Why Incels Capture Attention:

A Cultural Attraction Theory Perspective

William Costello

University of Texas at Austin

&

Alberto Acerbi

University of Trento

Corresponding author: williamcostello@utexas.edu

Abstract

Incels (involuntary celibates) are a misogynistic online subculture whose members define themselves by a perceived inability to form sexual or romantic relationships. Despite rare but high-profile instances of ideological violence, most empirical research shows that they struggle primarily with poor mental health rather than engage in organized extremism. Yet the group commands disproportionate public attention, illustrated most recently by Netflix's *Adolescence*, which quickly became the platform's most-watched mini-series of all time and sparked intense political discussion despite being fictional. Beyond this, the incel motif recurs in artistic depictions across film and musical lyrics and has entered common parlance as a popular insult directed at men. Why are incels so captivating? Drawing on cultural attraction theory and evolutionary psychology, we argue that incel narratives resonate with evolved cognitive biases that make them particularly "sticky." These include biases towards sex-related content, moral violations, negativity, coalitional threat, protectiveness of women, and morbid curiosity toward dangerous young men. Incels also qualify as minimally counterintuitive, violating gendered expectations by centering their identity on male sexual exclusion. These features render incel discourse especially memorable and transmissible. We conclude by considering the implications of this cultural virality for media, policy-makers, and public discourse, highlighting the risks of letting cultural attraction rather than empirical accuracy shape responses to incels.

Why Incels Capture Attention:

A Cultural Attraction Theory Perspective

Incels (involuntary celibates) are a misogynistic online subculture whose members define themselves by a perceived inability to form sexual or romantic relationships (Ging, 2019). Incel ideology centers on the "black-pill" belief that most women are attracted to a small number of men who monopolize sexual encounters, leaving others with no possibility of improving their romantic prospects (Baselice, 2024). In response to some rare but high-profile instances of ideologically motivated violence (Costello & Buss, 2023), the cultural prominence of incels has grown markedly in recent years, both in academic attention and public discourse.

Most recently, Netflix's *Adolescence* (a dramatization of incel themes) quickly became the platform's most-watched mini-series of all time (Hailu, 2025). The show tells the harrowing fictional story of 13-year-old Jamie, who is arrested for fatally stabbing his classmate, Katie. Told through continuous real-time takes, the narrative unfolds across Jamie's interrogation, the

police investigation, and his psychiatric evaluation, gradually revealing his misogynistic anger, which is influenced by exposure to online incel content.

Despite departing from the empirical record in several ways, the fictional series has had a substantial impact on public debate about the incel community (Costello, 2025). It has penetrated the highest ranks of political life, prompting a roundtable discussion between the show writers and the UK Prime Minister, and government-backed plans are underway to show the series in every secondary school in the UK (Costello, 2025). That a fictional show could influence political decision-making illustrates the need to understand *why* incel narratives resonate so powerfully in public discourse.

Why did *Adolescence* make such a mark, and why does it matter that it did? The incel community itself is numerically relatively small. At the time of writing, the largest online incel forum has around 30,000 active members globally, many of whom are likely journalists, researchers, or other observers. Yet incels command a level of cultural attention that is wholly disproportionate to their size and level of threat (Costello & Buss, 2023). To put this threat in context, estimates suggest incel violence has resulted in ~59 deaths worldwide (Hoffman et al., 2020). By contrast, Boko Haram, an Islamist terrorist group of ~15,000 members, has killed an estimated 350,000 people since 2002 (Amnesty International, 2015; Reuters, 2023). This disparity between incels' relatively small size and limited record of

violence, and their outsized cultural visibility, raises two pressing questions. First, why are incels so interesting to us? Second, what might the consequences be of elevating such a marginal community to such cultural prominence.

We argue that the extraordinary popularity of *Adolescence*, and the wider cultural fascination with incels more broadly, can be explained by *cultural attraction theory* (Sperber, 1996) and *evolutionary psychology* (Buss, 1995). By outlining the cognitive mechanisms that render stories about incels culturally attractive, we aim to explain their outsized visibility and to highlight the risks of letting cultural virality, rather than empirical accuracy, shape public discourse and policy. In short, stories about incels push a lot of our buttons, and it is important to understand why.

Cultural Attraction Theory and Evolutionary Psychology

Why do certain cultural narratives captivate public attention and persist in collective discourse, while others fade quickly? *Cultural attraction theory* offers a compelling answer. Originally developed by Sperber (1996), and expanded by different scholars in the cultural evolution tradition (e.g., Boyer, Morin), this framework posits that the stability of cultural items is not primarily due to faithful imitation or direct teaching. Instead, cultural items are reconstructed at each stage of transmission, and their stability arises when individual reconstructions tend to converge on similar outputs. This convergence often occurs because cultural representations align with

universal features of human cognition, as highlighted by evolutionary psychology (Buss, 1995).

