

Incels, the blackpill and the glorious evolution: an evolutionary psychological perspective

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Abstract

The modern age of the Internet has been marked by a rise in misogynistic cybergroups spreading extremist ideologies, most popular of which are incels (involuntary celibates). Incels are a subgroup of the manosphere, characterized by their lack of sexual experience and the desire to achieve sexual relations, alongside their misogynistic and radical tendencies. Research papers about incels have grown exponentially in recent years, especially in an attempt to apply evolutionary principles to their knowledge of incel ideology and behavior. Incels are an elusive subject because of their anonymity and social exclusion, which makes them difficult to study empirically or directly. This paper aims to apply core concepts of evolutionary psychology, analyze known research of incel behavior and posit new insights. Firstly, it explores the concept of inceldom. In addition, this paper attempts to resolve the debate around the actuality of incel violence. Lastly, it analyses known evolutionary explanations of incel behavior and posits a new one—envy as a key factor in incel behavior and ideology.

Keywords: envy, evolution, evolutionary psychology, incel violence, incels, involuntary celibate

Introduction

More and more space on the Internet is being dominated by men expressing outrage about men's rights and perpetuating misogynistic rhetoric among like-minded individuals, most of whom are also men. They conceal themselves in hidden nooks of our cyberspace, creating their own websites or lurking on the dark web, but also occupying comment sections on more popular social media platforms to spread their ideology. This community is called the *manosphere*. It consists of many different groups who share the belief that male rights are jeopardized, such as Men's Rights

Activists (MRAs), Pickup-Artists (PUAs), Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW), the Red Pill (TRP) and, famously, *incels* (“involuntary celibates”; Bachaud & Johns, 2023).

Incels are the most well-known subgroup of the manosphere. The original term, *invcel* before it got shortened, was coined in 1997 by a Canadian woman, Alana, who desired to connect with others experiencing similar struggles of social ineptitude (Weida, 2024). Alana created a website called *Alana’s Involuntary Celibacy Project*, which became a forum for other single people, and was not intended for any expression of misogynistic sentiment. According to Kelly et al. (2021), the overlap between Pick-Up Artists and incels facilitated a community of dissatisfied heterosexual men who perceived that they were entitled to sex and dehumanized women. The spread of this ideology pushed away other single people from this project, even Alana herself (Weida, 2024). Throughout the 2010s, incels flooded other more mainstream forums, such as Reddit and 4chan, and the term incel became a namesake for misogyny and extremism, as well as an insult to those who are socially awkward (Weida, 2024). Incels are characterized by their inability to form sexual and/or romantic relationships despite their best efforts. Most of the incel subculture consists of heterosexual men (ADL, 2020), as grievances expressed by women and men differ significantly. Ling (2022) explains that *femcel* (female incel) ideology is marked by a distinct desire for companionship, while incels crave sexual relations. Moreover, incel grievances are defined by male supremacist attitudes and rage both towards women who will not engage in sexual relationships as well as sexually successful men (Moonshot, 2023). In this paper, the term “incel” will refer to heterosexual men exclusively, since the evolutionary principles and studies later described refer to these men.

Evolutionary psychologists take a specific interest in incels given that their situation reflects observable evolutionary adaptations, such as mating strategies, mate deprivation, male aggression and the impact of modern society on evolved human psyche (Lindner, 2023a, 2023b; Baselice, 2024; Costello & Buss, 2023). Psychologists can observe this directly through incels’ misuse of evolutionary language and principles to justify their ideology (Bachaud & Johns, 2023). However, observing specific evolutionary principles is possible only through observing the way incels interact, what circumstances they share, how they behave towards non-incels and how they differ from the rest of the population. In spite of the growing interest in this fringe group, the data is still scarce and incels remain an elusive subject to research. Most research is based on indirect

methods as samples of incels willing to participate in direct methods of research are extremely sparse (Baselice, 2024; Lindner, 2023a). Baselice (2024) notes that most of what we do know about incelism is based on qualitative studies that observe these forums, linguistic analyses of incel posts (Brooks et al., 2022; Bachaud & Johns, 2023), surveys (Speckhard et al., 2021) and, occasionally, experimental research. The problem with incel research is that most samples are relatively small and their representativeness is questionable. Stijelja and Mishara's (2023) meta-analysis finds that only a small fraction of this sample is active on incel forums which makes it difficult to detect specific differences between incels and adult virgins. Furthermore, traditional tools used to analyze texts of incel forums may be insufficient (Lindner, 2023a), since incels develop their own terminologies to distinguish themselves and encode conversations to avoid getting flagged (Moonshot, 2023).

However, while incel research is scarce, research on adult virginity and late sexual onset does exist and can be applied to an extent. In their meta-analysis, Stijelja and Mishara (2023) find that the normativity of sexual experience leads adult virgins to feel as if they are "off-time" with their peers, which leads to stress, anxiety, a negative body image and a worse relationship with their peers and makes them more likely to be stigmatized. This sentiment is echoed in many studies surrounding incels. Lindner (2023a) highlights their obsession with physical appearance as well as women's unwillingness to engage in sexual relations with adult virgin men. Extensive research underlined incels' mental health, suicidal tendencies and ideation (Cottee, 2020; Daly & Laskovtsov, 2021; Speckhard et al., 2021; Costello et al., 2022; Baselice, 2024). There is a rising focus on former incels and their exiting strategies, specifically on the importance of self-care and, surprisingly, the unimportance of sexual relations when leaving incelism (Gheorghe & Yuzva Clement, 2023; Burns & Boislard, 2024). Some research has explored incels' misuse of evolutionary psychology to justify their ideology (Bachaud & Johns, 2023; Baselice, 2024). Most papers on incels and evolution are conceptual or theoretical (Lindner, 2023a; Baselice, 2024), including this paper.

