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# Hegemonic masculinities in the 'Manosphere': A thematic analysis of beliefs about men and women on The Red Pill and Incel

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## Abstract

Websites, blogs, and message boards of the "manosphere" are dedicated to a worldview that celebrates hegemonic masculinity and decries feminism. In a reflexive thematic analysis of 227 posts (389,189 words) from two manosphere message boards (The Red Pill and Incel), we analyzed how posters viewed women and men. We found that beliefs about women and men formed an ideology comprised of (a) evolution-based views of gender essentialism, (b) an informal psychology of women's motivations, and (c) a typology of men. Women were seen as having three primary motives: to deceive and manipulate men, to promiscuously satisfy their own sexual needs, and to trade sex for power. Men were seen as falling into two (The Red Pill) or three (Incel) types: alpha men who are attractive, powerful, and sexually successful, beta men who give to women as their only route to sexual interactions, and incel (involuntarily celibate) men who are too unattractive to achieve sexual success. Posters acted on these beliefs either to improve themselves (The Red Pill) or give up on life and endorse suicide and/or violence (Incel). We discuss these beliefs and actions in relation to theories of sexual aggression, the psychology of radicalization, and the American Psychological

Association's *Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Boys and Men.*

In 2014, Elliot Rodger committed a mass shooting in Santa Barbara, California, killing six people and wounding more than a dozen (Branson-Potts & Winton, 2018). Hours before, he uploaded a YouTube video explaining his intent to punish women for not sleeping with him, and sexually active men because he envied them. Rodger also discussed these beliefs on PUAhate.com which was frequented by people known as incels (short for "involuntarily celibate"). This message board is part of the "manosphere," a collection of websites, blogs, and message boards dedicated to a worldview that celebrates traditional masculinity and decries feminism as a source of male weakness or subordination (Ging, 2019). The Texas Department of Public Safety's (2020) Domestic Terrorism Threat Assessment states that incels are an "emerging domestic terrorism threat" (p. 3), noting the severity of the violent online rhetoric. Our goal for this study was to conduct a reflexive thematic analysis of posts on two websites that are part of the manosphere (The Red Pill and Incel.me), to better understand the men who are part of this community and to gain a better sense of the ways in which traditional and hegemonic masculinities are currently enacted among one group of younger, more technologically savvy men.

## HEGEMONIC AND TRADITIONAL MASCULINITY

The ways that men in manosphere communities see women and other men have been compared with hegemonic masculinity (Ging, 2019; Van Valkenburgh, 2018). Hegemonic masculinity is the configuration of enacting gender in a way that grants legitimacy to patriarchy, and subsequently to the dominance of men and subordination of women (Connell, 2005). In addition to hegemonic masculinity, there are other constructions of masculinity that legitimize patriarchy (Connell, 2005). Subordinated masculinity involves practices that constitute the reception of dominance from other men. Complicit masculinity consists of practices by men who do not embody hegemonic masculinity but go along with patriarchy and thus benefit from men's domination of women. Marginalized masculinity encompasses practices of men with other intersectional identities such as race, that results in their dominance from other men. Scholars who theorize hegemonic masculinity are typically less concerned with the degree to which men live up to these enactments (few men actually do), but more concerned with how the attempts to do so reinforce patriarchy (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Hegemonic masculinity may present differently across time and place. However, a constant is that implicit or explicit threats of violence are directed towards women in service of the hegemonic masculinity project of legitimizing patriarchy (Connell, 2005).

In their current forms, these hegemonic legitimizations of patriarchy become central to an identity that strongly emphasizes adherence to traditional masculinity in the face of perceived threats to it. Traditional masculinity ideology refers to a constellation of beliefs about what masculinity should be. Because cultural definitions of masculinity, even traditional masculinity, are fluid and multiple, a static definition is not practical (Pleck, 1995). However, consistent components of these beliefs (hostility toward femininity, dominance and aggression, nonrelational sexuality, and restrictive emotionality) are seen in the measurement of the endorsement of traditional

masculinity ideology (Levant, 2011). These are difficult ideals to live up to and men face negative consequences attempting to do so.

O'Neil (2013) summarized 30 years of research on such consequences describing several forms of gender role strain. Self-imposed restrictions connected to traditional masculinity are related to anxiety, intimacy problems, loneliness, and emotional dysregulation. Violating traditional male gender roles is related to substance abuse, self-objectification, and suicide. Endorsement of traditional male gender roles is related to violation of others through hostile sexism, dating violence, rape myth acceptance, and violence. All of these are common experiences of men, which we expected to see represented in posts on The Red Pill and Incel.

How people enact gender is deeply important to their self-identity. For men who construct a masculine gender identity using sexist attitudes, enactment of those sexist attitudes has generally gone underground (Glick & Fiske, 2011). However, in community spaces friendly to displays of sexist constructions of masculinity and femininity men congregate and reinforce these beliefs (Matthews, 2014). Our research examines discursive constructions of masculinity and femininity, represented on The Red Pill and Incel message boards. The semi-anonymity of these boards and the community culture facilitate frank discussions of these gender constructions.

## THE MANOSPHERE

The manosphere is a collection of digital spaces in which hegemonic and traditional masculinity are articulated bluntly and without artifice. These spaces are rich in useful data for researchers interested in documenting the ways in which these masculinities are enacted, because it is not necessary to "read between the lines" to discern the meaning of coded messages. In addition, many sites in the manosphere have a large membership and produce an outsized impact on the world. The Elliot Rodger mass shooting is one key example but, in addition, many spaces in the manosphere seek to encourage men to internalize core red pill tenets, one of which is to subjugate women and coerce them into sex (Dignam & Rohlinger, 2019). These sites often redefine sexual assault to exclude the kind of coercion promoted there (Gotell & Dutton, 2016). Furthermore, the manosphere is an echo chamber where sexism and misogyny are reinforced and escalated (Ging, 2019).

Research on the manosphere generally focuses on one or more distinctive subcultures, including Men's Rights Activists (MRAs), masculinist separatists called Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW), groups formed around misogynistic seduction techniques, called Pick-Up Artists (PUA) or red pill groups, and incels. In their discourse analysis of MRA websites, Gotell and Dutton (2016) found that the focus has moved away from fathers' rights and toward recruiting young men by stirring up anxiety around changing consent standards and sexual assault. A recent content analysis of a MGTOW site revealed that many of the discussions about why posters identify as MGTOW concerned misogynistic constructions of women as a threat (Wright et al., 2020). In an ethnography of London-based PUA communities O'Neill (2018) elucidated how neoliberalism and post-feminism shape men's engagement with PUA instruction-based seduction communities. Similar dynamics between masculinity and neoliberalism were present in The Red Pill message board's 'sidebar', a collection of essential readings prescribed by the moderators of the message board (Van Valkenburgh, 2018). Cosma and Gurevich (2020) conducted a discourse analysis with PUA media and found that women's bodies were constructed as commodities and used to bolster men's masculinity. In another study, members of the manosphere construed men as active and women as passive and discussed women through misogynistic lenses including objectification,

gendered scrutiny, and the assumption that women are immoral and untrustworthy (Krendel, 2020).