According to this view, some cultural representations are more likely to be remembered, shared, and reconstructed because they align with evolved cognitive preferences. These preferences, shaped by natural selection, bias humans toward information that is socially, morally, sexually, or emotionally salient. Cultural evolution is therefore not a process of random diffusion, but one shaped by systematic cognitive constraints, where certain representations are more likely to “stick”. Cultural attraction theory has been used to explain a wide range of phenomena, from the spread of imaginary worlds in fiction (Dubourg & Baumard, 2021; Dubourg et al., 2023) to the memorability of mythic narratives (Buskell, 2017).

Acerbi (2019, 2019b) applied the cultural attraction theory framework to the digital domain, suggesting that online environments are subject to the same cognitive biases. The spread of information online both of misinformation and accurate information, is influenced by factors such as negativity, perceived threat, moral outrage, disgust, or the presence of minimally counterintuitive elements. For example, content that is emotionally charged or morally polarized tends to propagate more effectively than neutral or balanced information (Brady et al., 2017).

In this paper, we argue that incel discourse is culturally successful because it resonates with a suite of cognitively attractive content features

and attentional biases humans possess. These include evolved sensitivities to sexual behavior, moral violations, social threat, tribal psychology, and negativity, as well as women's attentional bias to monitor stories about potentially dangerous unpartnered young men, and people's general protective tendency towards women. Finally, incels present an unexpected identity pattern, which constitutes minimally counterintuitive information. We explain how, together, these features render sensational narratives about incels more memorable, emotionally resonant, and transmissible.

Why Incel Stories "Stick"

Having introduced the incel phenomenon, its cultural salience, and the framework of cultural attraction theory, we now examine in detail how incel narratives draw on specific cognitive and attentional biases, beginning with two of the most evolutionarily significant domains for human psychology: sex and status.

***Sex and status related content*:** Sexual reproduction is the engine of evolution and genetic continuity, making mating one of the most important domains to humans (Darwin, 1871; Dawkins, 1976). Given the profound fitness consequences, sexual themes occupy a central place in human culture and are among the most universally attention-grabbing. For example, humans all around the world compose poetry and songs about love (Jankowiak & Fischer, 1992), and analyses of Billboard Top 100 songs reveal that the vast majority concern love, sex, or relationships (Hobbs & Gallup,

2011). Equally, humans have evolved to pay close attention to who is considered high status and why, because status (i.e., an individual's relative standing in the eyes of others) historically governed access to mates, resources, and allies (Buss et al., 2020; Henrich & Gil-White, 2001).

At its core, the incel identity is all about sex and status, and specifically sexual exclusion and frustration. Sexual frustration itself is a recurring theme in cultural narratives. From Jim Morrison's song lyric "Women seem wicked when you're unwanted" to Robert De Niro's iconic portrayal of an alienated, sexually frustrated man descending into violence in the movie *Taxi Driver*, the popularity of these artistic depictions highlight how widely recognizable such struggles are, even outside incel spaces. Although incels represent an extreme case, empirical data suggests that their struggles may resonate with people, because poor mating performance is fairly prevalent. A large cross-cultural study across 14 countries (N = 7,181) found that about one in four participants reported low mating performance, with more than half facing difficulties in starting or maintaining a relationship, and nearly 13 percent identifying as involuntarily single (Apostolou et al., 2023, 2024). This suggests that the circumstance of inceldom may tap into fears or experiences many humans can relate to, further amplifying the narrative's cultural resonance.

These struggles matter not only individually but also socially. Humans are deeply invested in stories about who is mating with whom, and, importantly, who is not mating at all. Such evaluations double as

assessments of status, since mating success functions as a key dimension of social prestige and self-esteem, especially for men (e.g., Schmitt & Jonason, 2019). One's mate (and therefore lacking the ability to attract one at all one) functions as a public signal of social rank (Winegard et al., 2013, 2017).

Given the link between sex and status, it is unsurprising that *incel* has entered public discourse as a cutting insult towards men. The term has become a go-to form of derogation: men use it to imply their own relative sexual abundance, while women deploy it as a dismissal that marks suitors as unworthy, misogynistic, and socially marginal (Costello, 2020, 2023). The insult notably pertains almost exclusively to men rather than women because male status and self-worth are more tightly linked to an ability to access sex (Schmitt & Jonason, 2019). Across evolutionary history, men have exhibited far greater variance in reproductive success than women. Many men left no offspring behind, whereas most women eventually reproduced (Betzig, 2012). This asymmetry makes male sexual exclusion especially salient and reputationally damaging. Calling a man an incel implies he has failed in one of the domains most central to male status and self-esteem, whereas women's mate value has historically been judged less by number of sexual partners and more by partner quality and commitment (Trivers, 1972; Buss & Schmitt, 1993).