This article will explain incel ideology and address the question of whether incels are violent. Furthermore, it will explore evolutionary and social components that gave rise to extremist viewpoints in low-status men. Lastly, this article will explain existing hypotheses of incel behavior and explore new ones, such as the interaction of envy and low reproduction value.

Incels

Certain key beliefs shape incel ideology. According to Moonshot (2023), in their guide to incel symbols and terminology, incels believe their lack of sexual relations is due to genetic factors (i.e. their looks), evolutionary adaptations of women and social structures that conspire against them (i.e. the dating scene). This manifests in something incels call the 80/20 rule (Moonshot, 2023), or the Pareto principle (Weida, 2024), which means that 80% of women are monopolized by the top 20% of men, leaving the rest deprived. Incels call themselves “genetically inferior”, believing that evolution itself works against their existence, which in turn creates a nihilistic outlook and can lead to violent and suicidal tendencies (Baselice, 2024). However, quite contradictorily, incels consider themselves intellectually superior to most of their peers, especially women, and consider sex and romantic relationships as something they are entitled to that society withholds (Lindner, 2023a).

Incels are haunted by their *sexual market value* (SMV), which is perceived as nonexistent (Lindner, 2023a). Foremost, they believe their lack of sexual experience makes them undesirable, especially compared with their peers. This compels them to seek out individuals with similar frustrations, which further amplifies incel ideologies. Furthermore, because incels believe they are genetically predetermined not to realize sexual relations, they harbor a deep resentment towards handsome men, as well as attractive women (Cottee, 2021). These individuals are known as *Chads* and *Stacies* (Moonshot, 2023). Incels believe Chads monopolize the sexual marketplace, leaving incels with no opportunities to achieve sexual relations. Stacy is the female version of Chad. Stacies are often the victims of incel violence online, such as the overused slogan, “OnlyFans detected, opinion rejected”, spouted when a woman says anything (OnlyFans being an online platform of content one pays a subscription for, often concerning adult content creators; Internet Matters, 2024). *Becky* is a less desirable woman, a counterpart to incels, who desires Chad as well. Incels feel entitled to sex from Becky, whom they view as inferior and unworthy to reject them. This dichotomy of women echoes Freud’s Madonna-whore complex, defined by Hertler et al. (2023) as a byproduct of male psychology in which men exaggerate differences and divide women into extremes of virtue (Becky, to an extent) and vice (Stacy). Hertler et al. (2023) believe that the evolutionary background for this complex is paternal uncertainty, as it may represent the

binary decision to invest in an offspring or not. Furthermore, they postulate that short-term mating strategies favor promiscuity, while, when choosing to father a child, men favor purity. Similarly, incels may believe they are deserving of a virtuous woman, since the only way to cope with their sexual inexperience is to demean women, most of whom they believe are promiscuous. These factors manifest in incels' *blackpill* mentality, based on the iconic "red pill"/"blue pill" scene from *The Matrix* (Wachowski & Wachowski, 1999). Taking the black pill represents the extreme nihilistic view that entering romantic relationships is impossible for genetically inferior men (Lindner, 2023a). The blackpill mentality fosters a hopeless worldview which paints women as oppressors who gatekeep sex or, better yet, social acceptance, thus creating even more misogynistic narratives. The fatalistic aspect of the incel ideology further entrenches its members and might make it even more difficult to leave incelism (Gheorghe & Yuzva Clement, 2023). The online nature of incel communities creates echo chambers, where ideas and posts are accepted by all its members with no outsider perspective. This reinforces existing beliefs as well as creates even more extremist views that radicalize its members further. Baseline (2024) argues that blackpilled incels believe the only way they can improve their life is to reverse the feminist movement. This ideology manifests in misogynistic actions or, at its most extreme, in stripping women of their human rights and advocating for treating women as property.

Incels are often suicidal; according to ADL (2020), 67.5% of incels on incel.co seriously considered suicide, while Speckhard et al. (2021) report that a third of their sample engaged in self-harm. Daly and Laskovtsov (2021) analyze incel Reddit posts detailing suicide methods, describe the use of the verb "roping" to entail suicide, and find that incels use forums as a way to research suicide methods. Even though there is no concrete data on committed suicides or other factors that may influence this phenomenon, suicide ideation is a problem in the incel community (Baseline, 2024). Why incels are suicidal is a manifold answer, since the interaction of different factors makes it hard to pinpoint the cause. Not only that, psychological research usually requires direct contact with the population, whether researchers want to conduct a survey, interview or an experiment, but this sample is quite hard to get. However, Baseline (2024) provides an evolutionary perspective as they apply de Catanzaro's (1986) model to incel behavior. De Catanzaro's (1986) mathematical model of self-preservation and self-destruction suggests that, in some cases, staying alive might lower one's fitness if one perceives oneself as a significant burden to their family. Given that one's inclusive fitness is also dependent on their kin's ability to

reproduce and pass on their shared genes, an incel might perceive himself as too large of a burden and, evolutionarily, might benefit from ending his own life. Opperman et al. (2015) found that suicide ideation positively correlates to a perception of one's own burdensomeness and low interpersonal connections in adolescents. However, this sample was relatively small, consisted mostly of women and excluded participants who had engaged in suicidal behavior (had a history of suicide attempts). Difficulty in generalizing these conclusions, as well as excluding the most vulnerable group of individuals with this issue, makes these findings significantly less robust. Bennett et al. (2025) find that interpersonal connection and loneliness are crucial predictors of suicide ideation in their large male sample. The authors also find that many factors distinguish suicide ideation and attempting suicide, which was one issue with the previously mentioned study. Specifically, Bennett et al. (2025) find that emotional suppression, perceived mattering to others and sexuality increase the likelihood of suicide attempts, all of which prove the importance of non-evolutionary factors in suicidal tendencies. While an important insight, it is essential to note that suicidal tendencies are not moderated exclusively by evolutionary adaptation and should not be considered as such. Suicidal thoughts are complex and highly individual. De Catanzaro's (1986) model remains unproven and, therefore, cannot be regarded as a definitive, let alone exclusive, cause of suicide.