In general, incels have not been included in data collection as part of larger explorations of the manosphere. Understandably, incels are typically discussed as a culture unto themselves, with a focus on their violent acts and violent discourse. Tomkinson et al. (2020) defined incels as a violent extremist threat and recommended government intervention in terms of mobilizing public security agencies and employing deradicalization processes. The incel subculture has been found to malign women, validate male oppression of women, and encourage violence (Glace et al., 2021; O'Malley et al., 2020). In a recent study, incels presented themselves as the victims of new dating technologies, with women manipulating this new system to give themselves a higher status than (male) incels (Preston et al., 2021). Maxwell et al. (2020) theorized that incels, beset by severe loneliness and unable to live up to internalized masculine ideals, become radicalized through experiencing romantic rejection and commiserating with the incel community.

Despite the separate treatment of the incel community in the literature, the Incel message board is embedded within the manosphere, both in terms of shared membership (Ribeiro et al., 2020) and beliefs about gender (Hoffman et al., 2020). These beliefs about gender center around the idea that there is a surface level cultural story (that women are oppressed by patriarchy) which covers up the true nature of gender relations (that male dominance represents the natural order, which feminism is upsetting with negative consequences for everyone). This is codified through a metaphor taken from the film "The Matrix", in which a blue pill would allow the protagonist to return to his existence in the false world and a red pill would allow him to break free and learn the truth about reality. The term "red pill" is shared across the manosphere, tying different groups together with the underlying belief that the metaphor represents (i.e. a kind of libertarian hetero-sexuality in which men and women are rational actors seeking to maximize different kinds of gains; Gavey, 2005, Hoffman et al., 2020). This is where The Red Pill forum in the manosphere gets its name. The corresponding "blue pill" in the ideology of the manosphere represents every-one else who remains ignorant of red pill "truths" (Labbaf, 2019). Both Incel and The Red Pill position themselves in opposition to the blue pill ideology, the only difference being the presence of "black pill" terminology among incels, which represents the additional "truth" of permanent hopelessness (of having a romantic or sexual relationship) that they accept for themselves (Hoff-man et al., 2020).

The relatively small body of social scientific research on the manosphere has been somewhat diffuse in both purpose and focus. The studies conducted to date differ from our proposed study most centrally in terms of scope, in that no research thus far has collected data from both The Red Pill and Incel. Our study seeks to do so in recognition of the fact that Incel formed in reaction to The Red Pill and other communities like it (Labbaf, 2019) and the two communities continue to be in dialogue with each other. Our study also differs from past research in that the only previous study that conducted a content analysis on data from The Red Pill examined core ideological texts rather than direct member discourse (Van Valkenburgh, 2018). Research focused on Incel has relied on exploratory thematic analyses of member discourse, similar to ours (Maxwell et al., 2020; O'Malley et al., 2020). However, our analysis of the Incel community connects it back into the larger manosphere, weaving common threads together to speak to the diverse responses that participants in the manosphere can have to similar underlying misogynistic ideologies. This goal is in line with quantitative findings that, over time, different spaces within the manosphere tend to share the same user base (Ribeiro et al., 2020).

## THE PRESENT STUDY

To better understand hegemonic and traditional masculinity in the current sociohistorical moment, and to explore the ways in which masculine ideology is articulated in online message boards that are part of the manosphere, we conducted a reflexive thematic analysis of posts on The Red Pill and Incel message boards. Our goal was to better understand these men's beliefs about men and women. To facilitate this exploratory study, we used a thematic analysis of conversations in the message boards to develop themes that highlight and explain members' ideologies.

## METHOD

We conducted a reflexive thematic analysis of posts on two online forums: The Red Pill (https://www.reddit.com/r/TheRedPill/) and Incel (https://incels.me/). These forums were chosen because they have large numbers of posters and posts, they have a relatively high profile in the broader culture (Ribeiro et al., 2020), and posters speak directly to each other and their communities, in a publicly accessible space. Although an account is needed to post, posts on the forums can be accessed without creating an account. Further, the content of the message boards is indexed by search engines such that posts can be found directly through web searches, unlike internet content intended to be private (commonly called the Deep Web or Dark Web; BrightPlanet, 2014).

Participation is largely anonymous, so a precise estimation of the demographics of the posters is not possible. However, we were able to extrapolate some information about posters from the data itself. Users on both boards seemed to agree that women and gay men could not be Incel. In our sample, we found only one self-identifying woman (on The Red Pill) and no self-identifying gay men. Given our observations and the intent and culture of these boards, it seems likely that nearly all posters are male and heterosexual. It is also likely that most posters are relatively young. One internal survey (on Incel.me) found that 66% of respondents were under 25 (Jeltsen, 2018).

### Sample

The week of June 4th 2018 to June 10th 2018 was randomly selected (from weeks in the period July 2017 to June 2018) for coding. This period was the immediate past when we began the study and, due to the large amount of repetitive content on the sites, we believe we coded enough data to capture major themes that recur in this social network space. Every message board post made during that week, along with its ensuing comments, was collected from both The Red Pill and Incel.

This method of sampling generated a large amount of data. To make analysis more tractable, we randomly selected half ($n = 27$) of The Red Pill's 54 posts to code. Because each post generates many responses, this resulted in 202,517 words of text. Individual posts and responses tended to be shorter on Incel, but there were many more posts. A single day of data capture on Incel yielded approximately the same amount of text as we had randomly selected from The Red Pill. For that reason, we included only Incel posts and responses from June 10th; this comprised 200 posts and ensuing comments and a total of 186,672 words. We chose to reduce the number of posts coded, but to include all responses to each post, rather than to code all posts sampled but to include only the original post, not the comments and responses. We made this choice because we wanted to examine how men interact with one another socially in these community spaces. The majority of the text on the boards is found within the responses to a post, and these responses include

important information such as clarifying community beliefs and providing clear and detailed advice for new members. This text was managed and coded using the NVIVO qualitative data management software.

## Data analysis

We followed Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2021) six-phase framework for reflexive thematic analysis, using an interpretivist approach, which complemented our exploratory aims (Tappan, 1997). Analyses reported here were oriented around two broad research questions about message posters' beliefs and ideologies concerning gender: "How do posters view women?" and "How do posters view men?" These two research questions guided the analysis for both The Red Pill and Incel boards, which allowed similarities and differences to be shown. We used this structure because of the similar gender beliefs and history across these two boards. Codes were developed in response to these two research questions separately for each board: first for The Red Pill, then for Incel. Additional analyses concerned the questions "How do posters view each other" and "How do posters view the world"; however, these analyses are not reported here. We did not have any formal a priori coding expectations and were largely able to avoid them through a lack of experience with these communities (the first author was the most familiar, having done a cursory exploration of these message boards).