That inceldom has become a symbolic shorthand for failed masculinity illustrates the enduring centrality of mating success to the social evaluation

of men. From a cultural attraction perspective, this blend of sex, status, and stigma helps explain why incel narratives resonate so strongly. They are both memorable and emotionally charged, ensuring their persistence in public discourse as iconic art and an enduring insult.

Minimally counterintuitive identity: Minimally counterintuitive concepts are representations that mostly conform to our intuitive ontological categories but include a small, unexpected violation (Boyer, 2001; Norenzayan & Atran, 2003). Such concepts are memorable because they balance familiarity (which aids comprehension) with novelty (which sustains attention and motivates sharing).

A further reason for the cultural "stickiness" of the incel narrative is that the incel identity itself qualifies as minimally counterintuitive. Across cultures, young adults consistently rank finding a romantic partner as one of the most important life goals, with men valuing sexual opportunities more strongly than women (Benenson & Markovitz, 2024). Yet the incel identity involves men, who are typically stereotyped as sexually assertive (Eaton & Rose, 2011) and status-striving in pursuit of mates (von Rueden et al., 2011), publicly defining themselves around sexual exclusion, failure, and giving up on mating (Costello et al., 2023). When so much of male status and self-esteem hinges on success in the mating domain (e.g., Schmitt & Jonason, 2019), the incel admission of sexual incompetence constitutes a sharp violation of gendered expectations and is jarring to society. This

unexpected inversion makes the concept both surprising and easy to recall, thereby enhancing its memorability and cultural transmission.

***Moralized disgust and the greater protectiveness of females theory*:** Moral disgust likely evolved because the costs of associating with cheaters, exploiters, or aggressors were historically high, making it adaptive to feel moral revulsion toward individuals who threatened cooperation and group stability (Chapman et al., 2009; Chapman & Anderson, 2013). From this perspective, moral disgust functions as both a psychological avoidance mechanism and a powerful tool of social condemnation.

A key trigger of moral disgust is harm to vulnerable individuals. The *harm hypothesis* and the *greater protectiveness of females theory* suggest that humans evolved heightened sensitivity to harm directed at women, given their higher reproductive value and centrality to offspring survival (Stewart-Williams et al., 2024). This protective bias is robust across domains (see Graso & Reynolds, 2024 for a review). For example, people are less willing to harm women than men (e.g., FeldmanHall et al., 2016), are more punitive toward people who victimize women than men (e.g., Curry et al., 2004), and are less willing to accept harm befalling women compared to men (e.g., Graso et al., 2023).

Incels violate the widely shared and cherished belief that women are to be protected. Not only do they espouse misogynistic rhetoric, but they

explicitly identify women and feminists as primary enemies (Costello et al., 2025). This combination makes them especially likely to evoke moralized disgust, thereby amplifying both attention to and transmission of incel-related narratives.

Negativity bias: Incel discourse aligns with the well-established *negativity bias* (i.e., the tendency for negative information to be more attention-grabbing, memorable, and influential than positive information (Rozin & Royzman, 2001). From an error management theory perspective (Haselton & Buss, 2000), the asymmetry of negativity bias is adaptive. Missing out on a positive opportunity usually leaves future opportunities intact, but failing to notice a genuine threat can impose catastrophic, irreversible costs such as injury or death. For this reason, humans evolved to treat negative information as more salient than positive, making "bad" psychologically stronger than "good", which ensures that negative stories attract disproportionate attention (Baumeister et al., 2001). A recent meta-analysis finds that most media and academic portrayals of incels are, unsurprisingly, highly negative (Maier, 2022).

***Coalitional tribal psychology*:** Media portrayals and often academic articles often frame incels as an organized, agentic collective posing a group-level threat to women and feminism in particular (e.g., Hofmann et al., 2020). This framing activates our evolved ingroup–outgroup tribal psychology (Cosmides & Tooby, 2010). At the same time, incels often behave performatively antagonistically, provoking condemnation they then use to

“verify” that society as a whole hates them (Costello & Thomas, 2025; Daly & Reed, 2022; Rousis et al., 2023). In this way, both incels and wider society engage with each other as monolithic groups rather than as individuals, creating a feedback loop that entrenches tribal perceptions. This reciprocal attribution of group agency reinforces the coalitional threat framing, heightening attention and transmission of incel narratives.