Incel violence

Are incels violent? This question presents a central issue in the debate concerning incels, especially for evolutionary psychologists. Lindner (2023a) asserts that incels are inherently violent. According to the FBI and DHS (2021), incels would be considered a terrorist threat due to their aggressive ideology, especially in light of the mass murders committed by Elliot Rodger or Alek Minassian, whose motives were rooted in misogyny or directly connected to the incel community. Rodger and Minassian are considered "saints" in incel culture, along with many others, as their actions resonate within incel communities (Moonshot, 2023). However, in their critique of Lindner's (2023a) work, Costello and Buss (2023) argue that incels are comparatively nonviolent. In contrast to other groups in the manosphere and the general population, they exhibit less willingness to commit sexual crimes (Speckhard et al., 2021). Moreover, Moskalenko et al.

(2022) found that, on a five-point scale measuring attitudes related to incel violence, the average incel scores 1.83 for the statement: “I admire Elliot Rodger for his Santa Barbara attack”.

It is crucial to note that both Lindner (2023a) and Costello and Buss (2023) implicitly focus only on acts of mass violence (e.g. Elliot Rodgers 2014 Isla Vista attack) or sexual crimes. In further publications, Lindner (2023b) concedes that suicide and suicide ideation is the only type of violence inherent to incels. However, this categorization has its contentions, since misogyny manifests through online violence as well as interpersonal violence. Society should not have to witness extreme acts of violence, like rape or murder, to recognize the danger of misogynistic ideologies, especially as online echo chambers expand rapidly. The problem with Lindner's (2023a, 2023b) analysis is assuming that most, if not all, incels are on the pathway to extreme violence through radicalization. Lindner's (2023a) argument reflects the *mate deprivation hypothesis*, which posits that if a person is headed towards certain reproductive failure, they are prone to committing sexual crimes to increase their fitness. However, this hypothesis lacks empirical support. Lalumière et al. (1996) found that heterosexual men who had significantly more sexual experience and a higher perceived mating value were found to be more sexually coercive. Furthermore, most perpetrators of sexual violence are found to be men of power, status and, therefore, higher reproductive value (Lalumière et al., 1996). Lankford et al. (2024) found that male celebrities are not only more likely to commit infidelity, but also are more likely to commit sexual crimes than the average US citizen. The second result was gathered using high estimates, which makes it less robust, but with celebrities' tendencies to cover up their sexual transgressions, it may be accurate (Lankford et al., 2024). They conclude this by analyzing existing public documents (newspapers, books, media reports, etc.) to identify if any of their chosen celebrities engaged in infidelity, sexual harassment, sexual assault or solicited a sex worker. While Costello and Buss's (2023) conclusion that incels may not exhibit extreme measures of physical or sexual violence is more reasonable compared to Lindner (2023a), incels do exhibit violent tendencies through three tiers outlined by Moonshot (2023): personal, interpersonal and societal. Personal violence is expressed through suicide ideation, self-harm or suicide itself. As agreed upon by all authors in question, this is something that, unfortunately, characterizes the incel movement. Interpersonal violence is between an incel and an individual, which includes gender-based crimes such as murder, rape and others fueled by misogyny (Moonshot, 2023). This tier includes other categories of violence, such as actions to humiliate and emotionally hurt women (hate speech,

bullying, etc.) and actions to make women feel fearful and uncomfortable. This type of violence is referred to as “lifefuel” by incels. This tier might represent general incel violence more saliently and deserves greater focus in future research—for example, analyses of incel sites or surveys of agreement to incel posts. The last tier of violence is societal violence, which concerns mass murders, such as ones committed by Rodgers and Minassian. This type of violence may represent a way to revel in the pain and suffering of a society which, in the eyes of incels, oppresses them (Moonshot, 2023). It is crucial to define incel violence, since it ties in closely with evolutionary adaptations that shape incel behavior. The question remains, why are incels unlikely to commit murder and rape? The answer to this may come from the *male sedation hypothesis* (Costello & Buss, 2023).

The male sedation hypothesis posits that there may be alternatives, specifically pornography, in the online world that diminish the motivation for real-life mate competition. Pornography can provide an illusion of fitness cues that imply reproduction needs being met, cues that might “trick” the evolved male psyche to believe he has escaped reproductive failure. Kendall (2006) claims that pornography might subdue rapists, as it represents consensual sex and induces sexual activity (masturbation). Sexual activity can substitute the need for sexual violence, thus making pornography itself a substitute for rape. Previous research found that the legalization of pornography reduced the number of sexual crimes committed, mostly conducted in former communist countries when democratic regimes were first established. For example, in the Czech Republic, despite other crime rates rising, the legal definition of rape becoming broader alongside more vigilant law enforcement, sexual crime rates still dropped against all odds (Diamond et al., 2011). A similar effect was found in Japan, China and the US (Diamond & Uchiyama, 1999; Diamond, 1999). This effect may seem counterintuitive, as one would believe pornography might make one more prone to committing sexual crimes. The *confluence model of sexual aggression*, introduced by Malamuth et al. (1996), defines three proximate causes of sexual aggression: hostile masculinity, impersonal sexuality, and, introduced later on, pornography use. Kohut et al. (2021) define hostile masculinity as a narcissistic and defensive orientation and a need to control and dominate women, while they define impersonal sexuality as a promiscuous and detached approach to sexual relations. This model is widely recognized and has relatively reliable empirical support (Bruera et al., 2022). However, the confluence model directly contradicts the findings from Diamond et al. (2011) and others. The following two studies challenge the confluence model.

