existing."
  65. It is recurrently argued that apps such as Tinder allow women to quickly choose "Chads" with whom to reproduce, and accentuated the normality of "free sex."
  66. For example: "Chad has to work hard to avoid having kids, roasties will beg for condoms off and lie about birth control to get his seed. Chads [...] have tons of baby mamas nowadays (and a lot of the time they don't file for child support either, so its win/win; genetic legacy without financial responsibility). Meanwhile normie betabux can't even be sure that his one kid is biologically his. The foid could've cheated on him while ovulating and his blue pill ass would never know."
  67. It is argued that even women would benefit from a return to patriarchy: "Women would be happier in a patriarchal society. Women would be happier if they were put into a arranged marriage in their teens and stayed home and made babies. Having a family is much more fulfilling than riding the cock carousel into their late thirties and having one retarded child in vitro as a single mom."
  68. For example: "Maybe there's some huge incel uprising in the future or something"; "Right now, I can see a violent uprising of all those deprived of sex in about 10 years, as our numbers continue to grow. Only a matter of time before feminism ends up being women's doom";

- “this year is looking promising, fellas. a good idea might be to set a shoddy nightclub on fire, dead are all going to be chad/stacy and it’ll likely be mass casualty”; “I’m actually calling for an uprising against the system. If the leftists were able to overthrow the American patriarchy, then can’t American men successfully overthrow the newly formed degenerate leftist dictatorship?”
69. “Kill me now,” writes one member, “I unironically wish Elliot Rodger stabbed or shot me to death. I unironically wish Alek Minassian ran me over in his van.”
  70. For example: “[Serious] Imagine if we committed mass suicide. I’m talking if we coordinated it and made it clear it was in the name of incelism. Imagine all virtue signalling normies and the completely unconcerned chads and staceys. Thoughts.”
  71. The statement goes as follows: “Seeing we’re getting attention from many sources, we’d like to clarify some things: Alek Minassian has never posted on Incels.me. As far as we are concerned, no one on the forum heard of him before these latest news. Being incel has no relation whatsoever with violence, aggression, misogyny, or any other negative connotation. While he may have called himself an incel, he does NOT in any way represent the community. One person does not represent communities, this should be known by now. Incels.me does NOT allow any kind of discussion of illegal activities. If you see any, report it.” The reader will appreciate the veracity of this paragraph in light of the preceding discussion.
  72. Consider the following examples of messages posted as members learnt about, and commented on Minassian’s attack: “I was expecting just another random allahu snackbar, but holy shit this is a legit ER [Elliot Rodger]. He might even be on this site!”; “Damn, if this is all legit than it’s amazing”; “PLEASE BE TRUE. SAY HIS NAME: ALEK MINASSIAN”; “I DON’T HAVE A GOOD ENOUGH WEAPON AARRGGGHHH”; “MORE TRUCKS OF PEACE”; “Degenerate roastie died in the attack!”; “The biggest tragedy is that Minassian didn’t run over more young women like this cunt”; “I hope for more van ramming attacks.”
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