The tragic case of the Toronto van killer (who in 2018 used a rental van to kill ten people in Toronto) illustrates how coalitional tribal psychology and negativity bias can amplify extreme incidents into cultural archetypes. Media coverage has repeatedly highlighted his Facebook post declaring “The Incel Rebellion has already begun!” while giving far less attention to the judge’s verdict saying that he fabricated his “incel rebellion” narrative to maximize notoriety (Minassian, 2021). By amplifying the “incel rebellion” myth, the media reinforces the impression of a coherent, violent movement, even though most incels do not communicate offline and the community does not collectively organize or advocate violence (Cottee, 2020; Costello et al., 2025).

From a cultural attraction perspective, this framing of the rare but sensational cases of incel violence exemplifies how evolved biases toward out-group threat and negativity interact with media dynamics to make incel narratives especially transmissible.

Potentially dangerous sexless young men: Attention toward incels may also reflect evolved biases to monitor recurrent ancestral threats. From an evolutionary perspective, incels might be expected to typify the well-documented "Young Male Syndrome," whereby unpartnered young men are disproportionately prone to risky and aggressive behavior in pursuit of status and mating opportunities (Blake & Brooks, 2022). Sexual violence, particularly from unfamiliar, unpartnered men, would have posed especially high ancestral costs to women, including obligatory parental investment in offspring whose genetic quality or paternal investment could not be assessed (Perrilloux et al., 2012). Consistent with this perspective, women are far more fearful of sexual violence from strangers than from acquaintances, even though the latter is statistically much more common (Buss, 2017). This asymmetry may reflect somewhat of an evolutionary mismatch, whereby women's psychology is better calibrated to ancestral contexts, where strangers represented a greater risk (Tooby & Cosmides, 1990).

As for negative bias, error management theory (Haselton & Buss, 2000) suggests that selection favored a "smoke-detector" strategy in which threat-detection systems are hypersensitive to cues of danger, because the costs of a false alarm are low compared to the catastrophic cost of missing a true threat. *Morbid curiosity* (i.e., the tendency to seek information about dangerous, threatening, or aversive phenomena) can be understood within a similar adaptive logic (Scrivner, 2021). Attending to frightening stories

provides a low-cost way to gather information about rare but potentially devastating dangers. Extensive cross cultural ethnographic data suggests that storytelling in forager populations serves this precise function, that is, providing low-cost instruction about how to recognize and avoid dangerous encounters (e.g., Scalise Sugiyama, 2021). The ubiquity of this pattern strongly suggests it is an evolved feature of human psychology.

This perspective helps explain the seemingly paradoxical finding that, although men are the more aggressive sex and might be expected to be most interested in violent content, true-crime media, particularly stories of male serial killers, are consumed disproportionately by women (Vicary & Fraley, 2010). By contrast, men show greater interest in stories of warfare and coalitional violence (Scalise Sugiyama, 2017; Tooby & Cosmides, 2010), reflecting sex-differentiated selection pressures (Buss, 1995).

In short, women's heightened vigilance toward incel narratives likely reflects evolved attentional biases toward ancestrally dangerous categories of men. Yet contemporary incels are far less violent than ancestral expectations would predict, perhaps because of the *Male Sedation Hypothesis* (i.e., that modern environments provide alternative outlets such as pornography, online forums, and video games, that channel frustration into less dangerous domains (Costello & Buss, 2023). The result is somewhat of an evolutionary mismatch. Our threat-detection systems remain hypersensitive to the cues incel stories activate, even though the actual level of danger is, for whatever reason, comparatively low.

Nonetheless, from a cultural attraction perspective, these evolved biases help explain why sensational narratives about incels are especially memorable, transmissible, and resistant to correction.

Implications

Our paper began with a puzzle: why does such a numerically small and relatively low-threat community command such disproportionate cultural visibility? Drawing on cultural attraction theory and evolutionary psychology, we argued that incel discourse resonates with a suite of evolved cognitive biases, such as negativity, moralized disgust, tribal threat detection, and morbid curiosity about dangerous unpartnered men, that make these narratives especially memorable and transmissible. Having outlined *why* stories about incels "stick," we now turn to the implications of this cultural virality for public discourse, policy-makers, and journalists.

First, it is important to recognize that women's aversion to incels is understandable, even if modern incels do not represent the same level of danger that ancestral counterparts might have posed. From an error management perspective, treating a group defined by misogynistic rhetoric with caution is adaptive, even if only a minority of incels produce hostile content (Jaki et al., 2019). The costs of mistakenly trusting a dangerous man could be catastrophic given that misogyny serves as a shared psychological mechanism underpinning various forms of male violence, including violent extremism, interpersonal violence, and violence against women (Rottweiler

et al., 2023). So given that incel spaces *do* contain misogynistic rhetoric, and the media often present the community as a monolithic tribal out-group, it is unsurprising that women are wary. This wariness, however, may represent a degree of evolutionary mismatch, where psychological mechanisms calibrated to ancestral dangers produce exaggerated threat perceptions in modern contexts.