Kohut et al. (2021) found no correlation between pornography and sexual aggression in Croatian male high schoolers, nor interactions with either of the remaining factors of the confluence model. Malamuth et al. (1996) explain that pornography may activate cognitive processes that predetermine sexual aggression; however, Kohut et al. (2021) point out that their sample was very young and may not have developed these cognitive processes yet. Furthermore, the self-report measures from these teens may have been modified for social desirability and underreported, which may have led to inaccurate results. Other variables may have confounded the relationship between pornography and sexual aggression, but the authors took care to establish the differences between each sample, as well as test additional variables. Additionally, Kohut et al. (2021) found that sensation-seeking facets and previous sexual aggression correlated significantly with sexual aggression, positing a relationship between personality and sexual crimes. Almeida et al. (2024) tested the relationship between hentai (a subgenre of Japanese anime or manga with explicit sexual content) usage and sexually aggressive strategies, and they found a significant positive correlation, on a large sample of college students. However, any correlation of hentai usage and sexual aggression for men was lost once they controlled the mediator rape myth endorsement, the idea that promiscuous women will and deserve to be raped. The same effect was found for the frequency of pornography use. For women, frequency of pornography use did influence sexual aggression, however this effect was lost once mediated by rape myth endorsement. They also found that the intensity of hentai content predicts rape myth endorsement. The problem with this study is that they implicitly assert that hentai fosters rape myth endorsement, which reflects directionality problems in correlation research. It is more likely that individuals who already have high rape myth endorsement seek out intense hentai content (which portrays sexually deviant behavior). Furthermore, this study suffers the same methodological issues as the previous one, since self-report measures were used and they can be underreported, especially with a topic such as hentai use and rape myth endorsement. It is also difficult to claim full mediatory effects of rape myth endorsement on sexual aggression, since Almeida et al. (2024) did not take account of confounding variables. As the previous study by Kohut et al. (2021) found, sensation seeking could also influence results concerning pornography use. Further examination into the relationship between personality and sexual aggression could be useful. What brings the confluence model into question is the fact that neither study found a direct link between pornography and sexual aggression, and both found mediatory effects correlated to sexual aggression. These findings

reflect greater support for the male sedation hypothesis and highlight the importance of further research into sexual aggression.

Evolutionary features

Incels and evolutionary psychology are intrinsically intertwined. The fundamental principles of human mating strategies and the sexual marketplace underline incel behavior and ideology, since incels present a unique subset of males who perceive they cannot achieve reproductive success. Evolutionary psychology seeks to understand the core differences between men and women through mating strategy, selection and sexual competition. Crucially, incel grievances are uniquely tied to evolutionary psychology. Their ideology is shaped by a cognitive distortion in their mating psychology (Costello et al., 2024), their inequality on the sexual marketplace and their perception as inferior in competition with other men. Additionally, incels misconstrue principles found in evolutionary psychology not only to rationalize their situation, but also to justify their misogynistic ideologies (Bachaud & Johns, 2023; Baselice, 2024). Baselice (2024) underlines incels' focus on evolutionary psychology as they cite reputable psychologists like David Buss, Anthony Volk, and Todd Shackelford as well as journals in their forums. The impact of evolutionary psychology on the development of incel ideology can and should be observed directly by psychologists, since it is severely unexplored.

Van Valkenburgh (2018) notes the misuse of evolutionary principles from Pick-Up Artists (PUAs), who represent a subgroup of the manosphere. Specifically, PUAs apply known evolutionary facts to create a more effective pick-up strategy. The most popular hypotheses in the manosphere mostly revolve around female mating strategies, which is furthered by the prominence of sex research in evolutionary psychology. Van Valkenburgh (2018) points out the popularity of the sexual marketplace theory (Baumeister & Vohs, 2004) among PUAs. Concretely, the incels' interpretation of the *dual mating hypothesis* is the most popular in the incel community (Bachaud & Johns, 2023). The idea is that women seek men who will invest in their offspring with resources, then, while ovulating, will mate with a genetically superior man. Incels believe women consistently cheat on their partners with a more attractive man, since physical attraction is considered a key fitness cue, indicating genetic superiority and increasing the likelihood of their offsprings inheriting "good" genes. To incels, this notion proves that monogamy is nonexistent,

or, at the very least, ineffective. This example illustrates how incels often misinterpret findings in evolutionary psychology to further their own beliefs. This perception is further facilitated by the phenomenon of concealed ovulation, meaning men cannot ascertain when women are fertile by their appearance. Furthermore, incels believe that the dual mating hypothesis is supported by the *sexy son hypothesis*, according to which women are more likely to choose ornamented males (in incel terms: Chads) to birth attractive offspring who will have greater reproductive success (Prokop et al., 2012). While these are legitimate hypotheses, incels distort them and misconstrue them to fit their extremist narrative. It is important to note that these interpretations are inherently false. Incels suffer from the naturalistic fallacy, since they extract normative conclusions from descriptive research. Evolutionary principles serve to observe the way things are, not how they ought to be. Furthermore, incels do not delve into the original research where these hypotheses were introduced; it is a game of Chinese whispers and at the end, reputable research is watered down and used to fulfil an extremist narrative. Lastly, incels suffer from something called the *gene's eye view* (Bachaud & Johns, 2023), meaning that they believe that and write as if people deliberately act to optimize their reproductive value. Works of evolutionary psychologists have been written from the gene's eye view for simplicity purposes, which allows incels to misinterpret works by reputable psychologists and foster their misogynistic views. Bachaud and Johns (2023) ascertain that the central issue in incels' interpretation of evolutionary psychology is the injection of moral reasoning, which is how research becomes weaponized to degrade women. Evolutionary psychology affects incel ideology in more ways than just justifying it, since evolutionary principles can be applied directly to incel behavior.