The initial coding was done by one white, male graduate student researcher (the first author) and two female undergraduate research assistants (one white, one Latina), who read all of the posts and comments multiple times, taking notes and identifying potential codes. From these notes and discussions, the coders developed an initial set of 45 codes which were potentially applicable to the guiding questions. Each instance of conversational contribution, either making an original posting or posting a comment, was coded as a single unit. These units of text were typically between three and five sentences but ranged from just a few words to multiple paragraphs. Consistent with Braun and Clarke's (2021) description of reflexive thematic analysis, no formal codebook was created. Instead, coders met frequently (two 2-hour meetings every week for three months) to discuss their decisions and to resolve any confusion about specific codes or discrepancies in coding. These meetings focused on each coder's concerns about codes, as well as any clear differences in approach to the codes. The team engaged in productive discussion until a consensus on the nature of the codes was reached and divergent coding practices were redirected towards consensus. This allowed the reflexive coding process to be collaborative, as Braun and Clarke's approach explicitly eschews inter-coder reliability.

Consistent with Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2021) approach, after the initial coding was complete, the first (white, male) and second (white, female) authors further refined, dropped, or combined codes into themes. Themes were also organized into a tiered structure for further clarification. For example, there were 11 codes that expressed a common understanding of the motivations of women (e.g., "hypergamy"), so we organized all these codes into three themes ("Deceptive," "Promiscuous," and "Trading Sex for Power"), which was later organized into a tier of themes capturing posters' beliefs about the nature of men and women. The authors compared themes with the text twice, revising them each time. Authors defined themes, grouped them together, and organized them into a coherent structure to better understand how they relate to each other in the ideologies of the communities on these message boards.

The discourse that we analyzed is rich in community-specific jargon. Our own understanding and definitions of this jargon was based on contextual clues, supplemented by other authors
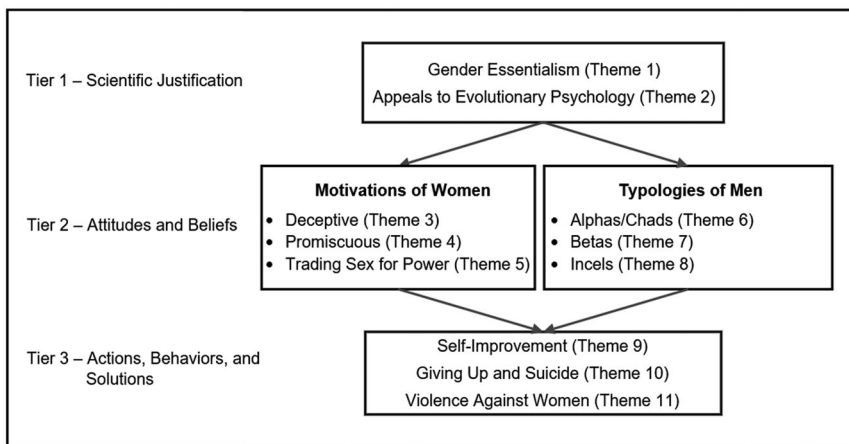
**FIGURE 1**    Thematic map depicting eleven themes organized within a three-tiered framework

who defined these terms (Glace et al., 2021). We also relied heavily on glossaries provided by the message boards themselves (https://www.reddit.com/r/TheRedPill/comments/2zckqu/updated_glossary_of_terms_and_acronyms/; https://incels.wiki/w/Incel_Forums_Term_Glossary).

We approached this research from a feminist social psychological perspective, which predisposed us to a critical evaluation of the ideologies presented in The Red Pill and Incel. Researchers from a different positionality might have different perspectives that would enable them to notice different themes or make different interpretations. At the time of the commencement of this research, there had been few explorations into manosphere communities, despite an outsized presence in news media. Our original orientation to these communities was thus influenced more by popular media accounts than by theoretical treatments in the psychological or sociological literature. Both authors were born in the United States and reside there, which may have further influenced our analysis.

## RESULTS

Eleven themes emerged from the data, as shown in the thematic map presented in Figure 1. Themes are presented in a tiered structure in which the first tier describes the scientific language with which posters couched their justifications, the second tier presents posters' attitudes and beliefs concerning the motivations of women and typologies of men, and the third tier enumerates actions those beliefs normalize. These three tiers are interrelated. The scientific language discussed in the first tier shapes and constrains the discussions around motivations of women and typologies of men. These community consensuses about the motivations of women and typologies of men, in turn, proscribe and limit possible actions and responses to the realities presented by The Red Pill and Incel posters.

## Tier 1: Scientific justification

The Red Pill and Incel posters see themselves as rational, logical, and unemotional, echoing a characteristic of traditional masculinity (Levant, 2011). This is stated plainly on The Red Pill: "Work on your frame [the way you present yourself], never be the sad and emotional one (be the

man, please)." Another commenter from The Red Pill noted that "A man's primary dimension is reason, a woman's is emotion." Although this identity as rational and unemotional was not a point of pride on Incel as it was on The Red Pill, it still formed part of the worldview espoused there. For example, in response to a post about instincts being powerful for incels, an Incel poster retorted "Only [for] foids [women]. Men possess the Logos [reason]."

Practically, this rational and scientific self-image allowed posters to insist that pseudo-scientific discussion of gender differences in these communities be taken seriously. This carried over into discussions of the origin of differences between men and women as intrinsic, and a reliance on evolutionary psychology as an explanation for gender differences.

## Theme 1: Gender essentialism

Gender essentialism is a form of psychological essentialism which assumes people of the same gender share a deep, underlying essence that shapes the way they exist in the world (Bem, 1993; Prentice & Miller, 2006). On both boards, posters discussed gender and gendered behavior as being fixed. Men and women were characterized as having completely distinct attributes. Posters used scientific jargon in their description of these beliefs.

> Women appear to be master manipulators because their biology allows them to hold multiple contradictory beliefs at the same time - that she loves Billy [a 'beta', or second-tier man] and wants to get fucked by Chad [an 'alpha' man]. In fact [not] only does their biology allow for this, but it is actually the lynchpin of female sexual strategy. The fact that these beliefs are sincerely held is what makes them so effective. Humans are evolved to have a sixth sense for when we are being lied to by someone we know well. Female cognitive dissonance evolved to defeat the human brain's lie detecting ability. (*The Red Pill*)

An incel commenter similarly noted: "Neurologically, the famale [sic] brain hasn't changed much since the caveman era. They still desire whatever what [sic] was the best genetic fit for them back in the day."

