

# Incels and the Incelosphere: An Overview of Current Research and Understanding

**FULL REPORT**

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# Incels and the Incelosphere: An Overview of Current Research and Understanding

## FULL REPORT

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### CONTENT WARNING

This report contains some offensive language.

This report was produced as part of the CREST project: Con.Cel: Tracking The Online Contagion Of InCel And Male Supremacist Ideology. The project maps out the online 'InCelosphere' and tracks its dynamics of contagion. You can find all the outputs from this project at: [www.crestresearch.ac.uk/projects/tracking-online-contagion-incel/](http://www.crestresearch.ac.uk/projects/tracking-online-contagion-incel/)

### ABOUT CREST

The Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats (CREST) is funded by the UK's Home Office and security and intelligence agencies to identify and produce social science that enhances their understanding of security threats and capacity to counter them. Its funding is administered by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC Award ES/V002775/1).

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This report provides an overview of the incel ideology and the wider manosphere, as well as a discussion as to whether this ideology crosses the threshold to be considered an extremist ideology and of the threat posed by incels. In doing so, it is shown that the incel ideology has all the characteristics of an extremist ideology. It is shown that there is a need to evaluate the incel threshold for violence in relation to both individual-level and wider contextual factors, with incel harm and violence taking three different forms; individual-level (i.e., self-harm and suicide), interpersonal (i.e., cyber-stalking) and societal-level (acts of mass-violence), with perpetrators of societal-level violence likely to have a psychological profile that is akin to that seen in school shooters.

It is also discussed how the increase in incel online content, frequency of violent behaviours by those who have engaged with it, and the growing awareness of this phenomenon is occurring at a time when higher proportions of younger people are appearing in the UK's terrorism statistics. At the same time, there is an emerging body of evidence demonstrating that increases in online misogynistic and anti-woman sentiments are related to broader offline behaviours, with strong support of these views also being related to an increased likelihood of support for extremist violence.

Finally, using a data-driven approach, it is also shown that that majority of UK-based online engagement with incel content occurs on the main incel forum of Incels.is, and that the vast majority of UK-based users actually contribute relatively few posts to the discussions on incel online spaces.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

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At around 18:00 local time on 12th August 2021, Jake Davison carried out a killing spree in Plymouth, UK, that resulted in the deaths of five people, before ultimately taking his own life. While the official inquest into this incident concluded that there was ‘no evidence’ of a manifesto or planning, with little indication that the content of incel online spaces “were the inspiration for what happened on 12th August [2021]” (Eve, 2023), what is currently known about Davison’s online footprint indicates that his online behaviour and the views he shared there were similar to that of other perpetrators of incel-related violence. This incident also follows the cases of Anwar Driouich and Gabrielle Friel who both appeared to have engaged with the online incel community to some degree and faced trial during 2020 for possessing terrorism-related materials.

At the same time, the number of online spaces that host such content is expanding, with the conglomerate of online spaces that host incel content being referred to as the ‘incelosphere’, and while the vast majority of adherents to this belief system are not violent, acts of violence whereby the perpetrator has interacted with the incelosphere to some degree have caused the deaths of roughly 100 people since Elliot Roger’s Isla Vista spree killing in 2014.

Research on the nature of the incel phenomenon and the threat it poses is still in its infancy, and given the online nature of the incel community, it has been limited to three different research methods. The first involves using the manifestos and sometimes the testimony of individuals who have committed acts of incel-related violence to develop an understanding of the impact of ideology on these individuals. While this method can offer useful insights into the relationship between these individuals, incel ideas, and violence, findings are not generalisable to the wider incel community due to it relying on a sample that is biased both in terms of consisting of individuals who have escalated

to violence and its small size when compared to the larger number of users online. As an example, van Brunt and Taylor (2021) used this method to develop the Incel Indoctrination Rubric (IIR), and in doing so, looked at 54 cases where individuals committed some act of violence and exhibited ideas similar to those seen in incel online spaces between the years 1938-2020. While only 13 of these could be considered specifically incel in nature, the larger number of 54 is still a small number of the 10,409 unique usernames in the data for the largest incel online space of Incels.is used in this report and others.

The second, involves developing a self-completion questionnaire and having it posted to one of the larger incel online spaces, usually Incels.is, by the administrator. These have offered useful insights into the demographics and self-reported mental health of this online community (Anti-Defamation League, 2020; Moskalenko et al., 2022; Speckhard et al., 2021; Speckhard and Ellenberg, 2022; Sugiura, 2021). However, the slight differences in results between such studies have shown that, while these insights are useful, issues such as self-selection bias or the time of day the survey goes online impact who completes the survey and therefore the results.

The third involves analysing discussions on online incel spaces, either through detailed analysis of a small number of posts (i.e., Menzie, 2020; O’Malley et al., 2020; Witt, 2020) or macro-level analysis of entire online spaces using computational methods to understand the nature of the incel worldview and its evolution over time (i.e., Baele et al., 2019; Jaki et al., 2019; Pelzer, 2018). While both aspects of this third method are useful in different ways, context for some findings can sometimes be lost, meaning that both should be paired together to some degree; i.e., the computational macro-level analysis being paired with in-depth analysis of a sub-sample of posts.

## INTRODUCTION

### Incels and the Incelosphere: An Overview of Current Research and Understanding

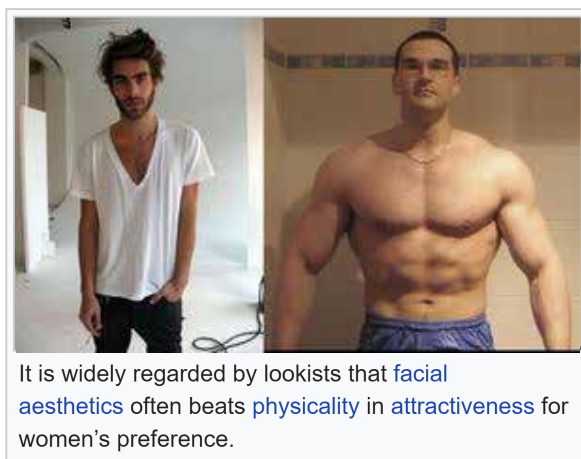
Given the infancy of research into, and the evolving understanding of, the incel phenomenon, this report aims to both provide an overview of what is known about the incels and incelosphere and act as a positioning piece that may allow for future research and understanding to be developed. As such, the report proceeds in seven sections. The first provides an overview of the incel ideology and worldview. The second, discusses whether the incels and inceldom crosses the threshold to be considered an extremist ideology, with the third section discussing these notions within the wider ‘manosphere’; the conglomerate of online spaces hosting misogynistic and anti-woman content of which inceldom is one part. The fourth section then builds upon the previous ones to discuss what tendencies incels and those who engage with their ideas have towards violence. The fifth then provides a data-driven exploration of UK-based engagement with the incelosphere. Finally, the last section, discusses the incel phenomenon within the wider social-online context and what this tells us about how this ideology evolves.



## 2. WHAT IS AN INCEL?

The term ‘incel’ is a portmanteau of ‘involuntary celibate’, with incels being individuals who are part of an active online subculture that appears to be expanding, both in terms of the number of individuals interacting with its content and the number of digital platforms on which said content appears. The digital platforms hosting incel-related content include sub-Reddits, dedicated incel forums, Telegram channels, Instagram accounts, online blogs, etc. Together these form an online ecosystem, similar to that seen in other extremist ideologies (see Baele et al., 2020a), which is referred to as the ‘incelosphere’ (Baele et al., 2023).

The core idea of the incel worldview is that attractiveness is genetically predetermined, with certain aesthetic features that are controlled by our genes being the only ones that women find sexually attractive (Baele et al., 2019; Ging, 2019; Hoffman et al., 2020). Incels then believe these traits to be sub-standard in themselves and argue that they are discriminated against because of this, what they call ‘lookism’ (see *figure 1*), due to how women prefer ‘genetically superior’ men; meaning they are therefore destined to be denied sexual relationships (Baele et al., 2019; Ging, 2019; Pelzer, 2018; Saptura and Boyle, 2020).



*Figure 1: A screenshot taken from Incels.wiki depicting the incels' notion of lookism.*

The incel worldview then posits that women are more sexually selective with lower levels of sexual promiscuity than men, as well as possessing more narrow views of attractiveness (Baele et al., 2019). Thus, incels speak of the ‘sexual marketplace’, a social hierarchy where one’s position is determined by their aesthetics and wealth (Baele et al., 2019; O’Malley et al., 2020). The views of physical attractiveness within the incel worldview are often discussed using an elaborate categorisation system based on height, build, genitals, personality, and specific facial features (Jaki et al., 2019), with how highly they score in these areas and their wealth then defining their ‘sexual marketplace value’ (SMV) (O’Malley et al., 2020).

Research has shown that the incel social hierarchy is a three-tiered one (Baele et al., 2019), where a minority of ‘Alpha’ males (‘Chads’) and females (‘Stacys’) stand on top, a majority of average-looking ‘Betas’ (‘normies’) follow, and a minority of exclusively male and unattractive incels at the bottom (*figure 2*). These Chad and Stacy categorisations are often depicted as caricatures, and while the finer details of these caricatures change depending on the context of the discussion, they are all based on an initial template design for each category (*figure 3*). This three-tier hierarchy highlights the contradictory nature of the incel worldview, in that it places the incels themselves at the bottom of this social hierarchy and argues that they are oppressed by women who withhold sex from them when exploiting their superior SMV, whilst also arguing that incels are superior to all women in terms of intelligence, strength, and morality (Baele et al., 2019; Sugiura, 2021). Likewise, incels view the Chads of their hierarchy as demonstrating hegemonic masculinity due to their perceived superior physical stature while deeming incels to be intellectual superior; what they refer to as ‘high IQ’ (Baele et al., 2019; van Brunt and Taylor, 2021).

## WHAT IS AN INCEL?

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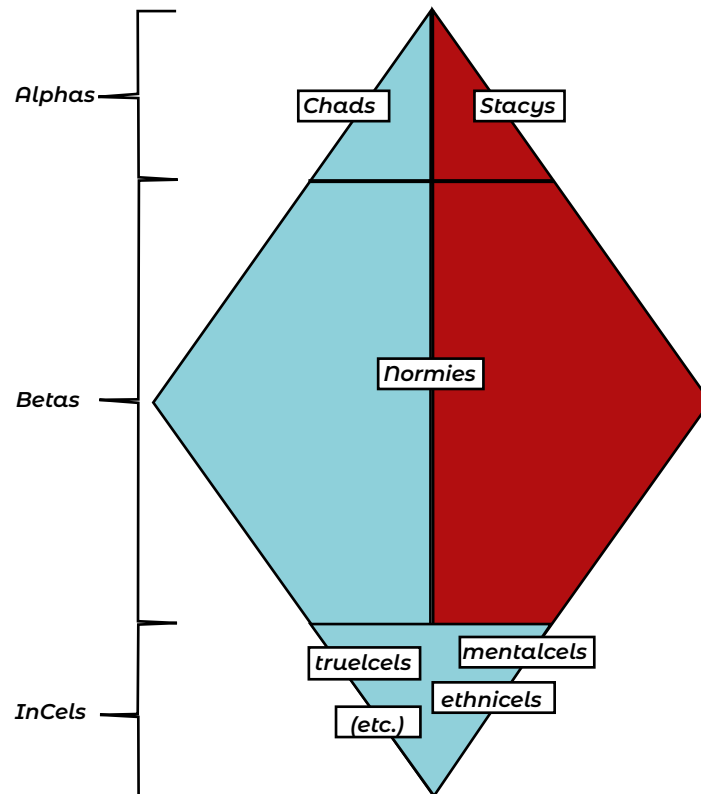


Figure 2: The incel social hierarchy from Baele et al. (2019).