Policymakers and educators should acknowledge the historical and theoretical reasons to be concerned about incels, while also communicating the empirical reality that most modern incels are not violent (Blake & Brooks, 2022; Costello & Buss, 2023). Such an approach could reduce unnecessary moral panic (see also Cottee, 2020). Future research should also investigate why modern incels are less violent than we might expect based on ancestral patterns, with one possibility being that evolutionarily novel online environments buffer against otherwise dangerous impulses (Costello & Buss, 2023). If so, political and journalistic panic about the dangers of online worlds may be directionally misguided, as the internet might in fact serve as a "safety valve" that channels frustration into less harmful outlets.

Second, when incels are invariably framed by the media as a collective and hostile outgroup, it likely fuels their own narrative that society despises them (Costello & Thomas, 2025). This tribal framing can create a feedback loop. Research shows that many incels already display unusually strong identity fusion with their ingroup, which predicts

endorsement of violence and online harassment (Rousis et al., 2023). By behaving antagonistically, they elicit condemnation from society, which they interpret as confirmation that society victimizes them, thereby justifying further antagonism. By engaging with incels as a homogenous enemy group, media and policymakers risk reinforcing the very dynamics they aim to reduce.

Third, distorted portrayals risk unfairly obscuring the reality of incels' lived experiences. Empirical research consistently shows that most incels are not violent, not aligned with far-right extremism, and instead struggle with poor mental health, including depression, anxiety, loneliness, and autism (see Costello, 2025 and Costello et al., 2024 for reviews). Alarmingly, approximately 20% of incels report experiencing daily thoughts of suicide (Costello et al., 2025). Yet these realities lack the same cognitive appeal as stories about a group-level threat to women, and so they are overshadowed in public discourse. The very cognitive attraction rules that explain the cultural virality of the incel narrative also explain why these misrepresentations persist.

The aforementioned Netflix drama *Adolescence* illustrates this problem vividly. Despite being a work of fiction, the series has been repeatedly described as a "documentary" by Prime Minister Starmer, led to the leader of the opposition being accused of a "dereliction of duty" for failing to watch it, and inspired government-backed plans to screen the show in every UK secondary school (Costello, 2025). The strengths and

weaknesses of a TV show would not normally merit policymaker attention, but *Adolescence* is different precisely because it resonates so powerfully with our evolved cognitive biases. Its cultural virality is unsurprising, but the danger lies in mistaking verisimilitude (i.e., the convincing appearance of truth) for actual evidence. Policy decisions must be grounded in sober, evidence-based research (e.g., Whittaker et al., 2024) rather than guided by highly emotive dramatizations. Fiction may help stimulate dialogue, but it cannot substitute for empirical reality. In fact, recognizing when attention is being disproportionately captured by content that is cognitively attractive, policymakers, journalists, and educators should even actively *counter-balance* these distortions.

Finally, there are implications for media coverage of the rare cases of incel-inspired violence. Research on mass killers shows that many "cruise for a cause," seeking ideologies that will maximize their notoriety (Lankford, 2016). The intense media focus on incels may therefore inadvertently make the ideology more attractive to such individuals, as was the case with the Toronto van killer. To mitigate this risk, we support the Institute for Research on Male Supremacism's (2023) call for "no notoriety protocols", which urge media outlets to avoid amplifying perpetrators' names and manifestos.

In short, these insights highlight the need for restraint and responsibility. Journalists, policymakers, and academics must resist the pull of sensationalism and prioritize accuracy over virality. Responsible

reporting should emphasize the diversity and complexity of incels' lived experiences rather than reinforcing the most cognitively attractive, but less representative, narratives. Only by grounding responses in evidence rather than sensationalism can we avoid moral panic and promote interventions that address the very real problems at stake.

Conclusion

Stories about incels spread because they align with evolved cognitive biases, not because they accurately reflect the group's reality. Recognizing this distinction is essential, because exaggerating incels as a monolithic threat risks reinforcing their sense of persecution, obscuring their real struggles, and fueling counterproductive moral panics. A more responsible path lies in grounding responses in evidence, not sensationalism.