Sexual selection. A concept first put forward by Darwin, sexual selection refers to adaptations that do not aid in survival, but enhance one's reproductive value (Brennan, 2010). Two mechanisms allow for sexual selection: intrasexual competition, where members of one sex compete for access to the other, and intersexual selection, where members of one sex choose mates of the other. These are foundational evolutionary mechanisms. It is worth noting that for this study human males engage in intrasexual competition, while females select whom to mate with. A man who is successful in this competition is considered to be of high value. Success can be achieved through direct confrontation with other men or by acquiring more resources that women value. For this reason, the phenomenon of polygyny arises, in which a high-value man can monopolize

multiple desirable women. In polygamous societies, fewer men are able to have children, while most women achieve reproductive success due to this imbalance in the sexual marketplace.

Asymmetric reproduction costs. To produce a child, a woman spends more resources than a man. For example, a woman is pregnant for 9 months and breastfeeds the following 6 months at least, while a man can spend less than 10 minutes conceiving a child. This asymmetry is reflected in sex-specific mating strategies (Larsen & Buss, 2008). Male sexual desire is based on the ability to reproduce as much as possible with as little effort as possible, which in turn fosters a short-term mating strategy, as well as exploitative and predatory desire (Lindner, 2023a). Female sexual desire is different, since they favor social benefits like wealth and status above physical attributes and sex itself, which makes them more selective when choosing a mate and more likely to choose a long-term mating strategy.

Young male syndrome. Wilson and Daly (1985) introduced the phenomenon of the *young male syndrome*. They posit that sexual selection suggests that men should be more willing to engage in violent or risky behavior during the peak of their reproductive value, just as individuals who are doomed for reproductive failure, in an attempt to gain sexual access. Therefore, young men are most prone to risk-taking and violent behavior. The Young male syndrome (Wilson & Daly, 1985) is reflected in crime statistics, as men commit the most crimes during their emerging adulthood. Men commit most murders and are more likely to be both the culprit and the victim (Falk et al., 2014). The Young male syndrome illustrates intrasexual competition that defines the male species. Men are also generally more aggressive, which is thought to be an evolutionary adaptation that would allow males to win intrasexual competitions and be allowed to mate, thus achieving more reproductive success (Larsen & Buss, 2008).

Individuals headed for reproductive failure, like incels, might be more inclined to engage in risky behavior as a response to their perceived undesirability. According to Costello et al. (2024), incels not only have a lower perceived mate value, but also overvalue women's minimum mate preference. Therefore, if incels can show they are better than Chads, they may gain access to women. According to Lindner (2023a), 82% of incels are between the ages of 18 and 30, with men between 18-21 making up the largest percentage, followed by those between 22-25. Incel demographic aligning with the age that exhibits the young male syndrome, combined with their perceived market value, means that incels are more likely to exhibit riskiness and violence. They

may do this through societal violence, however, simply being active on incels sites like incel.is, might satisfy this need for risky behavior. First, most incel sites are getting shut down by different organizations, like Reddit (Bell, 2017), with little success. Moreover, they may be under government investigation as part of a counter terrorist measure (FBI & DHS, 2021). Considering their disdain for society, the idea that they are defying the law may satisfy their need for rebellion and riskiness. Second, the content they create and consume on these sites is extremist and controversial. Engaging with this content might feel like a taboo, evoking a feeling of rule-breaking, while also allowing them to revel in the anonymity incel servers provide. Third, engaging in interpersonal online violence could be an expression of the young male syndrome. Larsen and Buss (2008) postulate that aggression is situational, since everyone is equipped with a gauge of their own capabilities and the capabilities of their rival, and then acts according to their assessment. Given that incels cannot engage in real-life competitions with Chads, thus they must simulate this conflict on sites where they put down both men like Chads and women. This notion is at the center of Lindner's (2023a) *coalitional bargaining hypothesis*. This hypothesis posits that incels create virtual or simulated coalitions to bargain for sexual access against Chads (sexually successful men). Costello and Buss (2023) object to this hypothesis. Their arguments consider the fact that this coalition needs to achieve the goal of gaining sexual access or competing with the Chads. This notion contradicts incels' nature. Incels resent former incels who gain sexual experience, often ostracizing and removing them from their forums (Hinds, 2022). Moreover, the blackpill mentality inherently prohibits any change. Given that we do not see incels utilizing this simulated coalition, Lindner's (2023a) hypothesis remains quite weak. Lindner (2023b) does respond to this criticism, saying that this coalition is a simulation and does not need a goal. Furthermore, Lindner (2023b) posits that incels rehearse intimidation tactics and form alliances. However, the alliance that the incel community represents is fully virtual and intangible, making its value on the sexual marketplace minimal. The more likely explanation is that this fraternity brings consolation to incel grievances or that it exists as a diffusion response to envy.