The incels then believe that, due to women being more sexually selective than men, the sexual marketplace is female-led or female-dominated, in that they have the ability to act as sexual gatekeepers by deciding who they engage in sexual relationships with (O'Malley et al., 2020; Sugiura, 2021), and that this negatively impacts less attractive men through the aforementioned notion of lookism (Pelzer, 2018). The incels refer to this perceived female tendency as 'hypergamy', which more specifically refers to the belief that the preference of women is to only engage in sexual relationships with attractive men, and that this dominates the sexual marketplace. Using an application of the Pareto principal from mathematics, incels argue that this results in 80% of women competing for sexual relationships with the top 20% of most attractive men (figure 4).





## The Stacy



Figure 3: The 'Chad' (top) and 'Stacy' (bottom) basic caricature. Taken from incels.wiki.

## WHAT IS AN INCEL?

### Incels and the Incelosphere: An Overview of Current Research and Understanding

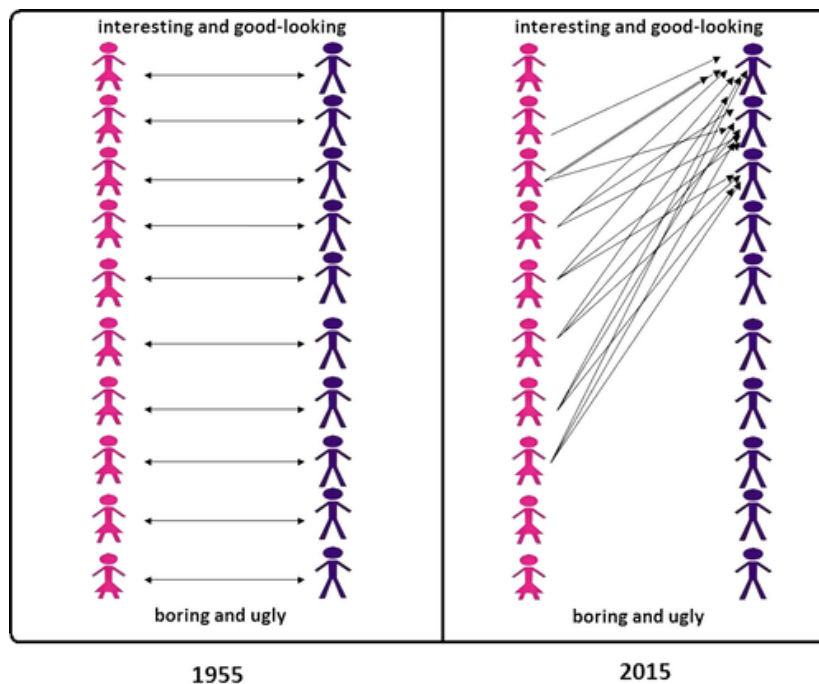


Figure 4: Hypergamy diagram from [incels.wiki](http://incels.wiki).

The consensus amongst the incel community is that this hypergamous behaviour was historically moderated due to women being dependent upon men for social-economic security, and that this, combined with the norms and values of traditional societies, ensured an 'equal distribution of women' amongst the male population (Baele et al., 2019). The incels point to the various societal changes that have occurred, starting with the emergence of second-wave feminism in the 1960s and continuing today with both technological progress and the continued effort of women for equal representation, pay, etc, as having resulted in women no longer being dependent on men for social-economic security. These changes, they believe, have enabled women to be more selective about who they engage in sexual relationships with, and that this in turn, has ultimately shifted the sexual marketplace from one where there was a 'fair' distribution of women amongst men to one where the 80/20 rule dominates. Incels feel as though this has cumulated in them being denied the sexual relationships they believe themselves to be entitled to (Baele et al., 2019; Ging, 2019; O'Malley et al., 2020; Papadamou et al., 2021; Scaptura and Boyle, 2020; Sugiura, 2021). Thus, as O'Malley et al. (2020) observe, the narrative within the incel worldview is one of women being evil and cruel due to a combination of evolution, biology, and culture.

This perceived societal order is linked to another central tenet of the incel worldview; the concept of 'pilling'. This is a notion that the incel worldview shares with certain aspects of far-right extremist ideology, particularly the alt-right, and is taken from the 1999 film *The Matrix*. Here, incels believe that most people have 'taken the blue pill', meaning that they are ignorant as to how the world 'really is'; i.e., they do not ascribe to the incel's worldview. The idea of 'taking the red pill' then refers to individuals coming to believe that the aforementioned social structure and groupings actually do exist, and that these social structures result in men being oppressed. In contrast to the alt-right formulation of 'pilling', however, the incel community have introduced a third type of pill; the black pill. This idea of being 'black pill' is a nihilistic extension of the red pill, in that it involves coming to believe that these social groupings and structures, not only exist, but are also immutable and that nothing can be done to move from one social category to another; i.e., to move from being an incel to a 'normie' (Baele et al., 2019; Ging, 2019; Hoffman et al., 2020). The black pill concept is often discussed a lot in relation to suicide within the incelosphere, perhaps due to the extreme nihilism associated with it.

### 3. INCELS AND THE EXTREMIST/TERRORIST THRESHOLD

Discussions around the nature of the incel phenomenon following the 12th August 2021 Plymouth attack, and whether it should be classified as an act of terrorism, demonstrated the amorphous and evolving nature of the incel phenomenon. Whilst there has always been some disagreement amongst researchers as to the exact definition of terrorism, most would point to an act of violence being committed to advance some kind of socio-political cause as the defining feature of terrorist violence; an aspect that is reflected in the UK legal framework.

When an act of incel-related violence is carried out, there is often some mention on the incelosphere of it being the start of an incel ‘uprising’ or ‘rebellion’. The most well-known example of this is the 2018 Toronto van attacker, Alek Minassian, who made a Facebook post shortly before his attack stating:

**“Private (Recruit) Minassian Infantry 00010, wishing to speak to Sgt 4chan please. C23249161. The Incel Rebellion has already begun! We will overthrow all the Chads and Stacys! All hail the Supreme Gentleman Elliot Rodger!”**

- Alek Minassian (Facebook post from 23/04/2018)

Likewise, Chris Harper-Mercer, the 2015 Umpqua Community College attacker, and Seung Hui Cho, the 2007 Virginia Tech shooter<sup>1</sup>, stated in their manifestos that:

**“I hope to inspire the masses with this, at least enough to get their passions aroused”**

- Chris Harper-Mercer (Personal Manifesto, pg 6)

**“Let the revolution begin!”**

- Seung Hui Cho (Personal Manifesto)

With some users on the incelosphere sharing similar sentiments, for example:

**“Good. Let the bastards cower in fear. The rebellion has begun.”**

- User on Incels.is (25/04/2018) following Alek Minassian’s attack

**“No more rope. Time for hope. Infantryman Alek Minassian may have been taken prisoner but the rebellion cannot be stopped now.”**

- User on Incels.is (25/04/2018) following Alek Minassian’s attack

However, empirical research has shown that the incel community mostly do not view acts of incel-inspired violence as a way of bringing around some form of social-political change. Instead, they tend to view such acts as a form of personal revenge or cathartic release for the perpetrator. This has been largely attributed to both the nihilistic nature of the black pill dictating that their perceived situation cannot be improved and the notion that incels are a natural category (Baele et al., 2019); with some users referring to any potential rebellion or uprising as a joke:

**“media keeps claiming there is an "incel uprising" and Minassian claimed allegiance to some group called "incel rebellion", jfl at**

<sup>1</sup> Note: Although the Virginia Tech shooting occurred in 2007, before the emergence of the incel phenomenon as it is today, many users on the incelosphere have framed Cho as an incel attacker, as they have also done with Marc Lépine who attacked École Polytechnique de Montréal in 1989.



## INCELS AND THE EXTREMIST/TERRORIST THRESHOLD

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**the media taking meme's seriously thinking these are actual groups.”**

**- User on Incels.is (25/04/2018) following Alek Minassian's 2018 attack**

**“one guy shitposts about a beta rebellion before going ER and normies think incels are a terrorist group, JUST FUCKING LOL”**

**- User on Incels.is (25/04/2018) following Alek Minassian's 2018 attack**

**I like Cho, I like it when an incel gets revenge on the stacies who treat them like shit. I would do it, but here in Britain it's almost impossible to get a gun.**

**- User on Incels.is (23/01/2018) speaking of Seung-Hui Cho's 2007 attack**

Despite these contrasting views on violence within the incelosphere, the fact that this worldview has integrated several beliefs about the nature of society and politics, such as the aforementioned social hierarchy, subjugation of a given social group, the notion of living in a 'lookist' society, and that feminism, liberalism and technological progress are to blame for this development (Baele et al., 2019; Ging, 2019; O'Malley et al., 2020; Papadamou et al., 2021; Scaptura and Boyle, 2020), along with clearly defined out-groups with associated dehumanising terms and views of them being inferior and existing to provide a function, has led to this worldview being viewed as an emergent and growing form of extremist ideology with a distinct gender-political and hate crime component that is conducive of acts of political violence (Hoffman et al., 2020; Sugiura, 2021).

Indeed, empirical work has demonstrated that the incel worldview exhibits all of the characteristics of an extremist ideology, with discussions on the incelosphere becoming more extreme over time (Baele et al., 2023, 2019). Extremist ideologies are normally

based around the notion of in-group and out-group(s), with intergroup competition being presented in the form of a crisis-solution narrative, which combine to create the 'extremist value proposition' (Berger, 2018a, 2018b). This involves defining some form of crisis, which draws upon themes of existential threat, apocalypse, impurity, dystopia, or the notion of a conspiracy. Regardless of which themes a given crisis-solution narrative draws on, they always portray the out-groups(s) as posing some form of threat (Berger, 2018a; Williams, 2021). In the incel ideology, the out-groups (featuring women and alpha males) are depicted in extremely negative and dehumanising ways through the use of negative adjectives and specific terms; such as 'femoids' or 'roasties', in the case of women.

However, merely believing in the presence of a threat is often not enough to convince one to engage in violent behaviours in response to a perceived threat or crisis, with an equally valid response being one of retreat (Williams, 2021). Thus, violent extremist ideologies often pair discussions of the threat posed by the out-group with a form of 'essentialist thinking' that views the out-group as having a certain set of inherently negative attributes that are necessary to their identity; often culminating in the view that the out-group is 'evil' (Berger, 2018a; Williams, 2021). This is seen in the incel worldview, where women are portrayed as being inherently evil, with numerous posts on the incelosphere involving discussions of how individuals have felt bullied by women or humiliated through rejection (O'Malley et al., 2020; Sugiura, 2021) and how the underlying logic of the hypergammy concept is that women are only capable of simple emotions (chiefly sexual desire) and guided by anti-social values such as cheating on their partners or manipulating men for sex or money (Baele et al., 2019).

This highlights one of the many paradoxes of the incel worldview, in that they claim to be victimised by the out-group(s) whilst also believing in an ideology that has a built-in supremacist hierarchy. Such hierarchies are common in extremist ideologies, something most notably seen in white supremacism, but also present

in Western supremacy, religious supremacy, etc, with the incel ideology being a form of male supremacy. Such ideologies not only simultaneously dehumanise and present the out-group(s) as posing a threat to the in-group, but also view the out-group as existing to fulfil some need or function for the in-group, with perceived violations of this entitlement being met with outrage and anger (Miller-Idriss, 2020). In the case of the incels, this translates to an entitlement to sex from women.

In short, whether the incel ideology crosses the threshold to be considered an extremist ideology requires a nuanced assessment. The incel worldview certainly does contain all the characteristics of a violent extremist ideology. At the same time, however, there is a body of research that has demonstrated how an individual being radicalised towards violent action can normally be more attributed to a combination of ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors than the ideology they espouse. The former referring to factors that are beyond the control of the individual, such as socio-economic conditions that impact them, and the latter referring to individual-level and psychological factors such as the impact of familial relationships (Altier et al., 2017; Horgan et al., 2017; Vergani et al., 2020). The most recent research on this subject has demonstrated that radicalisation to violent action is the result of both the cumulation and interaction of these factors and processes at different levels, meaning that it is very context dependent and therefore unique to each individual (Clemmow et al., 2023; Dawson, 2019).