Endorsing gender essentialism is related to the endorsement of gender stereotypes for both self and others (Skewes et al., 2018). Endorsement of stereotypes, in turn, results in ideological beliefs about social issues, such as opposition to male political candidates who do not conform to gender stereotypes (Swigger & Meyer, 2019) and opposition to women's and trans rights (Wilton et al., 2019). More directly, viewing gender essentialism as predestined can lead to dismissal of attempts to foster equality between men and women as an impossible pursuit (O'Neill, 2018). Indeed, this belief in gender essentialism tended to also take the form of endorsing traditional gender roles, as is common in broader culture (Bem, 1993). On both boards, posters attempted to use biology to explain the essentialized gender differences in motivations for women in particular (as exemplified by selected quotes in Tier 2).

## Theme 2: Appeals to evolutionary psychology

One of the most pervasive lay theories of gender essentialism in the modern era is biological essentialism, a theory that proposes innate and immutable biological differences as the cause of

differences in behavior (Wilton et al., 2019). Posters justified their beliefs in gender essentialism by invoking evolutionary psychology theories. Posters reinforced this through casual reference to gendered behaviors as genetic, biological, or having evolved. On The Red Pill, one member posited to another "Your male genes are programed [sic] to want women just for sex cause your male superiority doesn't need anything better from them." On Incel, a commenter noted that "We are, indeed, no longer in hunter-gatherer times. However, much of what was at play then still applies today. This includes women of course desiring bigger and more physically intimidating men, among many other things. It's all evolutionary behavior bro." Invoking evolutionary psychology to explain gendered behaviors has been found in other research with the manosphere (Ging, 2019; O'Neill, 2018) and represents a common thread that runs through gender essentialism in culture more broadly (Bem, 1993).

The importance of such theories in lay understanding of gender is highlighted by Connell (2005), who argued that science has replaced religion as the primary legitimization of hegemonic masculinity. Empirical studies also support the role of biological essentialism in people's beliefs about gender. For example, in a qualitative study of boxing gym members, biological explanations for gender differences were common and were used to normalize gender inequality (Matthews, 2014). Not surprisingly, then, we found that scientific appropriations to justify beliefs of biological gender essentialism were a major point of discussion on The Red Pill and Incel.

## Tier 2: Attitudes and beliefs

Endorsement of essentialistic gender differences on both message boards led posters to speculate on the innate motivations of all women and the different archetypes that men conform to. In this construction of gender, women are a homogenous group with the same innate motivations: to be deceptive, promiscuous, and to trade sex for power. In contrast, men were constructed heterogeneously, comprising three distinct groups: alpha males, beta males, and (on the Incel board) incels. Moreover, men were generally seen as having some agency to move between groups (this perspective was much more prevalent among The Red Pill than Incel posters).

## Theme 3: Motivations of women—Deceptive

The first of three themes concerning women's motivations is that women are inherently deceptive, even toward themselves, and that this deceitfulness is a means of manipulating men. This was seen across both message boards, but on the Incel board, posters often reacted with frustration and anger, as well as resignation and flat "factual" acceptance.

> Yeah man all women are going to lie about that. It's in their nature to deceive sexually, whether it's lying about their past exploits and N counts [number of sexual partners], or tricking people into pregnancy or cheating and using sex in a relationship to manipulate behaviors. (*The Red Pill*)

> There is no bigger liar than the female human. All the rising false rape charges essentially prove this. All the false hope they give toward sub8 [below 8 points on a 10 point attractiveness rating scale] men also proves this fact. (*Incel*)

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Here, the poster was both explicitly making a rape fabrication claim and referring to the sexual nature of this deception: the implication that women will falsely indicate sexual interest.

This theme relates to Burt's (1980) concept of adversarial sexual beliefs: the expectation that heterosexual romantic relationships pit men and women in competition with each other, with each utilizing manipulation and secrecy to exploit the other, resulting in a lack of trust. Believing women to be deceptive is core to this belief and helps justify men's domination and deceit because it is seen as necessary to counteract women's manipulations. Belief in the inherent deceptiveness of women thus precludes honest treatment of women, as equals.

As seen in the second quote, belief in women's deceptiveness becomes especially problematic concerning sexual aggression. If women are inherently deceptive, no accusation of rape is believable. The belief that most accusations of rape are lies is a central rape myth (Burt, 1980; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1995). Endorsement of rape myths is a strong risk factor for sexually aggressive behavior and rape (Chapleau & Oswald, 2010).

## Theme 4: Motivations of women—Promiscuous

The second theme about women's motivations, that women are inherently promiscuous, was prominent across both boards. This promiscuity was attributed to an evolutionary origin: the need to find the most (evolutionarily) fit mate: someone who is physically fit and well-resourced. On The Red Pill one commenter posited "Women can't handle freedom to a point where if you leave them to their own devices they will fuck around like crazy. And science has proved it many times over but people just ignore it." On Incel, a commenter contended "That's the current state of females fellas. They are nothing but whores and parasites seeking to get fucked by as many Chads [alpha men] as possible." Another commenter on Incel conveyed a similar sentiment:

> yup.. genetics are the only thing that matter. femoids [women] can give typical blue pilled response but once my aunt saw the hunter eyes and superior frame of the chad she immediately got wet like a dog in heat…. femoids can't fight biological ticks (*Incel*)

The Red Pill posters generally saw promiscuous women as an opportunity for sexual domination. Incel posters saw them as a sign of moral decay.

> What's good for us ephemerally is not necessarily what's good for them, or society, as a whole. Hence the adage "enjoy the decline." Would the 21 year hotbody be better off being hung up on the 37 year old with no intention of monogamy/marriage/commitment or someone closer to her age who wants a wife and kids? I'd argue that the latter is what's good for society and would be way better for her long term. Buuut, that's not what gets her motor running, so I'll enjoy fucking her (and her friends!) until i get bored of her. (*The Red Pill*)

> What I've grown to hate about women is their low sentience. Men at least can admit that our masculine nature has it's [sic] drawbacks along with it's [sic] positives and that we are to strive to find the best way to express it in a positive, productive manner. Women will consume the entire world and then blame us for not stopping them

…Women are just like Lampwick and the boys indulging themselves on Pleasure Island in Pinocchio. (*Incel*)

These attitudes can be understood in relation to the concept of ambivalent sexism and its component parts: benevolent sexism and hostile sexism. Benevolent sexism is reserved for women who adhere to traditional gender roles and hostile sexism is directed towards women who violate them (Fowers & Fowers, 2010). The nature of the "truths" revealed by The Red Pill and Incel is that all women are biologically designed to violate traditional gender roles. Thus, benevolent sexism is eschewed, and hostile sexism is applied to all women. In an effort to resist the benevolent sexism cultural narrative that "many women have a quality of purity that few men possess" (Glick & Fiske, 1996, p. 512), posters consistently reminded each other that no woman has this purity, and all women are fundamentally motivated by promiscuity.