References

Acerbi, A. (2019). Cognitive attraction and online misinformation. *Palgrave Communications, 5*, Article 15. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-019-0224-y

Acerbi, A. (2019b). *Cultural evolution in the digital age*, Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198835943.001.0001

Amnesty International (2015, January 29). Boko Haram: A glance at the deadliest 5 years. Retrieved from https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/01/boko-haram-glance/

Apostolou, M., Sullman, M., Birkás, B., Błachnio, A., Bushina, E., Calvo, F., ... & Font-Mayolas, S. (2023). Mating performance and singlehood across 14 nations. *Evolutionary Psychology*, *21*(1), 14747049221150169. https://doi.org/10.1177/14747049221150169

Apostolou, M., Sullman, M., Blachnio, A., Burysek, O., Bushina, E., Calvo, F., Costello, W., Helmy, M., Hill, T., Galatiani Karageorgiou, M., Lisun, Y., Manrique-Millones, D., Manrique-Pino, O., Ohtsubo, Y., Przepiorka, A., Saar, O. C., Tekes, B., Thomas, A. G., Wang, Y. … Font-Mayolas, S. (2024). Emotional wellbeing and life satisfaction of singles and mated people across 12 nations. *Evolutionary Psychological Science,* DOI: 10.1007/s40806-024-00416-0.

Baselice, K. A. (2024). Analyzing Incels through the lens of evolutionary psychology. *Culture and Evolution*, *20*(1), 42-58. https://doi.org/10.1556/2055.2022.00016

Baumeister, R. F., Bratslavsky, E., Finkenauer, C., & Vohs, K. D. (2001). Bad is stronger than good. *Review of general psychology*, *5*(4), 323-370. https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2680.5.4.323

Benenson, J. F., & Markovits, H. (2024). Young adults' desired life tradeoffs: love first, sex last. *Scientific Reports*, *14*(1), 19680. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-024-70742-7

Betzig, L. (2012). Means, variances, and ranges in reproductive success: comparative evidence. *Evolution and Human Behavior*, *33*(4), 309-317. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.evolhumbehav.2011.10.008

Blake, K. R., & Brooks, R. C. (2022). Societies should not ignore their incel problem. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2022.11.007

Boyer, P. (2001). *Religion explained: The evolutionary origins of religious thought*. Basic Books.

Brady, W. J., Wills, J. A., Jost, J. T., Tucker, J. A., & Van Bavel, J. J. (2017). Emotion shapes the diffusion of moralized content in social networks. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *114*(28), 7313-7318. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1618923114

Buskell, A. (2017). What are cultural attractors?. *Biology & Philosophy*, *32*(3), 377-394. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10539-017-9570-6

Buss, D. M. (1995). Evolutionary psychology: A new paradigm for psychological science. *Psychological Inquiry*, *6*(1), 1-30. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327965pli0601_1

Buss, D. M. (1995). Psychological sex differences: Origins through sexual selection. *American Psychologist, 50*(3), 164–168. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.50.3.164

Buss, D. M. (2017). Sexual conflict in human mating. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, *26*(4), 307-313. https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721417695559

Buss, D. M., & Schmitt, D. P. (1993). Sexual strategies theory: An evolutionary perspective on human mating. *Psychological Review, 100(2)*, 204–232. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.100.2.204

Buss, D. M., Durkee, P. K., Shackelford, T. K., Bowdle, B. F., Schmitt, D. P., Brase, G. L.,

Choe, J. C., & Trofimova, I. (2020). Human status criteria: Sex differences and similarities across 14 nations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 119*(5), 979–998. https://doi.org/10.1037/pspa0000206

Chapman, H. A., Kim, D. A., Susskind, J. M., & Anderson, A. K. (2009). In bad taste: Evidence for the oral origins of moral disgust. *Science*, *323*(5918), 1222-1226. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1165565

Chapman, H. A., & Anderson, A. K. (2013). Things rank and gross in nature: a review and synthesis of moral disgust. *Psychological bulletin*, *139*(2), 300. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0030964

Cosmides, L., & Tooby, J. (2010). Groups in mind: The coalitional roots of war and morality. In H. Høgh-Olesen (Ed.), *Human morality and sociality: Evolutionary and comparative perspectives* (pp. 191–234). Palgrave Macmillan.

Costello, W. (2023). The Allure of Inceldom: Why incels resist ascension. *Aporia Magazine.* https://www.aporiamagazine.com/p/the-allure-of-inceldom-why-incels

Costello, W. (2025, April 15). What Adolescence gets right and wrong about incels. *American Institute for Boys and Men*. https://aibm.org/commentary/what-adolescence-gets-right-and-wrong-about-incels/

Costello, W. (2025). Incels (Involuntary Celibates): Diagnosing the Effects of the Black Pill. In: Harper, C.A., *et al.* Sexual Crime and the Internet. Sexual Crime. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-95844-1_6

Costello, W., Rolon, V., Thomas, A. G., & Schmitt, D. (2022). Levels of well-being among men who are incel (involuntarily celibate). *Evolutionary Psychological Science, 8*(4), 375–390. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40806-022-00336-x