Thus, it is important to assess the extremist threshold for incels in relation to both individual-level factors and wider contextual ones, especially given cases, such as that of Alek Minassian, whereby the perpetrators of incel-related attacks are deemed to have acted for reason other than ideological ones. At the individual-level, the supremacist-essentialist conceptualisation of the out-group(s) and the narrative they provide appeal to the insecurities of young males, meaning the ‘pull’ factors are likely to feel more personalised, with the perceived violation of their entitlement to sex lowering

an individual’s threshold to violence. The latter refers to how many of these ideas stem from wider online communities concerned with ‘men’s rights’ and male supremacy which have the potential to act as a gateway to incel ideology, which have potentially manifested themselves in forms such as the increase in misogynistic and anti-woman ideas being echoed by young boys in school classrooms (Hope Not Hate, 2020; Miller-Idriss, 2023; Will, 2023). Although, recent high-profile events have resulted in an increased awareness of these ideas and narratives, and this has likely contributed to the increase in Prevent referrals for incel/anti-woman ideology, it is worth noting that relatively few of these referrals are deemed to be an extremist threat and carried forward to the Channel stage; with 23 cases being adopted by Channel from 77 Prevent referrals during 2021-2022.

## 4. THE MANOSPHERE

The sense of male supremacy, entitlement to sex, and other aspects of the incel ideology, did not develop entirely within the incelosphere, but instead evolved from views already held elsewhere online. Indeed, many of the above notions and terminology, such as the ‘sexual marketplace’ and red pill logic, stem from pre-existing communities concerned with ‘men’s rights’. In the online realm, the general consensus is that these ‘men’s rights’/male supremacy communities fall into one of broadly four categories; Men’s Rights Activists (MRA), Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW), Pick-Up Artists (PUA), and incels. As with the incelosphere, the loose conglomerate of online platforms that host content pertaining to any of these categories is known as the ‘manosphere’ (Baele et al., 2019; Farrell et al., 2019; Fitzgerald, 2020; Ging, 2019; Johanssen, 2022; Ribeiro et al., 2020; Sugiura, 2021).

The MRA want to effect legislative and social change in relation to matters such as family law, reproduction, military service, etc, that they perceive to discriminate against men. The MRA have their own version of the red pill, which involves viewing society as being gynocentric, with MRA groups being linked to hateful and misogynistic behaviours; such as discussions that have encouraged abuse of women, particularly feminists (Coston and Kimmel, 2013; Han and Yin, 2022; Ribeiro et al., 2020; Sugiura, 2021).

The MGTOWs are somewhat different to the other three categories, in that they espouse the notion of rejecting any relationships with women, and sometimes society as a whole, based on the logic that the current system is impossible to alter and will continue to discriminate against men. This community often discuss these notions in relation to misogynistic and anti-feminist behaviours and language, as well as regularly mocking the concept of inclusive masculinity (Han and Yin, 2022; Ribeiro et al., 2020; Sugiura, 2021).

The PUA organise their worldview around ‘the game’, the idea that there are proven techniques and strategies

that can be used to engage in sexual relationships with women; techniques that involve objectifying, and most often harassing, women. To the PUAs, this ‘knowledge’ about the techniques they discuss is what constitutes the red pill, with much of the terminology we now see in the incelosphere, such as ‘sexual marketplace value’ and strong views related to biological determinism and precise characterisation of individual aesthetics, originating here. Unlike other categories in the manosphere, the PUAs appear to be uninterested in politics, and instead opt for commercialisation of their ideas (Ging, 2019; Han and Yin, 2022; Ribeiro et al., 2020; Sugiura, 2021).

In short, although the manosphere consists of different, sometimes conflicting, groups with disparate aims, they all share common themes in being concerned with some form of masculinity crisis, some formulation of red pill logic, binary gender views, and accrediting women and feminism as being the root cause of their perceived oppression and victimisation; thereby justifying their hatred of women (Fitzgerald, 2020; Ging, 2019; Sugiura, 2021).

Furthermore, research has pointed to advancements in communication technologies, particularly the emergence of Web 2.0, in allowing individuals who hold such beliefs to coalesce online, with newer digital platforms creating novel opportunities for misogynistic views to evolve and be disseminated more widely than ever before, resulting in online misogynistic ecosystems that have been referred to as ‘toxic technocultures’ (Massanari, 2017) and ‘networked misogyny’ (Banet-Weiser and Miltner, 2016). It is believed that this has resulted in the manosphere coming to exhibit increasingly violent and hostile views towards women and other select groups (Farrell et al., 2019). This has coincided with newer and more extreme categories, such as the PUAs and incels, coming to overshadow older categories such as the MRAs through user migration, with incel discourse scoring similar levels of ‘toxicity of discussion’ measures to online spaces that host far-right extremist content like Gab (Ribeiro et al. 2020).



## 5. WHAT ARE THE INCEL TENDENCIES TOWARDS VIOLENCE?

While the incel ideology and worldview exhibits all of the characteristics of an extremist ideology (Baele et al., 2019; Jaki et al., 2019), studies have also shown that not all incels condone violence (Moskalenko et al., 2022) and that a lot of incel content exhibits typical anxieties of young men transitioning to adults (O'Malley et al., 2020). It has also been shown that discussions on online ecosystems, such as the incelosphere, are normally heterogeneous, with discussions on extremist and radical online spaces usually being driven by a small minority of influential users (Baele et al., 2022; Scrivens et al., 2021). Combined with the motivations for incel-related violence in certain cases being attributed to push and pull factors that are not ideological, any diagnosis of incel 'extremism' and its link with offline violence should be based on a detailed and multifaceted assessment. Specifically, it is necessary to evaluate the incel tendency towards violence in a nuanced fashion in relation to four distinct aspects.

The first involves conceptualising the incelosphere as a dynamic network of interacting online spaces; referred to as an 'ecosystem' approach to understanding online spaces hosting ideological content (Baele et al., 2020a; Hutchinson et al., 2022). In adopting an ecosystem-based approach, studies have shown that there has been a clear temporal evolution towards increasing amounts of extremist language being used within the incelosphere, with the current main forum of Incels. is having the highest ratio of extremist language since dedicated incel online spaces first began to emerge (Baele et al., 2023).

The second aspect concerns the form that incel violence takes. While acts of incel-related mass-violence such as Elliot Roger's 2014 Isla Vista and Alek Minassian's 2018 Toronto attacks are best conceptualised as societal-level violence, acts of incel harm and violence

also occur at the personal and interpersonal-levels. Regarding personal harm, discussions around the subject of suicide are incredibly common on the incelosphere, particularly when discussing the black pill concept. The incels have nomenclature for this subject, such as 'LDAR' ('lay down and rot'), which refers to the belief that self-improvement behaviours or corrective actions are pointless, and that incels are destined to be such for the entirety of their lives.

Regarding interpersonal violence, recent years have seen a number of individuals who appear to have engaged with incel ideology carrying out other forms of threatening and violent behaviours that fall outside of what would be deemed a terrorist or extremist attack. An example being Ben Moynihan, who attacked and stabbed three different women between June-July 2014 due to his sexual frustrations; stating that:

**"I was planning to murder women as an act of revenge because of the life they gave me, I'm still a virgin at 17"**

**- Ben Moynihan in a letter left to police during a series of stabbings in Portsmouth, UK, during June-July 2014 (following Roger's attack in May 2014).**

Moynihan's attacks took place during the formative years of the incel ideology, meaning its influence was unlikely to be a motivator. However, given that this happened a month after Elliot Roger's attack in May 2014 and the content of the notes that Moynihan left to the police, this incident is indicative of how incel-type ideas were held by individuals before the online subculture emerged, with developments in communication technologies, such as web 2.0, now allowing them to coalesce online and influence one another through their interactions. Indeed, there is now a body of research that shows how interactions

## WHAT ARE THE INCEL TENDENCIES TOWARDS VIOLENCE?

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between peers on such online spaces can serve to lower the threshold to violence for some individuals through the exchange of information and ideas (Gaudette et al., 2022; Kenyon et al., 2022; Mølmen and Ravndal, 2021).

In more recent years, there have been several other examples of interpersonal violence committed by individuals who have had some engagement with incel content online. An example being Alexander Stavropoulos who attacked a woman and her young daughter with a knife in Ontario, Canada in 2019<sup>2</sup>. There have also been cases whereby perpetrators of other forms of dangerous offline behaviours have a web history that shows some engagement with incel content. An example of this being Carl Bennington, who was sentenced in California during 2021 for cyberstalking and online harassment<sup>3</sup>. As with cases of societal-level incel-related violence, it has not been clear whether incel ideology was a motivating factor for these individuals, but its presence in their web history demonstrates that its themes and ideas appear to have some appeal to individuals who have subsequently engaged in harmful and violent behaviours that fall outside of the category of extremist of terrorist violence.

Following on from this, the third aspect concerns how the manifestos left behind by several individuals who did commit acts of incel-related mass-violence, or their police testimony/psychological evaluation if they survived their attack, have indicated a psychological profile that is very similar to those seen in school shooters. On the incelosphere, discussions often exhibit elements of *compensatory narcissism*, whereby some incels have a self-inflated image of themselves, but do not like themselves because they feel as though they do not live up to this image. In other words, they compensate for their insecure identity with a self-image of superiority (Langman, 2017; Millon and Davis, 1998); an example of this being their sense of intellectual superiority, what they call 'high IQ'.

Compensatory narcissists also often exhibit hostility towards those they feel have power over them, something that is seen in incelosphere discussions by the way in which incels deem women to be withholding sex from them.

An example of a compensatory narcissist was Eric Harris, one of the two Columbine High School shooters, who has been described as being in love with a grandiose self-image that he had created in response to feeling inadequate (Millon and Davis, 1998). While it is noteworthy that Eric Harris is also unique amongst psychopathic school shooters in that he actually developed an ideology to justify his violence (Langman, 2017), many school shooters exhibit traits reminiscent of those seen in incel attackers, particularly *sadistic traits* and *fragile narcissism*.

The former refers to how an individual feels impotent, unalive, and powerless, which they try to compensate for by having power over others. It has been suggested that this could be a motivating factor in some school shooters, as having the ability to take the lives of others allows such individuals to feel powerful (Fromm, 1997).

The latter refers to the tendency to be hypersensitive to anything that might be perceived as a slight or 'putdown' or not in-line with their inflated self-image. This is often linked to behaviour associated with *explosive psychopaths*, traits of which have been present in several incel attackers and school shooters. These are individuals who are prone to outbursts of rage caused by a sense of humiliation, and who are known to direct their rage towards people who symbolise their sense of failure (Langman, 2017), with these outbursts of rage often being seen as a way to discharge feelings of humiliation that have built up (Millon and Davis, 1998). For example, Elliot Roger left behind a manifesto titled *My Twisted World* in which he exhibited such traits multiple times:

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2 <https://www.sudbury.com/court/sudbury-incel-attacker-gets-two-life-sentences-for-brutal-attempted-murder-in-store-parking-lot-4867878>

3 <https://www.justice.gov/usao-cdca/pr/covina-man-sentenced-18-months-prison-cyberstalking>

**“As I made my way back from school one day during the first week, I was stopped at a stoplight in Isla Vista when I saw two hot blonde girls waiting at the bus stop. I was dressed in one of my nice shirts, so I looked at them and smiled. They looked at me, but didn’t even deign to smile back. They just looked away as if I was a fool. As I drove away I became very infuriated. It was such an insult. I made a U-turn, pulled up to their bus stop and splashed Starbucks latte all over them. I felt a feeling of spiteful satisfaction as I saw it stain their jeans. I then quickly speeded away before they could catch my license plate number. How dare those girls snub me in such a fashion! How dare they insult me so! I raged to myself repeatedly. They deserved the punishment I gave them. It was such a pity that my latte wasn’t hot enough to burn them. Those girls deserved to be dumped in boiling water for the crime of not giving me the attention and adoration I so rightfully deserve!”**

- Elliot Roger (2014) manifesto, pg. 100.