## Theme 5: Motivations of women—Trading sex for power

There were frequent references to a belief that women inherently seek power from men through their sexuality. Men's power exists in many forms, including money, fame, and physical strength, but women's only power is their sexuality. Posters attributed this motivation of women to an evolutionary advantage that accrues from manipulating men. The Red Pill posters seek control by not providing any material support or emotional attention, but instead by offering themselves as muscular and as strong as they can become (new posters are encouraged to not date until they have done this).

> Our gynocentric society is full of propaganda that says men should chase women, that women are the prize, that the man who buys flowers and stays by her side (sometimes chasing for years) … eventually wins. That is a load of horse shit. The man of value, instead, brings wisdom, strength, mental fortitude, leadership, wealth, and excitement to the table. Women (girls) crave this. It is built into their evolutionary psychology and biology. It is so hard-wired into them … [that] not even all the movies, TV shows, media propaganda, and fiction books can overcome this instinct. Women may say one thing (that they should be attracted to nice guy soy boys [vegetarians biologically feminized through consumption of soy] who buy them dinner and drinks), but we at the RedPill know not to listen to what women say, but watch what they do. (*The Red Pill)*

Incel posters saw women seeking power through sexuality as a trade they find frustrating, but also hopeful in that it is one of the only viable paths for romantic and sexual interaction with women available to them. In fact, Incel posters believed having enough money to attract women is incompatible with being "involuntarily celibate," as exemplified by one commenter: "Would be funny to see a billionaire incel here, though if you even have over a million there is no way you can be incel."

They emphasize that being physically attractive determines sexual success so much so that an attractive man is incapable of a lack of sexual success and an unattractive man faces a nearly insurmountable barrier to sexual success.

> And the science (not exactly science just common sense again) is: Chad [an attractive alpha man] can do whatever he wants, and he will be perceived as all-good, subhuman [self-identified incel] can do whatever he wants too, he will be perceived as all-bad. (*Incel*)

Those who endorse adversarial sexual beliefs expect relationships to be fundamentally exploitative (Burt, 1980). Men expect women to use their promiscuity to exploit men, gain power, and even dominate them. Fearing this, men dominate women, to avoid domination themselves (Johnson, 2014). These fears are made explicit in Glick and Fiske's (1996) hostile sexism scale, with items like "Women seek power by gaining control over men" (p. 500). Men on these boards applied this hostility to all women.

## Theme 6: Typologies of men—Alphas/Chads

Both boards endorsed a reified taxonomy of men. Sexually successful men were referred to as "alphas" on The Red Pill and "Chads" on Incel. Both boards agreed that sexually successful men tend to have other socially desirable traits that make multiple aspects of their lives successful. Alphas, in the abstract, embody hegemonic masculine ideals of dominating women and sexual success.

> Because they are the submissive inferior and thus you can do what you want with them & they take it. They're the doormats, you're the superior … Keep your guard up & don't ever make a bitch feel cute or like anything ever again unless she EARNS it. No meaningful attention until she earns it by being a dope ass girl whose always there when u want her etc. She gets a treat when she does right by you. Not for being a breathing vagina owner. (*The Red Pill*)

The boards differed on the options a man has in aspiring to be an alpha. Whereas Incel posters believed that successfully enacting hegemonic masculinity is not possible for them (or is even dangerous), The Red Pill posters believed all men are able to make changes and choices in their lives that allow them to be an alpha. However, many The Red Pill posters reported experiences that reflect imperfect replications of hegemonic masculinity, so The Red Pill posters are likely a combination of those who embody hegemonic masculinity and those who embody complicit masculinity. An example of the latter was an emphasis on mutual enjoyment and an egalitarian lack of possessiveness of women (attitudes that contrast with hegemonic masculinity's focus on dominating women).

> But also do it with the knowledge that she's not yours, it's just your turn. Would you have felt as bad post-breakup if your mindset throughout had been that the relationship would end sooner rather than later, and to just enjoy the time you do have together while you can? (*The Red Pill*)

Hegemonic masculinity is an abstract ideal that few precisely embody and that lacks static, observable characteristics (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Instead, most men have a more complex relationship with hegemonic masculine ideals (Wetherell & Edley, 1999). Those who would seek to become an alpha man, at least as they presented themselves on The

Red Pill, narrow themselves into only manifesting patriarchal dominance of women, sexually, relationally, and culturally. This has negative impacts on quality of relationships (Bay-Cheng et al., 2018) and can lead to rape (Gavey, 2005). The constraining male role norms that these men place upon themselves can cause anxiety and depression if not achieved and poor relations and violence if they are (Levant, 1996).

## Theme 7: Typologies of men—Betas

Many masculinities exist across cultures (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) and are available to men who do not limit themselves to pursuing the ideal of hegemonic masculinity. These alternate forms include complicit masculinity and masculinities that contest or reject hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005). On both boards, alternate forms of masculinity were over-simplified as the second type of man discussed—the "beta."

Betas are defined as weak men who rely upon trading money, power, or (worse) emotional intimacy for sex. This is reflected in the terminology "beta bux," referring to men who are seen to provide financial security to women in exchange for a relationship that includes sexual intimacy (Glace et al., 2021). Both boards displayed a vitriol for betas, whose behaviors are seen as putting them at risk of having a relationship with a woman who cheats with a more "alpha" man, something to be feared and avoided. Posters of both boards believed one could avoid being a beta. The Red Pill posters believed betas do not try hard enough to be alpha and this lack of masculine effort reflects a weak and feminine existence. Incels were included in The Red Pill's typology of betas because of their refusals (regardless of the reason), to work toward becoming an alpha.

> Sorry kid, you are Beta as fuck. Its laughable how big your ego is. You are the definition of a girlfriend. Chicks talk shit about guys they manipulate and don't bang you … You realised you would never be able to get this girl, so you sabotaged her yourself. You're pathetic. (*The Red Pill*)

Incel posters loathed men who would stoop to having sex with a woman who is assumed to be using them (although many fantasized about doing so).