Costello, W., Rolon, V., Thomas, A. G., & Schmitt, D. P. (2023). The Mating Psychology of Incels (Involuntary Celibates): Misfortunes, Misperceptions, and Misrepresentations. *The Journal of Sex Research*, *61*(7), 989–1000. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2023.2248096

Costello, W., & Buss, D. M. (2023). Why isn't there more incel violence? *Adaptive Human Behavior and Physiology, 9*(3), 252–259. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40750-023-00220-3

Costello, W., Daly, S. E., Sparks, B., & Thomas, A. G. (2024, September 6). More than Misogyny: The Merit of a Mental Health Perspective in Incel Research. https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/92fhr

Costello, W., Whittaker, J., & Thomas, A. G. (2025). The dual pathways hypothesis of incel harm: A model of harmful attitudes and beliefs among involuntary celibates. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 1-22. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-025-03161-y

Costello, W., & Thomas, A. G. (2025). Seeing through the black-pill: Incels are wrong about what people think of them. *Personality and Individual Differences*, *237*, 113041. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2025.113041

Cottee, S. (2020). Incel (E) motives: Resentment, shame and revenge. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, 44*(2), 93–114. https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2020.1822589

Curry, T. R., Lee, G., & Rodriguez, S. F. (2004). Does victim gender increase sentence severity? Further explorations of gender dynamics and sentencing outcomes. *Crime & Delinquency*, *50*(3), 319-343. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011128703256265

Daly, S. E., & Reed, S. M. (2022). "I Think Most of Society Hates Us": A Qualitative Thematic Analysis of Interviews with Incels. *Sex Roles*, 86(1–2), 14–33. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-021-01250-5

Darwin, C. (1871). *The descent of man, and selection in relation to sex*. John Murray.

Dawkins, R. (1976). *The selfish gene*. Oxford University Press.

Dubourg, E., Thouzeau, V., de Dampierre, C., Mogoutov, A., & Baumard, N. (2023). Exploratory preferences explain the human fascination for imaginary worlds in fictional stories. *Scientific Reports*, *13*(1), 8657. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-023-35151-2

Dubourg, E., & Baumard, N. (2022). Why imaginary worlds? The psychological foundations and cultural evolution of fictions with

imaginary worlds. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, *45*, e276. doi:10.1017/S0140525X21000923

Eaton, A. A., & Rose, S. (2011). Has dating become more egalitarian? A 35 year review using sex roles. *Sex Roles*, *64*(11), 843-862. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-011-9957-9

FeldmanHall, O., Dalgleish, T., Evans, D., Navrady, L., Tedeschi, E., & Mobbs, D. (2016). Moral chivalry: Gender and harm sensitivity predict costly altruism. *Social psychological and personality science*, *7*(6), 542-551. https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550616647448

Ging, D. (2019). Alphas, betas, and incels: Theorizing the masculinities of the manosphere. *Men and masculinities*, *22*(4), 638-657. https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X17706

Graso, M., Reynolds, T., & Aquino, K. (2023). Worth the risk? Greater acceptance of instrumental harm befalling men than women. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 52*, 2433-2445. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-023-02571-0

Graso, M., & Reynolds, T. (2024). A feminine advantage in the domain of harm: a review and path forward. *Biology Letters*, *20*(11), 20240381. https://doi.org/10.1098/rsbl.2024.0381

Hailu, S. (2025, January 16). 'Adolescence' becomes Netflix's No. 4 most popular English-language series ever with 114 million views and counting. *Variety*. https://variety.com/2025/tv/news/adolescence-netflix-ratings-record-1236363315/

Haselton, M. G., & Buss, D. M. (2000). Error management theory: a new perspective on biases in cross-sex mind reading. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *78*(1), 81. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.78.1.81

Henrich, J., & Gil-White, F. J. (2001). The evolution of prestige: Freely conferred deference as a mechanism for enhancing the benefits of cultural transmission. *Evolution and Human Behavior*, *22*(3), 165-196. https://doi.org/10.1016/S1090-5138(00)00071-4

Hobbs, D. R., & Gallup Jr, G. G. (2011). Songs as a medium for embedded reproductive messages. *Evolutionary Psychology*, *9*(3), 390-416. https://doi.org/10.1177/147470491100900309

Hoffman, B., Ware, J., & Shapiro, E. (2020). Assessing the threat of incel violence. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, 43*(7), 565–587. https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2020.1751459

Institute for Research on Male Supremacism. (2023). *Recommendations for reporting on male supremacist violence and misogynist incels*. https://www.theirms.org/forjournalists

Jaki, S., De Smedt, T., Gwóźdź, M., Panchal, R., Rossa, A., & De Pauw, G. (2019). Online hatred of women in the Incels.me forum: Linguistic analysis and automatic detection. *Journal of Language Aggression and Conflict*, *7*(2), 240–268. https://doi.org/10.1075/jlac.00026.jak