While the original plan for his attack failed, and he ended up carrying out an indiscriminate killing spree, it is worth noting that Roger’s intended target was a sorority house; a symbolic representation of his lack of success with women. Likewise, Scott Beierle, who attacked a yoga studio in Tallahassee in 2018, made comments such as:

**“I could have ripped her head off”**

- Scott Beierle speaking of a woman who cancelled a date with him in one of his YouTube videos.

However, it should be noted that not all incel-related attackers target symbolic representations, Minassian and Davison for example, were not discriminating in their targets.

Many school shooters and incel attackers have also possessed similar grievances to those of perpetrators of incel-related mass-violence. For example, it has been observed that school shooters with both psychopathic traits and physical deformities, tend to have fantasies about rape; an apparent way for these individuals to assert their masculinity (Langman, 2017). In conducting a systematic analysis of the psychological profiles and behaviours of psychopathic shooters, Langman (2017) observed how the majority of the sample targeted females, a factor that was attributed to the way in which those with fragile narcissism were unable to deal with rejection or their perceived helplessness from interacting with women, with 75% of this sample exhibiting body issues. This is supported by an emerging body of research that highlights the role that physical traits and developmental factors play in the self-identity of a large number of school shooters (see American Psychological Association, 2013), with numerous examples of school shooters leaving behind manifestos or journals that detail their frustrations with achieving sexual relationships. Indeed, some school shooters, such as Andrew Golden and Tim Kretschmer, appear to have specifically targeted women who had recently rejected them during their attacks. Similarly, Eric Harris often wrote things statements such as:

**“Right now I’m trying to get fucked and trying to finish off these time bombs. NBK came quick. why the fuck cant I get any? I mean, I’m nice and considerate and all that shit, but nooooo. I think I try to hard. but I kinda need to considering NBK is closing in.”**

- Eric Harris (04/03/1999) journal

There is also a fixation with school shooters on the incelsphere, with many discussions surrounding the lives, manifestos, and attacks committed by them. This fixation is demonstrated by the online behaviours of some incel-related attackers, with Chris Harper-Mercer explicitly mentioning Elliot Roger, Vester Flanagan, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, Adam Lanza, and



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Seung Cho by name, while William Atchison used a number of usernames that mimicked those used by notable school shooters; including ‘Adam Lanza’, ‘Rebdoomer’, ‘Sturmgeist88’, etc<sup>4</sup>.

The fourth aspect concerns mental health, particularly the high rate of self-reported autism from users on the incelosphere (Broyd et al., 2022; Jaki et al., 2019, 2019; Moskalenko et al., 2022; Speckhard and Ellenberg, 2022; van Brunt and Taylor, 2021; Williams et al., 2021), with some users arguing that this can render someone an incel (Jaki et al., 2019). At the same time, some research has indicated that individuals with autism may be particularly vulnerable to the incel worldview due to both problems they experience with understanding social relationships and the ‘rules-based’ nature of its ideology that focuses around clearly defined social groups and rules of interaction (Williams et al., 2021). While it is important to note that autism is not directly linked to violence or criminal behaviour, some research has highlighted that the difficulties with emotion regulation, impulse control, and a tendency for literal thinking may increase vulnerability to extremist ideas and engaging in violence (Broyd et al., 2022).

Research has also indicated that members of the incelosphere also experience symptoms related to depression, such as low mood, a sense of hopelessness, and suicidality; with the community often reinforcing these feelings within one another through their online interactions (Broyd et al., 2022; Speckhard and Ellenberg, 2022; van Brunt and Taylor, 2021).

However it is crucial to note these psychological traits are not deemed to be sufficient in themselves to motivate an individual to carry out an act of violence, and for an individual to do so, they need to be accompanied by the kind of over-generalisations, victim dehumanisation and neutralisation, and justifications seen in incel ideology (Broyd et al., 2022; van Brunt and Taylor, 2021; Williams et al., 2021).

Thus, it is perhaps best to evaluate the incel tendency towards violence by looking at proposed models of incel violence within the wider context of social-psychological issues akin to those that factor into the actions of school shooters. A model of incel violence that is useful for this purpose is the one proposed by van Brunt and Taylor (2021), which states that there should be a focus on the three central factors that drive incel beliefs (*figure 5*). First, while incels often lament on their perceived physical deformities and view themselves as ugly, they do consider themselves to be superior to other out-group(s) and this fuels a sense of entitlement, most notably in the form believing they are entitled to sex from women. Second, this is accompanied by a sense of jealousy towards others, such as ‘Chads’, who the incels deem to have access to the kind of women and sexual relationships that they believe are denied to them. Finally, the incel ideology is intrinsically misogynist, with its adherents exhibiting negative, objectifying, and essentialist views of women, often viewing them as an accessory.

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<sup>4</sup> [https://schoolshooters.info/sites/default/files/atchison\\_online\\_1.0.pdf](https://schoolshooters.info/sites/default/files/atchison_online_1.0.pdf)

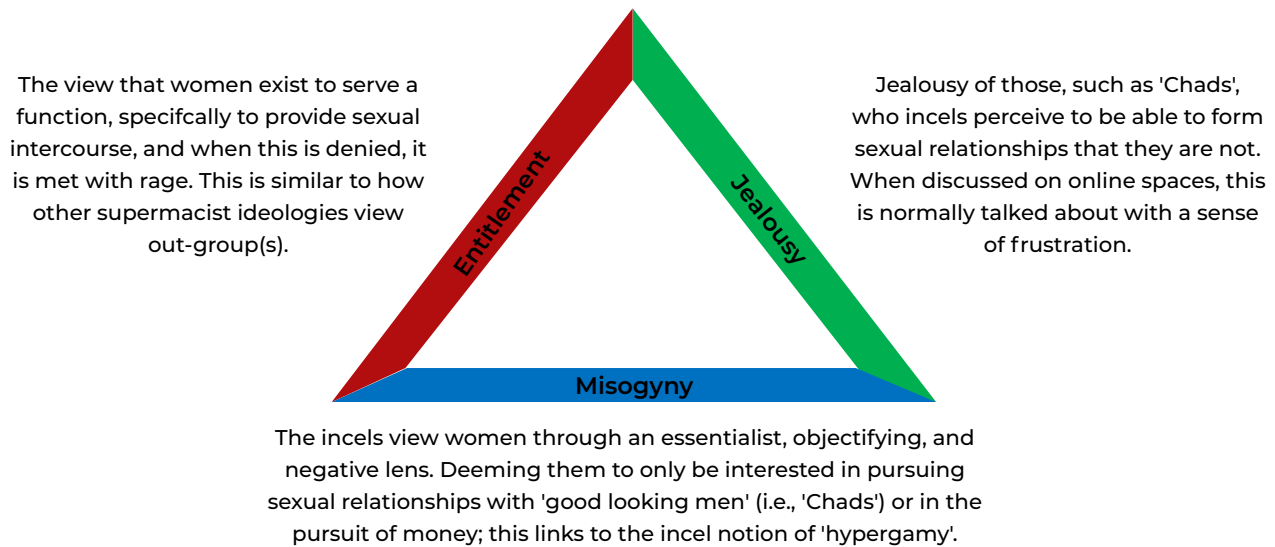


Figure 5: Replication of the triangle of central factors that drives incels towards violence from van Brunt and Taylor (2021).

Combining van Brunt and Taylor's (2021) model with the aspects of incel violence covered in this section and what is known about the age demographics of users on the incelosphere (see Anti-Defamation League, 2020; Moskalenko et al., 2022; Speckhard and Ellenberg, 2022; Sugiura, 2021), it is possible to build an understanding of a potential radicalisation pathway towards violence for incels; one that could be conceptualised as a 'red pill to black pill pipeline'.

It is worth noting here that the following pipeline model to violence currently has no empirical validity. It has been constructed solely from secondary research and open-source information that is available about the individuals who have committed acts of incel-related mass-violence and what is known about the incel online community. In this model, individuals who are 'red pillled' in the sense that they believe in the aforementioned social hierarchy and accompanying worldview, but have not adopted the 'black pill' nihilistic views of these categories being immutable, may view acts of mass-violence as a way of bringing around a form of socio-political change to improve their perceived situation. Given the nature of the incel ideology, it is likely that some of the younger individuals (i.e., 12-13 years of age) who engage with this content may naturally disengage from it as they mature through

socialisation processes, resulting in their time on these online spaces being a temporary phase. However, those who fail to form meaningful social relationships and instead continue to interpret their offline, real-world, experiences through the lens of incel ideology develop the potential to shift from red pill logic to black pill logic, as they spend more time engaging with this content and having nihilistic views reinforced through online interactions with others. Hence the large number of discussions that feature both black pill logic and mentions of suicide. Over time, the sense of hopelessness, feelings of inadequacies, and frustrations with life being viewed through the lens of entitlement to sex, sense of jealousy, and misogyny that is characteristic of the incel ideology have the potential to lower their thresholds to violence. This could explain why a sense of hopelessness and suicidal ideation has been noted in most perpetrators of incel-related mass-violence (van Brunt and Taylor, 2021; Williams et al., 2021) and might partially explain why, despite the incelosphere involving contributions to discussions from very young people, perpetrators of such acts tend to be older, normally in their early 20s, and why six of the nine perpetrators of acts of incel-related mass-violence listed in *table 1* either committed suicide at the end of their attack or attempted 'suicide by cop'.

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There are three crucial things to note about this pipeline, however. First, as stated above, this pipeline model was constructed from secondary data related to the nature of discussions on incel online spaces and what is known about perpetrators of incel-related mass-violence. It is therefore unlikely to capture the experience of all individuals who engage with this content and more extensive work is therefore required. Furthermore, given the diversification in harmful and violent behaviours being carried out by individuals who have engaged with incel content online, it is unlikely that this model will be generalisable to all individuals who have committed some form of harmful and violent action.

Second, while the abovementioned mental health issues and psychological tendencies seen in school shooters have been observed in several incel attackers and may increase an individual's vulnerability to an extremist ideology (Broyd et al., 2022; Speckhard and Ellenberg, 2022; van Brunt and Taylor, 2021; Williams et al., 2021), it is crucial to note that this factor is unlikely to be the cause of an individual engaging in violent action, but instead may act alongside other factors in lowering the threshold for engaging in violence when combined with the incel ideology and worldview.

Third, given the nature of discussions on the incelosphere, posts and comments made by an individual on these online spaces may contain 'leakage' when aspects of the incel ideology and worldview are integrated into long-form discussions of an individual's personal life and offline experiences. Leakage is the process whereby an individual makes comments that indicate they are either planning or preparing for an attack. It has been noted that with school shooters this normally takes the form of comments or brags to friends or classmates (Langman, 2017), and in more recent years, acts of extremist mass-violence have seen the perpetrators announce their intentions on their preferred online space shortly before commencing their attack (Baele et al., 2020b); something that was seen in the cases of Alek Minassian and Chris Harper-Mercer. As such, some individuals who are engaging with online incel content, and making posts that integrate these ideas with their personal, offline, life experiences in a long-form piece of writing could potentially constitute a form of leakage that indicates that an individual's threshold to carry out an act of mass-violence is decreasing, or that their tendency to want to target a specific individual in an act of interpersonal violence is increasing.