> Are you so desperate that you are now at the point in which you are 100% willing to beta provide? Also are you wealthy or earning enough to do this? in case you finally have a chance to beta bux a hot women. If you beta bux and marry the bitch then you deserve inceldom for life and eternal punishment for being a cuck. If you beta bux for that pussy for a little while and then dump the bitch on the streets then that is ultimate revenge for your life thus far. (*Incel*)

Betas were discussed in negatively feminine ways. This relates to "precarious manhood" where masculinity is not assumed to be stable within a man, but is fragile and can be lost at any time (Bosson et al., 2009). Proving manhood is done by distinguishing oneself from femininity, consistent with traditional masculinity (Levant, 2011). A man who fears appearing feminine (undergoing gender threat), would identify femininity externally from himself and be hostile toward it (O'Neil, 2013).

## Theme 8: Typologies of men—Incels

Inclusion of incels as a typology of men was unique to the Incel board. Incel posters believed that incels are genetically, physically, or mentally undesirable in a way that is unchangeable without surgery. Incels saw themselves as isolated without any hope for change and expressed depression, suicidality, and anger towards particular people and the world.

> "I was born. I was socially inept. I was a trouble [sic] child. I played lots of video games and spent a lot of time online. I struggled with my peers. My family distanced themselves from me. My mental health worsened. I now play lots of video games and spend too much time online watching anime and posting on forums/image boards. I am ugly." (*Incel*)

Incel posters' views of themselves aligned with Connell's (2005) "marginalized masculinity," where a subordinated group lacking authorization by the dominant group in a patriarchal system still helps reinforce hegemonic masculinity. Incel posters felt discriminated against for not embodying hegemonic masculinity, but did not question or reject this form of masculinity. Moreover, they still sought out domination of women. This is seen in the objectifying ways in which Incel posters yearn for women: as objects that they simultaneously denigrate and wish to possess, or as literal sex objects: reduced to their genitals. One commenter exemplified this: "Living as an incel is basically dying. Not being able to put your penis inside a non escort will literally fuck your life up."

## Tier 3: Actions, behaviors, and solutions

After accepting these beliefs, posters decide to change themselves through an intensive mental and physical "self-improvement" journey (The Red Pill) or accept an additional "truth" that they cannot meaningfully improve themselves (Incel). Here the functions of these boards diverge. The Red Pill concerns itself with advice to improve oneself mentally (reading to become more knowledgeable and practicing for approaching women) and physically (exercising). Incel posters gather to share anger, loneliness, hatred of women, suicidal thoughts, and desires for violence. Key to this is their shared objectification of themselves, each other, and women.

## Theme 9: Self-improvement

The Red Pill posters shared strategies to become more agentic, less emotionally expressive, and more physically attractive (muscular), matching their behavior with their endorsement of traditional masculine traits of being action-oriented, stoic, and physically and emotionally strong. As one commenter on The Red Pill suggested, "Invest your personal time into positive outlets. Lift, have a social network, have hobbies, make money outside work. Do the things you need to for ranking up in SMV [Sexual Market Value]."

Often this took the form of specific advice to read particular content on The Red Pill.

> "In a nutshell mate, you've got a LOT to learn about Life and TRP's [The Red Pill] a great place for you to begin, (So, first read ALL the sidebar [saved posts] material AND the sites like The Rational Male) and it will take some time (possibly years) for you to 'internalize' TRP's teachings/advice." (*The Red Pill*)

Improvement of one's physical attractiveness was measured through self-objectification to check progress, through posts seeking confirmation of one's assessment of their attractiveness. This is consistent with findings that endorsement of traditional gender roles places constrictions upon how men may present themselves (O'Neil, 2013). This includes self-objectification as a way to achieve traditional gender roles relating to physicality, such as muscularity (Davids et al., 2018). The Red Pill posters sought muscularity through weightlifting, exemplified by this commenter's suggestion "Talk to the iron. Lift. Can't say it enough. Read any of the posts in TRP and you'll see this again and again. FUCKING LIFT. Get yourself in shape and sorted out before you try and get girls."

The Red Pill posters exemplify research showing men are less likely to perceive negative results of self-objectification (Newheiser et al., 2010). This is true even though self-objectification has negative impacts on men, including poor body esteem (Strelan & Hargreaves, 2005), body shame, and body surveillance (Davids et al., 2018).

Incel posters that hold out hope for physical attractiveness sought it through body modification like leg-lengthening procedures or plastic surgery. One Incel poster posited: "In fact, there's no such thing as a former incel unless you get plastic surgery."

## Theme 10: Giving up and suicide

The Incel board facilitated self-objectification in a way that led posters to believe that their lack of romantic success is due to negative physical or mental characteristics that are permanent. This left Incel posters believing there are no options to make their lives better (referred to as the "black pill"). To relieve the pressure to behave sexually aggressively, they refrain from romantic pursuit of women altogether.

> The bright side of the blackpill is knowing it's over anyway so I can relax and enjoy watching the Brazil x Austria soccer game on tv with my family.

> Before I'd be like "fuck games I need to approach 50 women today or I'm FUCKED" - "YOU ONLY APPROACHED 4, FUCKER!!! PIECE OF SHIT!!!" (*Incel*)

Often Incel posters pessimistically decided that they will "lay down and rot" (LDAR). This was coupled with expressions of how they find things less enjoyable than they used to and that they find themselves sleeping a great deal. These experiences are consistent with ways in which depression manifests in men (American Psychological Association [APA], 2019), one possible consequence of gender role conflict (O'Neil, 2013). An Incel poster expressed symptoms of depression and panic at his lack of hope (instead seeking distractions, called "cope" on Incel).

> i feel so burned out with life at just 16, im so tired already, what the fuck, i know this isnt normal […] i dont know what to do, social isolation is mentally jarring and i can feel myself deteriorating, i have no friends, hardly any family (even fewer of

which that care), no money and no life, i literally spent all day just rotting in bed and thinking.[…] I'm gonna need some next level cope for this one boys, help me out, im being genuine here, i dont have the balls to rope [suicide by hanging] just yet, though death sounds rather enticing right now. (*Incel*)

Endorsement of and failure to live up to traditional masculinity ideals also leads to anxiety and stress (O'Neil, 2013). In the Incel community, this was seen in anguish over unfulfilled romantic and sexual desire, loneliness, and social isolation. These are other ways in which depression in men manifests and may contribute to the suicide rate amongst men being four times higher than women (De Leo et al., 2013). Incel posters described a desire for death to end this pain. Sometimes it is a plainly stated "I want to kill myself." Other times, these feelings were described more thoroughly, as by this commenter: "i need to fucking die already. i live for nothing, and base pleasures do nothing for me. my fear of death is nothing compared to the fear of waking up in the morning."