Envy. Kimplova et al. (2024) define envy as a complex emotion characterized by a feeling of lacking another person's qualities or belongings, as well as the desire to possess them. The interaction between incels and envy is complex, but undeniable. Incels are characterized by a lack of sexual experience and extreme desire to achieve sexual relationships. They exhibit something van de Ven (2016) defines as malicious envy, a need to harm and bring down the object of envy

from its superior position. Incels envy Chads and they also envy attractive women for their sexual success (Cottee, 2020). However, the way incels envy Chads is different from the way they envy Stacies. Kimplova et al. (2024) investigated the differences in envy between the sexes on a large sample of Czech citizens. The results find that women and men envy their respective sex more strongly; women envy other women for their looks, while men envy men for their status. Interestingly, women envy men for status, while men envy women for beauty. These findings likely reflect the perception of “lacking”, that is central to envy. The measures were gathered in interview form, which allows for more complex answers and insight, but also enhances the interviewers’ bias, even though they were trained beforehand. Furthermore, the interview was comprised of a single open-ended question, which limited the control over these variables, given that variables such as intelligence, openness and verbal fluidity can influence the quantity and the quality of a given answer. Using a more guided approach, like the traditional survey with predetermined items, can ensure that participants engage in terms relevant to envy, or that they do not forget something. Moreover, that kind of approach makes it easier to quantify and compare the obtained answers. Lastly, this study was conducted in a very homogeneous culture, thus making generalization more difficult. Notably, this study found that men envy women in terms of a category the authors called “Seduction, Manipulation”, which includes women’s supposed ability to manipulate others, their sex appeal, and the idea that women possess “weapons” that control men. This notion is in line with incels’ perception of women as succubi that control men through offering or withholding sex (Lindner, 2023a). It is important to note that incels might project their social isolation and need for companionship onto the belief that having sex will make them “normal”. Exiting strategies employed by incels support this conclusion given that, after they lose their virginity, most realize it was not enough to feel a sense of normalcy and start making concrete changes to their lives (Burns & Boislard, 2024).

Envy is connected to radicalization. Empirical research has shown that envy positively correlates with extremism and violence associated with radicalism, even when controlling for demographic variables (Moncrieff & Lienard, 2023). These correlations were small to moderate, implying there are more variables at play. The self-report measures of this study also pose a limitation, given that envy is viewed as a socially unacceptable emotion from an evolutionary perspective. In a later study, Moncrieff and Lienard (2024) posit that functions of emotions, particularly envy, align closely with the process of radicalization. Motivational and identificational

components of envy, along with the attribution of responsibility with envy, foster a misguided notion of one's rival and their wrongdoing, thus amplifying feelings of hatred and enabling radicalization. Envy as an emotion was crucial in our evolutionary past. Since ostracization and scarcity were fatal, humans needed to garner an intrinsic motivation to monitor cues of social differentiation and competition (Larsen & Buss, 2008). Additionally, Inoue et al. (2015) found that envy is stronger when a resource is divisible but not expected to be shared. Similarly, in the sexual marketplace, women could be considered a divisible resource that can fulfil almost all of men's needs. Regardless, due to polygyny, higher-status men claim more than one woman, thus making this resource unavailable and increasing feelings of envy. Consequently, the functional reason for envy may be to neutralize superior competitors (Moncrieff & Lienard, 2024).

Envy is looked down upon. Additionally, it lacks an expression that can identify it. The reason for that may be that envy can promote attacks on one's reputation or possessions, thus learning of another's envy lowers their trustworthiness (Moncrieff & Lienard, 2024), which can lead to ostracization. The authors argue that envy reveals more about what one covets, not owns, which can injure one's social status. Envy is inherent to one's self-interest, which can also hurt the community, fostering social isolation. Moncrieff and Lienard (2024) posit that envy has an output-diffusion that encourages enviers to diffuse the responsibility of their envy and promotes creating coalitions. Because of diffusion, envy can create a community of individuals who share a similar envious interest and a goal to actively put down or harm the object of envy, but without individual responsibility. Coalitions provide cover for one's envy, greater bargaining power, as well as size and formidability. Radicalization is closely related to collectivism. Ideologies of a radicalized movement provide already packaged justification for one's violence or envy (Moncrieff & Lienard, 2024). An individual who harbors great envy towards sexually successful rivals and a great desire for companionship has already been radicalized; the incel community is simply there to echo back what has already been decided. Coalitions were exceedingly important in our evolutionary past. Winegard et al. (2020) put forward their *coalition value theory* (CVT), explaining that humans evolved psychological mechanisms to achieve two goals: to maximize their coalition value (being useful to the group) and to maximize their group status. The authors posit that this coalition value is strongly related to self-esteem, which can lead to envy when encountering someone with more value. Building on this idea, it can be posited that incels found themselves undervalued in our traditional coalition, their local communities. Comparing

themselves to Chads or anyone well-adapted to society, incels found their self-esteem wounded, leading to feelings of envy towards these individuals and enabling incels to become radicalized. Considering Lindner's (2023a) *coalitional bargaining theory*, this explanation appears to be more salient.

Building on existing research, this paper would like to posit that envy may be at the center of the rise in incel popularity. The link between envy and incels has not been adequately explored. It can be posited that there is inherent envy in members of the incel movement towards women for their ability to seduce men and towards men their age who can fit in. Moreover, it is much more likely that incels are radicalized before they join the incel movement. Elliot Rodgers predates the online rise of incels, but his manifesto aligns perfectly with incel ideology (Moonshot, 2023), showing that an individual does not need a movement to become radicalized. His lengthy manifesto proposes a “war on women” and expresses deep anger and frustration over his social life and lack of sexual experience. Furthermore, incels who commit massive acts of violence and unfortunately take many lives get “canonized” in the incel community. Incels revel in the hurt and violence of “normies”, individuals that do not experience inceldom (Moonshot, 2023). To incels, normies represent the oppressors. Envy could explain this phenomenon as well. Schadenfreude is the experience of joy or pleasure at another's misfortune (Akre, 2024), which could explain the pleasure extremists feel at another's pain (Moncrieff & Lienard, 2024). Schadenfreude could explain incels' reverence of mass murderers. This aspect of incel research needs to be explored further.