## 6. A DATA-DRIVEN ANALYSIS OF INCELOSPHERE ENGAGEMENT BY UK-BASED USERS

After extensive exploration of incel online spaces using classic snowballing and out-links techniques, a series of custom-built web scrapers were developed in the generic high-level programming language Python to collect the content of a range of pertinent spaces. Data collection was done first-hand by the researcher, with the only exceptions being the sub-Reddits r/Incel, r/Incels, r/Braincels, and r/IncelsWithoutHate. These sub-Reddits were shut down for violating Reddit's terms of service in relation to hate speech and bullying long before this project began, so their content was extracted from the Pushshift.io open-source data archiving site, which has been collecting Reddit data and making it freely available to researchers since 2015 (Baumgartner et al. 2020).<sup>5</sup> This yielded a dataset that contained all of the textual data and metadata available for every post made to 32 different online spaces hosting incel content. This dataset will be made available to the scholarly community for further analysis, and an

extensive overview and discussion of it can be found in Baele et al. (2023).

To analyse the levels of engagement with incelsphere content within the UK, a multi-step process was adopted to create a list of users who had identified themselves as living in the UK. First a list of identifiers, such as 'here in', 'i am from', 'here', etc, were taken along with a second list of descriptors, such as 'uk', 'ireland', and 'ukcel', and all possible combinations of these terms were created (*figure 6*). This yielded a list containing phrases such as 'here in the uk', 'where i live in scotland', 'ukcel here', etc, that could be used to detect posts contained in the dataset whereby the author identified themselves as being UK-based. Note that terms such as 'UKcel' and 'Scotcel' are reflective of the way in which incels tend to discuss their specific traits by adding the 'cel' suffix to descriptors, which is short for 'celibate'.

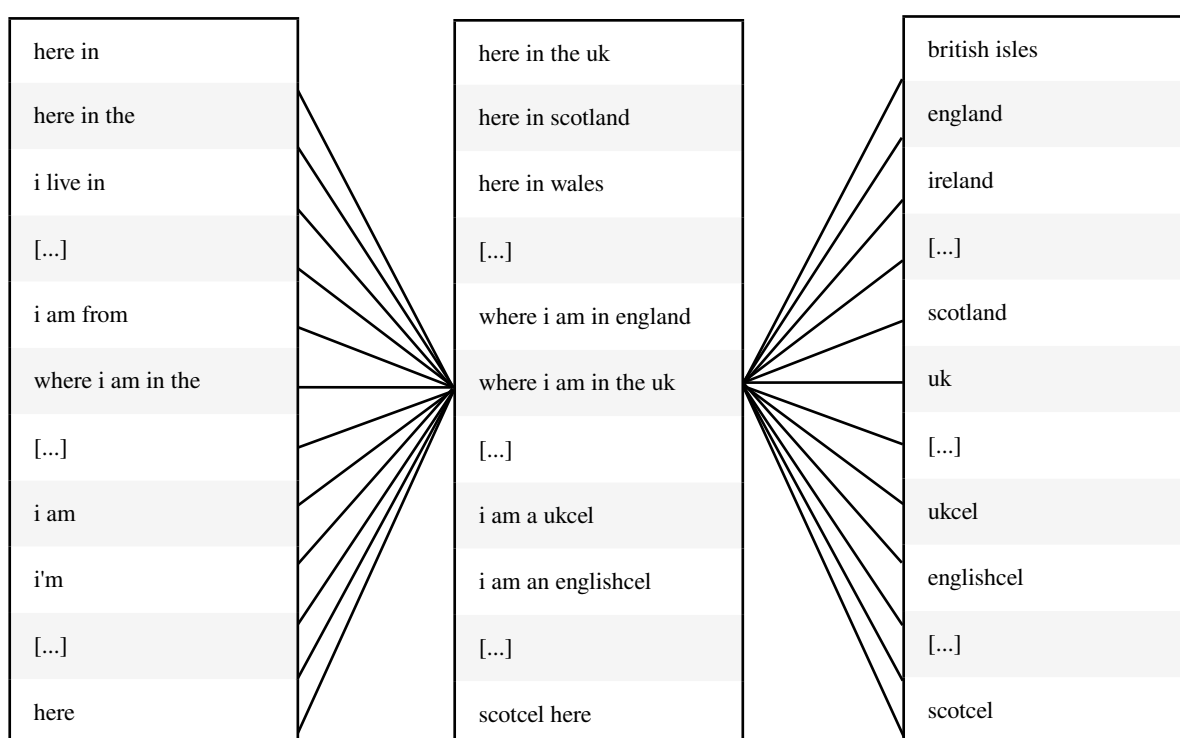


Figure 6: A representation of the list of identifiers (left), descriptors (right), and final list of combined terms (middle).  
Note: "[...]" denotes that the whole list is not shown.

<sup>5</sup> The authors extend their thanks to the Pushshift researchers.



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The second step used this combined list to cycle through every post in the dataset and extract any post that contained one of the phrases within the list. For each of these extracted posts, the name of the author was extracted to create a list of authors who had identified themselves as living in the UK. Finally, all of the posts made by these authors were then extracted from the dataset in order to yield a final dataset of 2,314,866 posts and accompanying metadata made to various forums and sub-Reddits by individuals who claimed to have been based in the UK.<sup>6</sup>

Plotting the number of posts across time in figures 7 and 8 demonstrates that the daily number of posts for UK-based users (*figure 7, top*) broadly follows the same pattern seen by all users on these platforms (*figure 7, bottom*). These figures also have vertical green lines that indicate when prominent acts of incel-related mass-violence, details of which are contained in *table 1*, where the initials used in these graphs are connected to incidents. While this is not an exhaustive list of incel-related violent attacks, it provides a useful overview of those that have had considerable media attention and which might have triggered increases/decreases in online engagement with incel content.

Two other observations can be seen in *figure 7*. First, there was little engagement from UK-based users on the incelosphere during 2016-2017, when it predominantly took the form of a series of sub-Reddits. After this point, the forums were much more popular amongst UK-based users. Indeed, the first main uptick in UK-based engagement with the incelosphere coincides with the emergence of Incels.is<sup>7</sup>. In the broader ecosystem, the number of daily posts to forums steadily increases before reaching peak engagement a few months after the establishment of Incels.is and Alex Minassian's Toronto van attack during April-May 2018. Engagement then lowers, before steadily increasing to its second highest peak around the time of the introduction of the first

COVID-19 restrictions in Europe and the US. In the case of UK-based users, peak engagement coincides with the introduction of these COVID-19 restrictions.

Second, there is a noticeable drop in the number of daily posts by both UK-based and all other users following October 2020. While there is an increase in engagement for forums for the general user base in February-March 2022, the amount of user engagement for UK-based users remains low. From the data obtained and presented here, it is not possible to determine the cause of this significant drop in engagement. However, it is possible that this reflects an evolution in the incelosphere whereby its userbase are beginning to favour other platforms, such as Discord and Twitch<sup>8</sup>; a phenomenon that has been seen on platforms hosting different extremist ideological content (Baele et al., 2020b).

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6 Only data from these two types of platform types were included in the below analysis either due to the nature of the platform meaning that all usernames are listed as 'Anonymous', as is the case with the chan boards, or no users on the platform explicitly identifying themselves as being from the UK, as was the case with Telegram, etc.

7 Incels.is has existed under a number of domains, such as Incels.me and Incels.co. It was originally Incels.me.

8 A more comprehensive diachronic analysis of the incelosphere can be found in Baele et al. (2023).

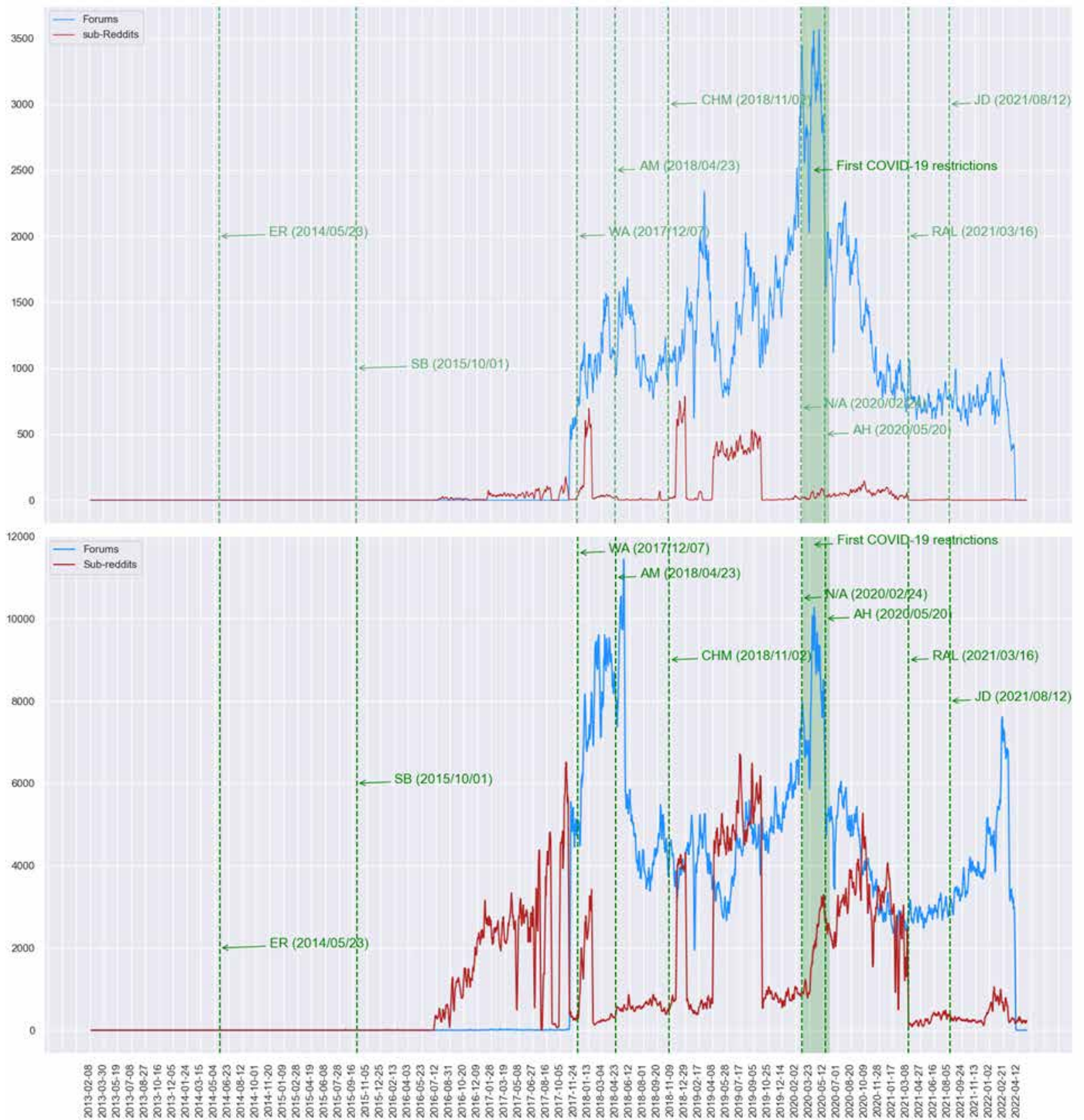


Figure 7: Number of posts made to forums and sub-Reddits for all users (bottom) and only UK-based users (top). 5-day rolling average.

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Initials	Name	Date	Location	Perpetrator outcome
ER	Elliot Rodger	23/05/2014	Isla Vista, USA	Suicide
SB	Scott Beierle	01/10/2015	Tallahassee, USA	Suicide
WA	William Atchison	07/12/2017	Aztec, USA	Suicide
AM	Alek Minassian	23/04/2018	Toronto, Canada	Attempted 'suicide by cop' but failed
CHM	Chris Harper-Mercer	02/11/2018	Roseburg, USA	Suicide
N/A	Undisclosed name due to the perpetrator being 17-years old	24/02/2020	Toronto, Canada	Arrested
AH	Armando Hernandez	20/05/2020	Glendale (Phoenix), USA	Surrendered
RAL	Robert Aaron-Long	16/03/2021	Atlanta, USA	Arrested
JD	Jake Davison	12/08/2021	Plymouth, UK	Suicide

Table 1. Key acts of incel-related violence that have gained substantial media attention.