The Incel community also had a darkly sarcastic humor around suicide. Posters encouraged each other to commit suicide as a joke (although often the joking nature is not obvious). For example, several "joking" responses encouraged suicide as how to deal with the depression expressed by a previously discussed poster: "The best way to solve depression: suicide." Another: "The best cope is rope. Jk [just kidding]"

## Theme 11: Violence against women

An extreme example of how endorsement of traditional masculinity can lead to harm is through violence against others (O'Neil, 2013). When masculinity is under threat, men can react in an aggressive manner (Bosson et al., 2009). As an expression of frustration with their lack of sexual success (counterevidence to fitting traditional masculine roles), Incel posters spoke of their desire for violence against other people. This often took the form of a reference to past Incel mass violence, such as Elliot Rodger ("ER"). One poster encouraged this: "If all of us grab a weap/knifu we can make [this] the day of the incelindependenceday". Another advocated violence for the sake of "revenge": "I wouldn't rest until every incel gets his revenge. Go ER or fuck with the femoids [women] for the sake of good ol' times."

Another way in which Incel posters imagined ending their loneliness and lack of sexual success is through sexual violence against women. They casually discussed widespread sexual violence against women as a natural societal solution to the existence of incels, as this poster did: "In the past (caveman times), when men were refused sex and didn't reproduce, they resorted to rape." Others had extended this as a societal prescription:

"thats what would ultimately happen. Im not encouraging it. Im [sic] just saying based on how more and more men are becoming incel due to sexual distribution getting more unequal. The only way some men would be able to obtain sex would be via rape." (*Incel*)

Others discussed a more personal desire to sexually assault women in order to have sex, like one poster who off-handedly stated, "If I somehow manage to get laid, she'd be the only one on drugs there."

This is consistent with the way in which Incel posters endorse beliefs about women's motivations being manipulative and promiscuous. The societal problem, in their view, is that women are

not sharing their sexuality equally with everyone because they are acting upon their own sexual preferences rather than the desires of people like incels. This is sexual entitlement, the belief that one deserves sexual activity regardless of any other contextual factors. Sexual entitlement predicts sexual aggression and, in combination with adversarial sexual beliefs, can predict self-reported sexual coercion (Klement et al., 2019). Connell's (2005) "marginalized masculinity" clarifies this violence. Incels endorsed the hegemonic masculinity goals of sexually dominating women but go further and also endorse violence against "normies" (complicit masculinities) who they perceive as preventing their participation in hegemonic masculinity.

## DISCUSSION

Through an examination of discussions on The Red Pill and Incel message boards, we elucidated some of the interlocking beliefs that posters share which represent how they commonly react to the world. As depicted in Figure 1, the logic of these beliefs starts from the premise that there are clear distinctions between men and women (based on evolutionary psychology concepts and biological essentialism). Then, both communities codify their understandings of basic motivations of women and a typology of men. Their understanding of the motivations of women highlights how they always expect women to be deceptive, promiscuous, and power-seeking with their sexuality. These communities reify dominant, sexually successful alpha men (or Chads), and weaker beta men who provide support in exchange for a relationship, but only the Incel board recognizes incels as a meaningfully distinct identity. For The Red Pill, posters seek to become alpha through self-improvement. For Incel, posters accept their perceived exclusion from heterosexual romance and give up, desire suicide, and discuss violent revenge upon a perceived oppressive society and sexual assault against women.

These themes attribute a lack of agency to women, whose behaviors are seen to be driven by evolutionary motivations that dictate all actions. In contrast, complete agency is attributed to men. This is true even for incels, who characterize themselves as unable to find romantic success, but still choose how to act around women. This is consistent with stereotypes of men as agentic and therefore dominant and women as non-agentic and therefore submissive (Rudman & Glick, 2008). Even in the way in which men and women are discussed and analyzed by these communities, stereotypes permeate the structure of the discourse and reinforce gendered beliefs about dominance and submission.

Many of these beliefs closely align with traditional masculine gender roles and beliefs, including hostile sexism, adversarial sexual beliefs, and rape myth acceptance. Together, they capture many component parts of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2005). Posters of both communities aspire towards hegemonic masculinity goals. Posters of The Red Pill express forms of either hegemonic masculinity or complicit masculinity (depending on their success of adhering to their ideals), wherein they benefit from patriarchy. In contrast, because of their perceptions of being denied participation in the rewards of patriarchy, Incel posters express a marginalized masculinity. They direct their aggression and anger towards women as a display of their masculinity and towards other men for their perceived role in marginalizing them. In addition, prior research and a larger cultural context can help us examine what is unsaid.

## The Red Pill and sexual aggression

Malamuth's (2003) confluence model for sexual aggression describes two major factors in sexual aggression in heterosexual men: (a) "hostile masculinity" directed towards women, which results in adversarial views in relationships and cognitive distortions about women (Abbey et al., 2011) and (b) "impersonal sex" where sex is seen as a game to be won by having as many emotionless sexual encounters as possible. The influence of these two factors on sexual aggression are attenuated by having empathy for others.

The Red Pill posters appear to meet both criteria of the confluence model. All three motivations they attribute to women are cognitive distortions applied to all women. These cognitive distortions are hostile, as evidenced by the denial of women's agency, the narrowness of the boxes into which women are placed, and the infantilizing and dehumanizing language that is regularly used. The Red Pill posters frame masculinity as being successful at dominating women and they aspire to succeed in having as much sex as possible without emotional connection. The discourse we found in The Red Pill addresses a possible methodological issue with Malamuth's (2003) model, specifically that "hostile masculinity" is not actually a measurement of masculinity but instead a more generalized antipathy towards women (McDermott et al., 2015). We found that The Red Pill posters organized their enactment of masculinity around hostility towards women, thus essentially constructing a hostile masculinity in alignment with how Malamuth uses the concept.

The fact that The Red Pill posters endorsed both hostile masculinity and impersonal sex suggests that they have an elevated risk for perpetrating sexual aggression. This is likely compounded by the fact that they also endorse a highly individualistic outlook and prize their lack of emotional involvement with others. Men are encouraged to "Keep your guard up" and not display kindness without getting anything in return. These are aspects of being self-oriented, the opposite of empathetic: necessary conditions for hostile masculinity and impersonal sex to predict sexual aggression (Malamuth, 2003). O'Neill (2018) also found that sexual aggression is core to the London in-person seduction community teachings.

## Self-objectification

For The Red Pill men, self-objectification is core to the self-improvement process which focuses upon making oneself as attractive to women as possible. This is consistent with restrictive embodiments of masculinity centering on muscularity. Although self-objectification negatively impacts men, this was not seen in our data, perhaps because of the centrality of appearance to the culture and guidance on The Red Pill. The negative impact of self-objectification is more easily seen in the Incel belief system which adopts a severely negative assessment of one's physical body as the reason for a lack of romantic success. This reflects poor body esteem and body shame that impacts men who self-objectify (Strelan & Hargreaves, 2005). Incel posters also scrutinized their physical appearance down to the millimeter, an extreme form of body surveillance associated with self-objectification (Davids et al., 2018).