Sexual economics

The *sexual economics theory* (SET), proposed by Baumeister and Vohs (2004), essentially applies economic laws to human mating strategies. The sexual marketplace includes all sexual relations in a given area, the female resource being sex, and the male being status. Women constitute the supply, since they supply sex, and men the demand. Lindner (2023a) considers modern changes in the sexual marketplace to be crucial factors in the rise of incel ideologies. They posit that monogamy, which they consider the ultimate tactic that favors low-status men, is endangered. Lindner (2023a) highlights recent “de facto polygyny”—the rise of promiscuous men,

more cheating and serial monogamists. De facto polygyny creates a marketplace where most women are taken by high-status men, and monogamy cannot deter this distribution anymore (Lindner, 2023a). This trend facilitates a rise in incel ideology, but perhaps it may be facilitated through envy.

One major issue with the sexual economics theory, as well as Lindner's (2023a) assertion of it, is that it is speculative. This issue sparked a heated debate on the legitimacy of SET between its authors (Baumeister & Vohs, 2004) and Rudman (2017), who questions the assertion that women are at fault for culturally suppressing their sexuality. Rudman et al. (2013) explored the issue of the *sexual double standard* (SDS), which dictates views on male and female sexuality, with men being praised for casual sex while women are shunned for it. Baumeister and Twenge (2002) propose the *female control theory* (FCT), according to which women actively restrict sex to protect their market value and prompt other women to do so through advice, thereby positing that women themselves culturally suppress their own sexuality. The FCT is largely contingent on the sexual economics theory, as per the idea that women withhold sex to gain some upper hand. This ties into the perceived abilities men envy women for, discussed in *Evolutionary features*. Rudman et al. (2013) propose that the SDS is endorsed by men, thus positing the *male control theory* (MCT). They support this claim through empirical research (Rudman et al., 2013) on a sample of young adults (18-22), which limits generalizability, and by using self-report measures, which may influence the validity of the study. Rudman et al. (2013) find that men tend to be more sexist and demean women through the SDS, perpetuate rape myths more (which is something the original authors completely ignore) and endorse the SDS more, while women tend to resist it. In the same research, Rudman et al. (2013) find zero support in either gender for the sexual economics theory, the belief that sex is a female resource. Baumeister and Vohs (2004) preempt this by stating that people do not acknowledge the sexual economics theory because it is "unromantic", which is most likely a convenient excuse for a lack of empirical evidence. Rudman et al. (2013) counter by noting that rape myths are perceived as less romantic, yet still supported by both genders, which also supports the validity of using self-report measures.

It may not be that the sexual marketplace changes drastically, given that the sexual economics theory is vehemently opposed (Rudman et al., 2013; Rudman, 2017), but rather that the perception of it may exacerbate the feeling of loneliness and isolation present in incels. The incel

community presents a distinct cocktail of evolutionary factors and modern trends which have enabled their persistence. A more in-depth analysis of these trends follows in the next section. However, it can be posited that envy and the need for competition exist in every individual whose reproductive fitness is at risk; ergo, incels are not a unique consequence of the sexual marketplace. Second, the rise of technology makes dating considerably easier through online dating sites. A failure to find a mate on these sites may highlight one's incompetence in dating, making an incel feel more ostracized. Third, technology also makes it easier to connect individuals with the same grievances. When it comes to interests and resentments that are looked down upon by the general public, these individuals are more likely to create secluded echo chambers. Combined with the notion that envy facilitates coalition responses to diffuse responsibility, the rise in incel ideology was always likely. The sexual economics theory, while wildly popular in incel discourse because it fuels their ideology, may also lead psychologists to overlook alternative explanations. A mating crisis is likely to be happening now (Costello & Buss, 2023) and incels are a factor. And while this may affect the number of incels, it does not mean they would not be any incels if this was not the case.

However, if we consider the sexual marketplace theory to be a rational representation of our mating strategies, certain socio-cultural trends have facilitated the mating crisis posited by Costello and Buss (2023). First, it is important to consider the rise in female autonomy and its effects on incel behavior. Female autonomy has increased through access to education, allowing women to compete alongside men and helping women become independent from men (Lindner, 2023a). David and Melanie (2013) found that women are more likely to finish higher education and get higher-paying jobs than men born in the US. According to the European Institute for Gender Equality (2023), more women than men under the age of 49 have completed higher education. This asymmetry in career success enables women to be more selective, since they have an evolutionary inclination to value status and resources above all and look for men with even higher status and pay than themselves. This selectiveness further makes it harder for incels to form relationships, since it raises the ceiling on what can be considered a high-value male. Furthermore, fewer single women are looking for relationships. In an article for *The Independent*, Hosie (2017) writes that over 75% of women are not actively looking for a relationship, while the same goes for 65% of men. However, fewer women are single than men, making this statistic even more drastic. According to Gelles-Watnick (2023), 63% of men under 30 are single, and only 34% of women.

Women are more sexually fluid and more likely to identify as queer, as Massey et al. (2024) found that women from 18 to 26 are rejecting exclusive heterosexuality at a higher rate, while men do not display the same trend. These trends show that there are fewer available women while men continue to stay single and heterosexual. A skewed sex ratio allows women to be more selective, since they have a larger pool to choose from, which allows for bitterness and envy to arise in men who are not chosen, therefore making space for the rise of incel ideology. Combined with the higher ceiling in what constitutes a high-value male, all the statistics are stacked against men being able to form romantic relationships. This is at the core of incel ideology, fostering bitterness and encouraging these men to seek out others with the same grievances. Social media activity mirrors this trend. Brooks et al. (2022) found that the number of tweets corresponding to incel language and ideology is much higher in places where one would expect same-sex competition to be higher. The authors point out three major factors they observed: income inequality, gender equality and sex ratios.