Figure 8 then shows the number of daily posts made by all UK-based posters for each specific forum (top) and sub-Reddit (bottom) in the dataset. It shows that Incels.is has acted as the long-standing anchor of the incelosphere and has historically been the most popular incel online space amongst UK-based users, as measured by number of daily posts made to it. This mirrors what is seen in the incelosphere as a whole (Baele et al., 2023). It also shows that Looksmax.org began to increase in popularity towards the end of the data collection period. Regarding sub-Reddits, r/Braincels was the most popular amongst UK-based users before being shut down.

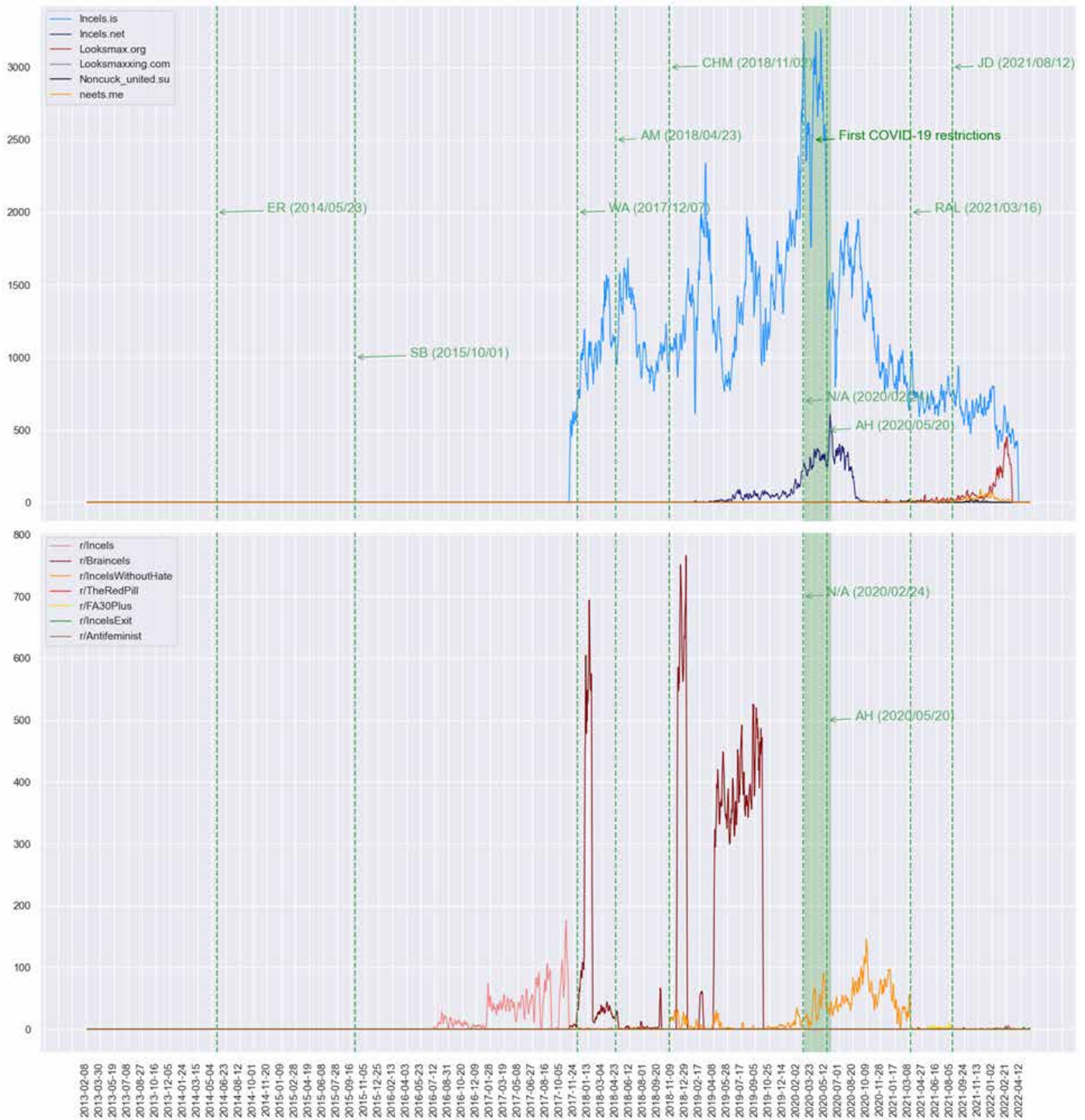


Figure 8: Number of posts made to individual forums (top) and sub-Reddits (bottom) by UK-based users. 5-day rolling average.



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Building upon a body of work that highlighted a potential ‘super-posters’ phenomenon, whereby a minority of users post disproportionately more than other users on extremist online forums, and the impact that these super-posters might have on the nature of discussions on these forums (Kleinberg et al., 2021; Scrivens, 2021; Scrivens et al., 2021), more recent empirical work has demonstrated both that categorising users as either posters or super-posters is too reductive and that this applies to forums hosting both extremist and non-extremist content (Baele et al., 2022).

Utilising this same method on the number of posts made by each of the 583 identified unique UK-based usernames, *figure 9* shows that the optimal number of groups for these users is 4; the same as what Baele et al. (2022) demonstrated. More importantly, it shows that the majority of UK-based users make very few posts, typically 1-2, these are referred to as hypo-posters. There are then normo-posters who post fewer than 20,000 times, super-posters who post between 20,000 – 40,000 times, and finally, there are two hyper-posters who post >40,000 times. Thus, out of the 583 unique UK-based usernames, very few of these actually contribute to discussions on incel online spaces within this dataset to any significant degree.

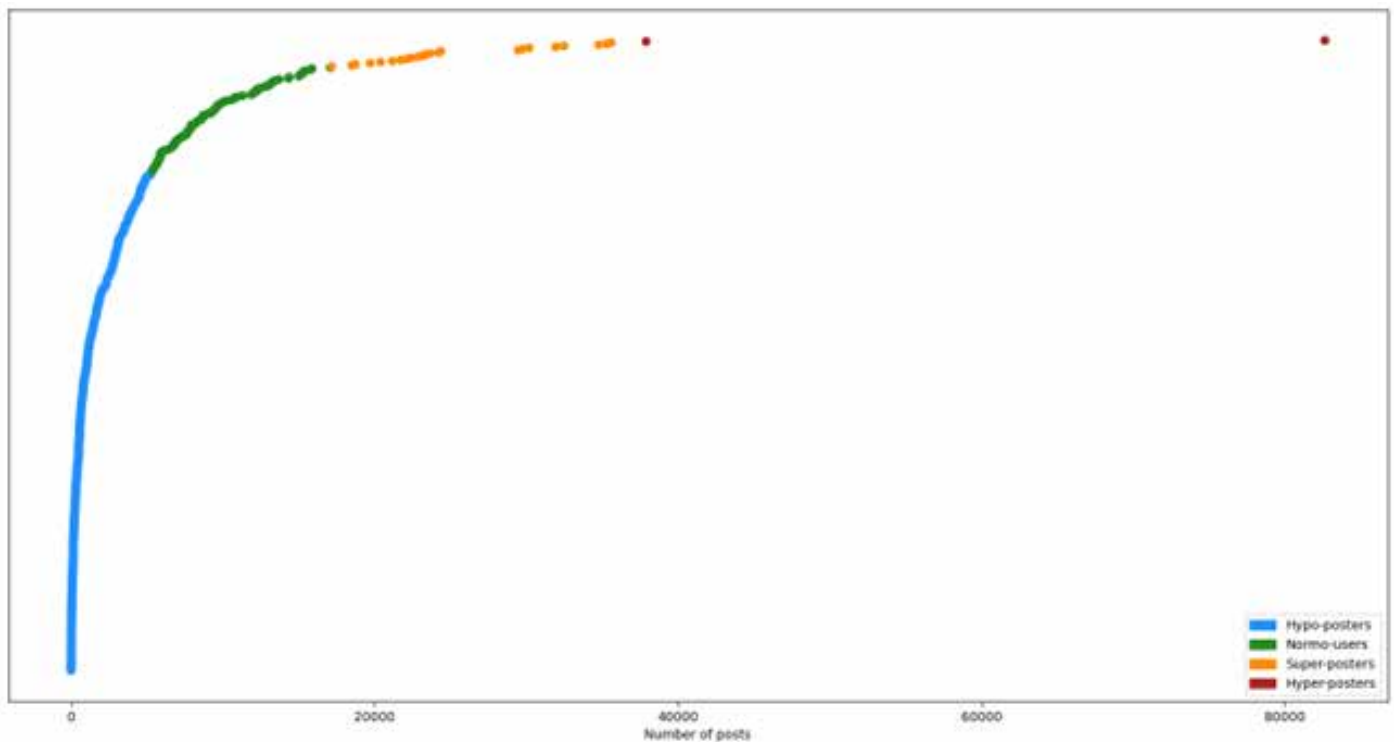


Figure 9: Categories of posters based on their number of posts as calculated by the Fisher-Jenks algorithm.

Figure 10 then uses an empirical cumulative distribution function (ECDF) to display the distribution of posts per UK-based user, represented as a proportion on the y-axis, for each distinct online space in the data. In doing so, it demonstrates that the vast majority of UK-based engagement on the incelosphere occurs on Incels.is, which not only has the most posts made by these users, but which also hosts the two hyper-posters from figure 9. Incels.net then comes in as the second online space with most UK engagement.

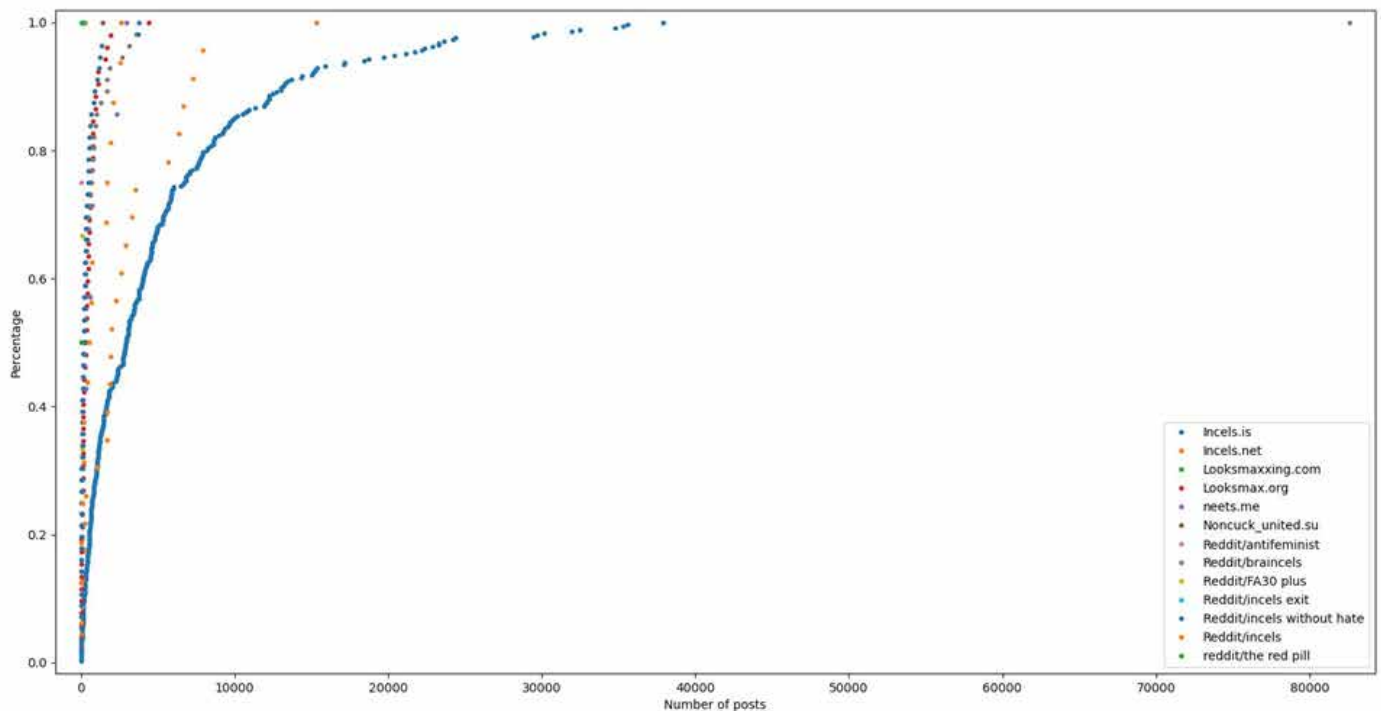


Figure 10: ECDF showing what percentage of UK-based posters (y-axis) have specific number of posts (x-axis) per individual online space.