## Incel and violent extremism

The psychology of radicalization (Kruglanski et al., 2014) describes violent extremists as following a path from a more conventional life to one devoted wholly towards violence against perceived

enemies. First, a person experiences a personal humiliation or a strong feeling of a loss of significance in the world. Subsequently, that person goes on a "significance quest" to return to a sense of having meaning in the world or to undo the effects of the personal humiliation. Because they feel a lack of power, they may imagine violence as a way to impact the world. If they turn to violence to achieve their quest, they become alienated from their social support network. To facilitate their quest without the support of their network, they find a new network: a group and ideology that supports violent means to gain significance.

Incel posters seem to follow a similar path. Posters described their humiliations in detail, including both specific people and groups they blame. They discussed feelings of invisibility and a complete lack of engagement with the world. Almost all Incel posters described a struggle for significance in the modern world. As a community, Incel welcomes new posters and pushes them towards accepting the "black pill" more fully by convincing them they have no hope. In the most extreme form, they push each other to commit suicide. In parallel, incels consistently validate violent acts to express their frustrations and gain significance. To that end, they casually encourage each other to commit mass violence. These encouragements to commit suicide or violence against others might be defensively considered a form of dark humor. However, Incel posters frequently discuss being on the autism spectrum, a feature of which is having difficulty understanding ironic humor without any context clues that identify it as such. These encouragements are likely to be understood, at least by some readers, as literal encouragement to do these things, especially considering the numerous violent attacks attributed to Incel members (Hankes & Amend, 2018).

## Limitations

Although our research team was diverse across race, gender, and age, we did not have any insiders to the manosphere guiding our analyses; thus, it is possible that we overlooked some nuances of the dialogue. Based on the quantity and repetitive nature of the posts sampled, we believe that our sample was sufficient to shed light on our research questions. However, it is possible that the posts could also have been unique to the particular context of these two message boards. As such, these findings are not necessarily transferrable across different contexts, such as a different manosphere message board.

## Implications for action

A decade ago, Glick and Fiske (2011) believed hostile sexist attitudes had softened or gone underground. However, the largely anonymous communities of The Red Pill and Incel provide an example of hostile sexism beliefs being openly expressed, outside of the larger cultural discourse described by Glick and Fiske. On the other hand, Reddit has "Quarantined" Red Pill (Fearnow, 2018) (i.e., labeled it with a prominent warning as being potentially offensive and harmful) because of its misogynistic content, supporting the idea that misogyny is increasingly socially unacceptable. This quarantine led to a decline in activity on the board since our original data collection, suggesting that public pressure has caused these beliefs to go further underground into other, less visible virtual community spaces. However, politically powerful people, like Donald Trump, Jr., still endorse red pill ideologies, claiming that amongst others, "red pill" is a term "that conservatives often use to express themselves" (Trump, 2019). The kind of misogyny and resentment present in both message boards is part of a larger backlash against feminist gains in the latter half

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of the 20th century which continues to be opposed by conservatism (Manne, 2017). In this way, these message boards represent a particular reaction to the current sociohistorical context. As such, any changes to The Red Pill and similar communities would need to come as part of larger cultural changes, rather than targeted intervention to dislodge posters of beliefs they believe central to achieving their goals of sexual success.

It is important to remember, as noted in the APA Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Boys and Men (APA, 2019), that boys and men are struggling in general. Income inequality has intensified (Horowitz et al., 2020), which is especially challenging for men who have internalized the idea that they are solely responsible for the financial success or failure of their family. Traditional masculine gender roles are dangerous to follow and dangerous to challenge (O'Neil, 2013). Strict adherence to traditional masculine gender roles hurts and impedes personal and intimate relationships (Levant, 1996; Levant et al., 2014). As societal and cultural changes encourage, men are trying to move past these restrictive roles, but often run against severe gendered expectations. Manosphere spaces are one way (some) men try to respond to and navigate these changes, but as our research shows, these spaces come with risks both to the men who inhabit them and to the women they interact with outside them.

We painted a somewhat bleak picture, especially of the Incel community. How should society respond? Tomkinson et al. (2020) advocate that identifying the Incel community as a security threat is an important starting point, followed by preventing their radicalization. Theories of deradicalization (Kruglanski et al., 2014) suggest that there is hope for either preventing radicalization or reversing it. Importantly, one must distinguish between explicit and implicit deradicalization. Explicit deradicalization involves ideological confrontations to dismantle one's belief in the necessity of violence, and pushing a cultural disincentive towards violent acts. Implicit deradicalization focuses upon finding more acceptable ways to meet the emotional needs of a radicalized person. The key is providing support, reducing feelings of insignificance, and healing ostracization.

Stories from former Incel posters can help us understand there is a way out of these toxic communities. Jack Peterson was an early and thoroughly enmeshed poster of the Incel community since he was a teenager, writing thousands of posts (Jeltsen, 2018). Once the media focused on incel violence, he became a spokesperson for the community. He rejected the violence of Incel, but contact with reporters (particularly female reporters), gave him pause and broke through his hopeless view of the world.

Explicit deradicalization of entrenched manosphere members can be difficult because of the interlocking nature of their beliefs. Any argument is met with a counterargument (which would then need to be dismantled) or simply writing the person off as untrustworthy. Peterson already believed violence was immoral, even when fully enmeshed in the Incel community (Jeltsen, 2018), which likely facilitated his deradicalization.

Implicit deradicalization is also a difficult path. Part of the belief system is a distrust in and contempt for psychological intervention. However, Peterson described his media interviews as a turning point. The empathetic concern and honest curiosity of reporters (many of whom were women) gave him a different perspective (Jeltsen, 2018). This parallels the APA (2019) guidelines, which advocate an explicit practice of fostering healthy social relationships with and between boys and men. We need to find a way to bring men out from under crushing traditional gender roles and back into the fold of a welcoming, and liberating, community.

## Conclusion

There were many similarities between The Red Pill and Incel message boards; posters shared a misogynistic ideology that is associated with an increased risk of sexual aggression perpetration. On the Incel board, conditions for radicalization toward extreme violence were also present. Both boards presented forms of hegemonic masculinities, with clear negative consequences for both society and the posters themselves. Our exploratory foray into these specific corners of the "manosphere" suggests that additional research is warranted. Such research should include additional thematic analyses but, ideally, would also encompass interviews or surveys with posters. Communicating directly with people who post on The Red Pill and Incel would allow further confirmation of the views in the present analysis, but could also move beyond the somewhat restricted discourse present on the message boards themselves. With a deeper understanding of the psychology of the men who are active in these spaces, and with attention to the development of identities and beliefs that occur because of that activity, we believe that psychologists can offer alternatives to these echo-chamber spaces, ones which will ultimately prove more helpful and supportive to men.

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