Jankowiak, W. R., & Fischer, E. F. (1992). A cross-cultural perspective on romantic love. *Ethnology*, *31*(2), 149-155. https://doi.org/10.2307/3773618

Lankford, A. (2016). Fame-seeking rampage shooters: Initial findings and empirical predictions. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, *27*, 122-129. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2016.02.002

Maier, G. (2022). *Attitudes towards incels: A meta study on negative attitudes in research* (Master's thesis, University of South-Eastern Norway). USN Open Archive. https://hdl.handle.net/11250/2992355

R. v. Minassian, 2021 ONSC 1258 (CanLII). https://www.canlii.org/en/on/onsc/doc/2021/2021onsc1258/2021onsc1258.html

Norenzayan, A., & Atran, S. (2003). Cognitive and emotional processes in the cultural transmission of natural and nonnatural beliefs. In M. Schaller & C. S. Crandall (Eds.), *The psychological foundations of culture*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781410608994

Perilloux, C., Duntley, J. D., & Buss, D. M. (2012). The costs of rape. *Archives of Sexual behavior*, *41*(5), 1099-1106. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-011-9863-9

Reuters (2023, March 9). *Islamist militants kill at least 25 in Nigeria's Borno state*. https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/islamist-militants-kill-least-25-nigerias-borno-state-2023-03-09/

Rousis, G. J., Martel, F. A., Bosson, J. K., & Swann Jr, W. B. (2023). Behind the blackpill: Self-verification and identity fusion predict endorsement of violence against women among self-identified incels. *Personality and social psychology bulletin*, *50*(11), 1531-1545. https://doi.org/10.1177/01461672231166481

Rottweiler, B., Clemmow, C., & Gill, P. (2024). A common psychology of male violence? Assessing the effects of misogyny on intentions to engage in violent extremism, interpersonal violence and support for violence against women. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, *37*(3), 287-312. https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2023.2292723

Rozin, P., & Royzman, E. B. (2001). Negativity bias, negativity dominance, and contagion. *Personality and social psychology review*, *5*(4), 296-320. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327957PSPR0504_2

Scalise Sugiyama, M. (2021). Co-occurrence of Ostensive Communication and Generalizable Knowledge in Forager Storytelling: Cross-Cultural Evidence of Teaching in Forager Societies. *Human Nature*, *32*(1), 279-300. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12110-021-09385-w

Schmitt, D. P., & Jonason, P. K. (2019). Self-esteem as an adaptive sociometer of mating success: Evaluating evidence of sex-specific psychological design across 10 world regions. *Personality and Individual Differences*, *143*, 13-20. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2019.02.011

Scrivner, C. (2021). The psychology of morbid curiosity: Development and initial validation of the morbid curiosity scale. *Personality and Individual Differences*, *183*, 111139. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2021.111139

Sperber, D. (1996). *Explaining culture: A naturalistic approach* (Vol. 21). Blackwell: Oxford.

Stewart-Williams, S., Leong, C. X., Seto, S. A., Thomas, A. G., & Wong, X. L. (2024). The harm hypothesis: How perceived harm to women shapes reactions to research on sex differences. *International Journal of Psychology, 59*(3), 495–504. https://doi.org/10.1002/ijop.13101

Tooby, J., & Cosmides, L. (1990). The past explains the present: Emotional adaptations and the structure of ancestral environments. *Ethology and Sociobiology*, *11*(4-5), 375-424. https://doi.org/10.1016/0162-3095(90)90017-Z

Trivers, R. L. (1972). Parental investment and sexual selection. In B. Campbell (Ed.), *Sexual selection and the descent of man: 1871–1971* (pp. 136–179). Aldine. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315129266-7

Von Rueden, C., Gurven, M., & Kaplan, H. (2011). Why do men seek status? Fitness payoffs to dominance and prestige. *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, *278*(1715), 2223-2232. https://doi.org/10.1098/rspb.2010.2145

Whittaker, J., Costello, W., & Thomas, A. G. (2024). *Predicting harm among incels (involuntary celibates): The roles of mental health, ideological*

belief and social networking (Independent report). Commission for Countering Extremism. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/predicting-harm-among-incels-involuntary-celibates

Winegard, B. M., Winegard, B., & Geary, D. C. (2013). If you've got it, flaunt it: Humans flaunt attractive partners to enhance their status and desirability. *PloS one, 8*(8), e72000. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0072000

Winegard, B., Winegard, B., Reynolds, T., Geary, D. C., & Baumeister, R. F. (2017). One's better half: Romantic partners function as social signals. *Evolutionary Psychological Science, 3*(4), 294-305. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40806-017-0095-7