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While there is disparity in the total number of posts made to the incelosphere by different UK-based users, a more interesting question is whether the number of UK-based users has increased over time. This was calculated by taking the date of the first and last post made by each user, and for every date in between, one was added to the tally of 'active users' for the given date on that specific platform. While this is not a perfect measure of whether a username was an active user, since they could have continued reading content but not posted after the final post date, for example, it is the best measure that is possible given the nature of these online spaces.

Figure 11 shows that the first dedicated incel online space, the sub-Reddit r/Incels, had a maximum of 16 unique users who identified themselves as being based in the UK. The successor to this platform, the sub-Reddit r/Braincels, then slowly increased the

number of UK-based users throughout 2018 and eventually peaked at 56. However, it is again Incels.is that has the highest number of UK-based users, which increases sharply during the first few months of the forum being active, before switching to a slower rate of increasing users. It then reaches its peak at the time of the introduction of the first COVID-19 restrictions in Europe and the US with 369 users identifying themselves as being based in the UK. There is also a constant and steady increase in the number of UK-based active users on Looksmax.org over time.

However, despite these increasing numbers, it is worth noting that users who identified themselves as being UK-based make up a relatively very small proportion of the total number of users on these online platforms (table 2).

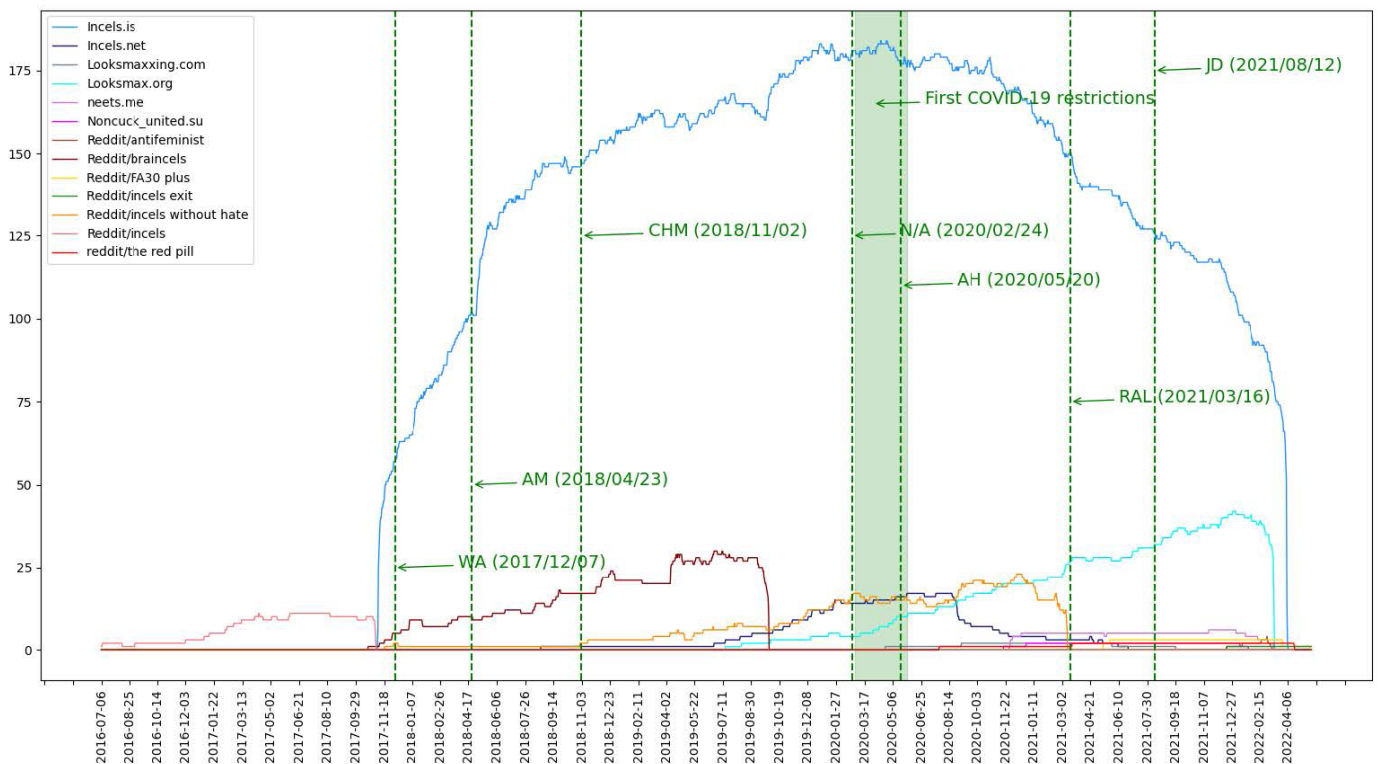


Figure 11: Number of users who identified themselves as being based in the UK over time and across online spaces.

Platform	Number of users	Number of UK-based users	Proportion of UK-based users
Incels.is	369	10,408	0.035
Incels.net	23	2,818	0.008
Looksmaxxing.com	2	223	0.008
Looksmax.org	52	4,094	0.012
Neets.me	7	281	0.024
Noncuck.su	2	161	0.012
r/Antifeminist	4	3,508	0.001
r/Braincels	56	30,973	0.001
r/FA30Plus	3	1,530	0.001
r/Incelexit	1	2,155	0.000
r/incelswithouthate	56	39,474	0.001
r/Incels	16	35,119	0.000
r/Theredpill	2	9,835	0.000
<b>All platform total</b>	<b>593</b>	<b>140,651</b>	<b>0.103</b>

Table 2. Proportions of all users on each online space that is self-identified as being UK-based.



# 7. HOW WORRIED SHOULD WE BE ABOUT INCEL-RELATED VIOLENCE?

There is a growing body of work which demonstrates that extreme language use is increasing on both the incelosphere and wider manosphere (Baele et al., 2023; Farrell et al., 2019), with reports of misogynistic and anti-woman attitudes being shared by young boys in the class room (Hope Not Hate, 2020; Miller-Idriss, 2023; Will, 2023). At the same time, an emerging body of research has shown that, not only are such online behaviours strongly indicative of broader offline misogynistic attitudes and aggressive/violent behaviours (Powell and Henry, 2017; Rottweiler et al., 2021), but that there is a link between having violent misogynistic attitudes and an increased likelihood of support for violent extremism (Díaz and Valji, 2023; Johnston and True, 2019; Roose et al., 2022; Rottweiler et al., 2021),

This is occurring at a time when official terrorism statistics for the UK are showing an increase in both the number of young people being charged with TACT offences and Prevent referrals for the MUU (for ‘Mixed, Unclear, and Unstable’) categorisation, which the incel ideology falls under. In breaking down the MUU categorisation, the 2021-2022 Prevent statistics showed that there were 77 referrals related to incel ideology, with 23 of these being adopted as Channel cases, and 154 referrals due to school massacre fixation, of which 38 were adopted as Channel cases; with these two ideological classifications being the most likely to be adopted as Channel cases (UK Home Office, 2023). Additionally, these data showed that, of the 6,406 Prevent referrals made to the year ending March 2022, those under 15 years of age accounted for 1,829 (29%) and those aged 15-20 accounted for 1,902 (30%); with those under 15 constituting the largest proportion of those adopted as a Channel case (299 out of 804 cases) (UK Home Office, 2023). At the same time, the most recent UK terrorism statistics showed

a substantial increase in terrorism-related arrests for those under the age of 20, resulting in the number of individuals aged 10-20 being arrested for terrorism-related offences outnumbering those aged 21-29 for the first time during the year ending September 2022 (UK Home Office, 2022).

This is happening at a time when our online behaviours are changing, with all demographics spending more time online; a behavioural shift that is most significant amongst teenagers, with some reporting that they are ‘always’ connected to the internet in some capacity (see Anderson and Jiang, 2018; Ofcom, 2021). As a result of this, academic researchers have integrated these changes in our online behaviours and the nature of lone-actor radicalisation to form the concept of ‘onlife’, which rejects the online and offline dichotomy and argues that individuals now interact and behave in spaces that integrate aspects of both; with some arguing that current radicalisation patterns are best conceived of as a product of this (Fisogni, 2019; Valentini, Lorusso and Stephan, 2020).

This change in our online behaviours combined with both the pull factors feeling personalised for young males engaging with incel ideology given that incelosphere content features themes pertaining to anxieties of young men transitioning to adults (O’Malley et al., 2020) and evidence that the age demographic for incels tends to be relatively young (Anti-Defamation League, 2020; Moskalenko et al., 2022; Speckhard and Ellenberg, 2022; Sugiura, 2021), engagement with incel content is likely to continue to increase in the coming years given that this ideology is particularly insidious and pries on the insecurities of young boys who are often still going through a period of socialisation.

At the same time, more people are likely to be drawn to these ideas for two additional reasons. First, there is increased awareness of the existence of these online communities following high-profile incidents and subsequent media attention, with many of the concepts and notions seen on the incelosphere becoming part of more mainstream parts of the internet; i.e., ‘Chad’ is now often used in online gaming communities that are not known for hosting extremist content. Second, the aforementioned increase in misogynistic attitudes and social media impact of individuals who are both influential online and espouse ideas that tap into arguments from the wider manosphere have the potential to act as a gateway towards the incel ideology.

In short, it is unlikely that the incel phenomenon, or at least the ideas that underpin it are unlikely to go away anytime soon. As such, there is a need to develop a framework for better assessing individuals who are susceptible to incel and manosphere ideology and who exhibit risk factors for violence. One such measure, termed the Incel Indoctrination Rubric (IIR), was recently developed by van Brunt and Taylor (2021), and uses 20 risk factors in order to measure an individual’s commitment to incel ideology. However, while the IIR was based on 54 case studies of individuals who had committed violent acts and exhibited anti-woman/misogynistic sentiments, there is not yet any study that has sought to validate it as a useful tool for assessing an individual and it was not developed specifically to assess those in the incel population with mental health issues (Broyd et al., 2022; van Brunt and Taylor, 2021). As such, further work is required in this area.

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# GLOSSARY

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## CONTENT WARNING

This glossary contains some offensive language.

**2D>3D:** The believe that AI chatbots are better than real-world girlfriends.

**80/20 rule:** An application of the Pareto principal from mathematics, with incels using it to refer to how 80% of women try to engage in sexual relationships with the top 20% of most attractive (as dictated by the standard of attractiveness in the incel subculture) of men.

**Alt-rightcels:** Incels who associate with alt-right politics.

**AOC:** Age of consent.

**Ascend:** To leave incelism by having non-paid for sex with a woman.

**Atomic black pill:** Refers to any proof that women behave the way that the incel ideology states, such as only being attracted to male physical traits. Sometimes linked to the notion of Black pill science.