Incels and others propose enforced monogamy as a solution to this rising problem in the sexual marketplace. Incels may mirror low-status men that existed long before our current age and their behavior may be a set of ancient mechanisms to ensure copulation. However, the reason we are noticing them now may be more complex. Lindner (2023a) compares monogamy to an “anti-monopolistic practice”, which prohibits higher-status men from monopolizing more women from the market. Baseline (2024) highlights how extremely incels call for subjugating women, reversing the feminist movement and enforcing monogamy. Highlighting Jordan Peterson’s comment in the New York Times (Bowles, 2018) that society needs to enforce monogamy following Alek Minassian’s Toronto attack, Demetriou (2022) provides a philosophical approach to enforced monogamy. On a legal level, enforcing monogamy is impossible, and banning polygamy violates autonomy and liberty, principles which take logical precedence when creating laws. While monogamy may seem like a way to keep society safe from incels, there is a harmful lack of nuance when Jordan Peterson claims that enforced monogamy would have stopped the Toronto attack. Important to note is the fact that it is not only men, but also women that are having fewer sexual relations than before, despite popular belief (Demetriou, 2022), showing that the rise of polygamy is not the sole cause of incelism. The reasons are diverse: the author mentions the housing crisis, the economy, internet addictions, etc. Interestingly, Demetriou (2022) proposes a need to educate and prepare young teens for romantic relationships, which used to be the purpose of church

communities/religious communities, dances and finishing/charm schools (institutions in which students, usually women, learn social etiquette). While this conclusion might seem traditional, there is an indication that young men and women lack preparation for social relations, to the point where pornography becomes the only channel of education for most. Additionally, as social media becomes more prominent, individuals spend more time on it, losing touch with the outside world. For incels, who are less ready to be social, this trend may be detrimental. Lastly, the global decline in mental health must not be ignored and institutions need to make sure everyone gets adequate help. The incel movement may likely be a response to a lack of social education. Combined with the consequence of the digital world creating more isolation, there is a growing need for places where young people can interact, learn how to coexist and form friendships and romantic relationships. Incels represent a subgroup of men likely predisposed to develop mental illnesses and whom this recent trend affects more harshly (Stijelja & Mishara, 2023), as they do not independently seek out social gatherings and resort to unhealthy habits as a response. Enforced monogamy is not the solution to this issue. Institutions should instead focus on systematic changes in their educational systems as well as providing better access to psychological support for all their citizens.

Conclusion

While incel research is growing, the reasons why the incel community become so popular remain elusive. From an evolutionary perspective, inceldom represents a consequence of a socially unrestricted mating market. Nevertheless, it is wrong to simplify this movement as an evolutionary reaction, given that its rise in popularity also brought on violence and, unfortunately, victims of suicide and mass attacks. Incel research needs to explore many avenues to answer the questions it asks, even though the sample is hard to recruit, which makes it much more important to be nuanced in one's assumptions and careful with one's hypotheses. In this paper, it was crucial to start with a definition of incels, as they are a specific community. The paper explored the nature of incels, their sexlessness, the blackpill mentality, and the frustration defined by a hatred towards women. Furthermore, it defined incels' declining mental health as well as their tendencies regarding suicide and suicide ideation. Crucially, this paper explored the conflict within the field of evolutionary psychology concerning the nature of incel violence, providing a new insight that an average incel

may not be inclined to commit physical violence. Incel may be better defined by their demeaning behavior towards women and their nihilistic worldview. Conclusively, there is a need to reframe the way psychologists define incel violence in empirical studies, given that interpersonal and verbal violence, especially in the cyberspace, may be crucial for a better understanding of incel psychology. This paper delved into the influence of evolutionary psychology itself and the ways incels misconstrue its findings to justify their ideology. Furthermore, it explored abstract concepts that may apply to incel behavior and ideology, specifically those relating to general evolutionary principles such as sexual selection and intrasexual competition, with a greater focus on the sexual marketplace theory. More specific concepts were examined as well, such as the young male syndrome and the role of envy. Furthermore, the investigation of socio-cultural trends provides a better insight into incel psychology. This paper analyzed existing hypotheses of incel behavior, provided a new hypothesis based on envy and explored the concept of monogamy. For future research, it may be critical to research the role of envy as well as compare individuals who do not identify as incels but share the same characteristics to determine the impacts of radicalization.

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Sažetak

Moderno doba interneta obilježeno je porastom mizoginij i ekstremističkih ideologija, posebno unutar internetskih zajednica, među kojima je najpopularnija zajednica incela (nenamjerni celibati). Inceli su podgrupa tzv. *manosphere*. Oni su karakterizirani svojim manjkom seksualnog iskustva, intenzivnom žudnjom za ostvarivanjem seksualnih odnosa te izraženim seksističnim i radikalnim tendencijama. Posljednjih godina broj istraživačkih radova o incelimu eksponencijalno je narastao, specifično u pokušaju da se primijene evolucijski principi za bolje razumijevanje ideologije incela i ponašanja. Međutim, zbog anonimnosti incel foruma i njihove tendencije da se socijalno izoliraju, inceli je teško direktno i empirijski proučavati. Cilj ovog rada jest primijeniti temeljne koncepte evolucijske psihologije na poznate činjenice o incelimu, analizirati prijašnja istraživanja i predložiti nove uvide. Prvo, rad proučava opći koncept incela i njihove zajednice. Nadalje, analizira prirodu nasilja povezanog s incelimu te nastoji razriješiti raspravu

unutar znanstvene zajednice o tom pitanju. Posljednje, rad analizira postojeća evolucijska objašnjenja ponašanja incela i predlaže zavist kao ključan faktor ponašanja incela i njihove ideologije.

Ključne riječi: evolucija, evolucijska psihologija, inceli, nasilje povezano s incelima, nenamjerni celibat, zavist