**AWALT:** Stands for 'All Woman Are Like That' and refers to the incel view of how all women are driven by their perceived natural tendencies to pursuing sexual relationships.

**Based:** Not caring about the opinions of others or by being 'political correct'.

**Becky/Beckys:** The majority of the female population, considered by the incels to be 'average' looking females.

**Beta:** Men who dedicate large amounts of time and resources to a woman in order to try and engage in a sexual or romantic relationship with her.

**Beta orbiter:** A man who either follows female influencers online or spends a large amount of time with a woman/women pretending to listen and care about their opinions.

**Betabux:** A man who is both in a relationship and not a Chad. The term refers to how women supposedly only interested in dating such men while cheating on them or after they have hit an age where they are no longer attractive to chads; known as hitting 'the wall'.

**Biological Essentialism:** The notion that rejecting incels is an innate aspect of female behaviour.

**Blackcel:** A black incel.

**Black pill:** A more nihilistic version of the red pill. Being black pill means that an individual not only recognises the existence of the incel social hierarchy, but also accepts that its categorisations are immutable, and they cannot 'ascend'.

**Black pill science:** This involves 'experiments' that yield perceived proof that women are only interested in the physical appearances of males; this 'proof' is referred to as atomic black pill.

**Blue pill:** Being blue pill means that an individual is unaware of the existence of the incel social hierarchy or does not believe in its existence.

**Bone smash theory:** Linked to the notion of looksmaxxing and refers to the belief that bones will grow when exposed to repeated trauma and this can lead to individuals changing their physical appearances.

**Catfishing:** Creating a fake social media profile for the purposes of tricking an individual online into conversation or using the fake profile to bully another individual.

**Chad:** This refers to the men who are at the top of the incel social hierarchy due to their perceived Aryan looks and being in possession of genetic traits that incels deem women to find attractive, such as jawline, hairline, height, etc.

**Chaddam:** An Arab Chad.

**Chadfishing:** A specific form of catfishing done by incels using images of men that they deem attractive in order to carryout black pill science ‘experiments’.

**Chadlite:** A lower-tier Chad.

**Chadpreet:** An Indian Chad.

**Chang:** A Chad from East-Asia.

**Cheerleader effect:** The notion that women are more attractive when they are in a group compared to when they are on their own.

**Cock carousel:** The belief that women in their 20s engaging in sexual relationships with one man after the other, before settling for a less attractive man in their 30s, often after hitting the wall.

**Cucks:** A man deemed to be emasculated by their own behaviour, such as dating a woman who is cheating on them or subscribing to the blue pill.

**Cuckold:** A man who is dating or married to an adulterous wife.

**Currycel:** An Indian incel.

**Dog pill:** The belief that women would prefer to have sex with dogs instead with an incel.

**DOXX:** Finding and publishing private information about someone online for malicious purposes.

**Escortcel:** An incel who uses sex workers.

**Fapfuel:** Material used by incels to aid masturbation.

**FBIcels:** A term used by incels to refer to users on incel online spaces that are believed to be undercover law enforcements.

**Femoid/Foid:** A shortened version of ‘femanoïd’, which is a portmanteau of ‘Female’ and ‘humanoid’, which refers to the incel belief that women are not human.

**Frenchcel:** A French incel.

**Game:** Techniques discussed by Pick-Up Artists (PUA) to manipulate women into sex.

**Giga:** A prefix put in front of a word to describe the ‘ultimate’ version of something; i.e., giga-Chad to an ‘ultimate’ Chad.

**Going ER/Go ER:** ‘ER’ refers to Elliot Rodger, and this term refers to carrying out or lauding an act of mass-violence or murder-suicide.

**Goy/Goyim:** Hebrew and Yiddish term for non-Jewish people, which has been co-opted by the far-right extremist communities and sometimes the incel subculture to refer to their non-Jewish ethnicity.

**Gymmaxxing:** Improving one’s physical appearances by going to the gym.

**Gynocentric:** The notion that society is actively works against men and favours women and feminist ideals.

**Halo effect:** The tendency to view an attractive person as innocent, often ascribing them positive traits, such as honesty.



## GLOSSARY

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**hERo:** The capitalised 'ER' refers to Elliot Roger and is used to praise someone for carrying out an act of mass-violence.

**High IQ:** A term used to describe a high-level of intelligence when talking about an individual or a high-quality post when referring to online posts.

**High T:** High levels of testosterone.

**High-tier:** An individual with above average physical attractiveness.

**Hypergamy:** The notion that women are only interested in seeking out sexual relationships with the most attractive males, and that women are therefore uninterested in less attractive men due to being more sexually selective.

**ITcucks:** Members of the sub-Reddit r/IncelTears who seek out, and collect screenshots of, incel content online in order to post in the sub-Reddit for mockery.

**It's Over:** Refers to suicidal ideation.

**Jail Bait:** A girl who is under the age of sexual consent.

**JB:** Shortened version of Jail Bait.

**JBB:** Short for Just Be Black.

**JB pill:** Refers to 'jail bait pill', which argues that Jail Bait is an anti-male concept that prevents men from engaging in sexual acts with women in their 'prime'.

**JBW:** Short for Just Be White.

**JFL:** Short for 'just fucking LOL', often used to refer to individuals behaving in ways that incels deem to be typical of how they perceive their group.

**Jihad pill:** The notion that the only way to access sexual relationships is by becoming a jihadist or committing an act of jihad.

**Jihadmaxxing:** Accessing sexual relationships by becoming a jihadist.

**Just Be Black:** The notion that certain behaviours that allow someone to have sex are only an option if you are black.

**Just Be White:** The notion that certain behaviours that allow someone to have sex are only an option if you are white.

**KHHV:** Short for 'kissless, hugless, handholdless virgin'.

**Landwhale:** An overweight woman.

**LARP:** Short for 'live action role play', used within incel online spaces to refer to someone who is pretending to be someone or something they are not.

**LDAR:** Short for 'lay down and rot', used to refer to the belief that self-improvement behaviours or corrective actions are pointless. Often used as a justification for withdrawing from human social contact.

**Lifefuel:** Refers to something that encourages an incel to continue to live.

**Lookism:** The incel notion that they are discriminated against based on their physical appearances.

**Looksmax/Looksmaxxing:** Anything that can be tried to improve one's physical attractiveness, such as expensive haircuts, clothes, or going to the gym regularly.

**Low T:** Low levels of testosterone.

**Low-tier:** The notion that a low-tier normie has below average physical attractiveness.

**Maleleader Effect:** When a male looks more attractive when they are part of a group of males due to the others being less attractive.

**Manlet:** A short man or one with a small physique.

**Manosphere:** The conglomerate of online spaces that host content from Men's Rights Activists (MRAs), Men Go Their Own Way (MGTOW), Pick-Up Artists (PUA), and incels.

**Marcel:** A married incel.

**Men's Rights Activists (MRAs):** One of the four groups of the manosphere who want to effect legislative and social change in relation to matters such as family law, reproduction, military service, etc, that they perceive to discriminate against men.

**Men Go Their Own Way (MGTOW):** One of the four groups of the manosphere who espouse the notion of rejecting any relationships with women, and sometimes society as a whole, based on the logic that the current system is impossible to alter and will continue to discriminate against men.

**Mentalcel:** An incel with mental health issues, most commonly self-reported autism.

**Mogs/Mogged:** The act of dominating someone by being more attractive.

**Moneymaxx:** Engaging in certain behaviour to become wealthier as a way of gaining access to sex.

**Muslimcel:** An incel who is Muslim.

**NEET:** Short for 'Not in Education, Employment or Training', often seen to be an admirable way of living by the incel subculture as it represents one moving themselves away from an oppressive society.

**Nice guy/nice guy syndrome:** men who believe that they are entitled to sex and relationships with women because believe that they possess traits that make them good partners.

**Noodlewhores:** An incel term for Asian women.

**Normie:** An individual who is not an incel or a Chad/Stacy.

**NPC:** In videogame jargon NPC stands for 'Non-Player Character', and are characters in the video game that are pre-programmed by developers. On incel online spaces, this term is used to refer to individuals who are seen to be part of the system and who argue in favour of political correctness, etc.

**Omega:** A man who has problems interacting with women and therefore has no prospect of a relationship with a woman.

**Orbiter:** Same as Beta Orbiter.

**Pee-Pee:** A slang term for the symbol/meme Pepe the Frog that is often used in far-right extremist communities.

**Pick-up Artists (PUAs):** One of the four groups of the manosphere who organise their worldview around 'the game', the idea that there are proven techniques and strategies that can be used to engage in sexual relationships with women; techniques that involve objectifying, and most often harassing, women.

**Pink Pill:** Despite the incels arguing that women cannot be incels, there is a small community of women who believe that they cannot live up to society's idea of the 'perfect women' no matter how hard they try.

**PSL rating:** A acronym of the names of the previous manosphere sites 'PUAhate', 'Sluthate', and 'Lookism', and is a 10-point scale used to rate an individual's physical appearance.

**Ragefuel:** News stories, information, events, or something else that makes incels angry.

**Red pill:** being red pill means that an individual is 'awake' and aware that the incel social hierarchy exists.

**Ricecel:** An East-Asian incel.

**Roastie:** Refers to a sexually active woman due to the incel's belief that female genitals change after sex and come to resemble roast beef.

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**Rope:** Refers to suicidal ideation.

**SEAMaxx/SEAMaxxing:** SEA is short for South-East Asia, and this term refers to travelling to the region in pursuit of sex due to the belief that white men are preferred by Asian women.

**Serious:** Used as a label on incel online spaces to refer to threads discussing issues such as the merits of perpetrators of mass-violence, etc.

**Sexual Marketplace:** A term for the modern dating world.

**Simp:** A man who invests a large amount of time and resources in a woman who is not sexually or romantically interested in him.

**SMV:** Short for 'Sexual Marketplace Value', which is used as a measure of an individual's attractiveness.

**Soyboy:** Refers to men with leftist socio-political views and feminists who lack masculine traits, based on the notion that men become weak when consume dairy-free products.

**Soyciety:** The notion that society has lost its strength due to caving to left-wing politics, feminism, and LGBTQ+ policies.

**Stacy/Stacey:** The female equivalent of a Chad. The type of woman who is at the top of the incel social hierarchy, and the ones that incels most want to engage in sexual relationships with. Often described as being blonde with long legs.

**Statusmaxx:** Increasing one's social status in an effort to increase their SMV.

**Stop coping:** Refers to suicidal ideation.

**Stormcel:** An incel who subscribes to white supremacy and therefore frequently visits the far-right extremist website Stormfront.

**Sub 8 law:** The notion that men with a PSL rating lower than 8 are unable to access sexual and romantic relationships.

**Sub 9 law:** The notion that men with a PSL rating lower than 9 are unable to access sexual and romantic relationships.

**Suifuel:** Short for 'suicide fuel' and refers to news stories, information, or some other content that increases the level of self-hate within an incel and therefore fuelling their desire to kill themselves.

**The Wall:** The notion that the maximum age a woman can reach before her SMV starts to decrease is 25.

**Thugmaxxing:** A term used to refer to black incels who dress and behave in a manner perceived to be 'thuglike' in order to attract women.

**Tic-tacs:** refers to overdosing on tic-tacs, a mockery of suicide that implies people only do it for attention.

**Tik-Tok Pill:** The argument that the social media platform Tik-Tok is dominated by Chads and Staceys.

**Tyrone:** A black Chad.

**Wagecuck:** Any man who works and therefore contributes to a society that oppresses them.

**Waifu:** An animated/computer-generated female character that someone has sexual or romantic feelings for.

**Whitecel:** A white incel.

**White Knight:** A man who rushes to aid women in any situation in order to feel better about himself.

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The logo graphic consists of three concentric, semi-circular red arcs on the left side, partially overlapping a solid red circle. The word "CREST" is written in white, uppercase letters across the red circle.

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