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Phenomenology Of Incels with Aggrieved Entitlement Who Participate in Online Communities

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Walden University

College of Psychology and Community Services

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Catherine Patterson-Sterling

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Walden University

2024

Abstract

Phenomenology Of Incels with Aggrieved Entitlement Who Participate in Online

Communities

by

Catherine Patterson-Sterling

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Forensic Psychology

Walden University

February 2024

Abstract

Incels are men who are unable to obtain romantic or sexual relationships with women, to which they feel entitled. The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the lived experiences of self-identified incels with aggrieved entitlement to better inform deradicalization interventions. Much previous incel research has included static one-dimensional posts on incel forums online which does not capture the social nuances, complex layers of phenomenon, or challenges around aggrieved entitlement of many incels. Furthermore, the issue of mass violence by self-identified incels has become a threat assessment issue so there is a need to explore interventions for deradicalization. The findings of this qualitative interpretative phenomenological research that included interviews with ten self-identified incels provided more nuanced understandings or social contexts around larger incel struggles. Emergent themes included (a) self-identified flaw(s) related to a bio-social-physical origin, (b) crossing a threshold which will be identified as a frustration barrier, (c) developing a seeker mentality, (d) emersion into the incel community at large, (e) selecting a sect or grouping of incels, (f) living with persecution, and (g) aggrieved entitlement. Such findings are in alignment or even an extension upon the existing research on incels and the results of this research will be able to assist in the development of deradicalization interventions. Positive social change implications include findings as well as insights that can be used for future deradicalization interventions such as assisting youth to learn about healthy relationships as well as have inoculated messaging around the manosphere or online misogyny prior to radicalization exposure.

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Dedication

I would like to thank my family for their strength, understanding, and encouragement. Without their support and patience, I could not fulfill the requirements of this journey. They are my soft place to fall and the light of my life.

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Dr. Hickey has served as my Chair and the captain of this incredible voyage. He is an exceptional person not only professionally with all of his knowledge, but as an inspiration of what life can be in this wild adventure. Dr. Hickey inspires me to think beyond barriers and to step with confidence into imagining the potential of what could be in a field that has only started and is not yet defined. Overall, Dr. Hickey is my role model also for how to do this journey with incredible delight as well as humor. I have also had the immense fortune of working with my second committee Dr. Gilstrap who has helped me to understand the models, hold steady in the details, and expand my understandings beyond what I could have imagined. Without her assurance and guidance, I would not have been able to achieve this goal. I am forever grateful for her mentorship. Lastly, I would like to thank my participants. Without their openness and willingness to have me witness their journeys, this study would not be possible. With courage, they shared with me the depths of their experiences and with vulnerability they let others witness their challenges as well as victories so that as researchers we can narrow that gap of misunderstanding to start those very important larger conversations. I am so grateful for your help and for the honor of bearing witness to your lived experiences.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The phenomenon that was explored in this interpretative phenomenological research study was to understand the lived experiences of self-identified incels with aggrieved entitlement. According to the United States Secret Service (2020), incels are “men who feel unable to obtain romantic or sexual relationships with women, to which they feel entitled.” (p. 3). Such incels are part of an identifiable online community who post regularly about their frustrations and have their own ideology as well as terms (Van Brunt & Taylor, 2021). There are over 50 different mass violence events in which lone actors have demonstrated characteristics in relation to incel ideologies, so this subculture is of great concern as well as interest to the threat assessment community of researchers (Van Brunt & Taylor).

This study needed to be conducted because in the larger threat assessment field there are concerns with what appears to be the potential for domestic terrorism or violent extremism through radicalized incel ideologies (Van Brunt & Taylor, 2021). In fact, Moskalenko et al. (2022) described “Mass-casualty incel attacks have led the security services in the US, Canada, and the UK to classify incels as a violent extremist threat” (p. 1). If researchers can understand the lived experiences of incel online communities with aggrieved entitlement issues, then the potential for violent extremism can be explored, insights into the escalation cycle of radicalized thinking may be examined, and this overall population of aggrieved people self-identifying as incels can be better understood as a social phenomenon. Clearly, not all self-identified incels have any inclinations

towards violence; however, this group of individuals with a high internet presence are of interest to threat assessment researchers (Maxwell et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the potential social implications of this study are that insights around radicalization, indoctrination, and incel ideologies can be better explored as part of deradicalization interventions. Also, self-identifying incels could share their lived experiences with aggrieved entitlement so that the perceived social rejection of this fringe online community could be understood within larger contexts such as dating apps or other issues which is often contentious with many incels (Preston et al., 2021). In this chapter, the background, research problem, purpose statement, research questions, and theoretical framework are further explored.

Background

Within the field of incel research, qualitative studies are still in the early phases of development (Daly & Reed, 2021). Historically, such studies on incels has related to thematic coding often with online forum posts serving as the data set (Daly & Reed). Therefore, there was a major expansion of research focus when Daly and Reed completed an exploratory study of 10 self-identified incels instead of analyzing established posted language on forums. Within this study, Daly and Reed identified themes around masculine challenges as well as frustrations around engaging desirable women romantically, feelings of disempowerment or marginalization, and reinforcement of “inceldom.” Daly and Reed also acknowledged self-identified incel patterns within the participant group around retaliatory posting often referred to as “shit posting” in which there were violent, objectified, and hegemonic claims diminishing the dignity of

women. The research gap explored in my study was to capture the lived experiences of aggrieved entitlement of self-identified incels within online communities to better inform deradicalization interventions. In this study, I addressed a gap in knowledge in the discipline in that researchers have focused on self-identified incel asynchronous written communication in online forums. Daly and Reed (2021) were one of the first researchers to conduct an exploratory study by interviewing self-identified incels according to a hegemonic theoretical framework. The lived experience of self-identified incels is not fully understood by researchers, as qualitative research is in the early stages. Essentially, I was able to address the one dimensional nature of written communication that has been coded by having interactive and synchronous communication with live incels through open ended interviews around issues of aggrieved entitlement from various online communities.

Furthermore, this study was needed because there is a depth of lived experience that is not captured by researchers in asynchronous written communication that is part of a forum and can be taken out of context. Self-identified incels need to speak to their own experiences for the social phenomenology of incel ideologies to be better understood particularly around issues of aggrieved entitlement. Then, with the data of this research, the radicalization of incel ideologies can be recognized by researchers particularly in relation to the threat potential of violent extremism as well as domestic terrorism if extremist incel ideologies are followed by lone actors with tendencies towards violence.

Research Problem

The research problem was that the nuances of lived experience of self-identified incels has not been fully identified by researchers, as qualitative research is in the early stages. The Anti-Defamation League (ADL, 2020) suggested from forum activity input that there are as many as 100,000 incels. Also, according to the ADL, law enforcement attributes 50 murders in North America in the last 6 years to the actions of violent incels (ADL). The United States Secret Service (2020) described online activity of incels amongst a larger digital ecosystem called the manosphere in which there are several active groups such as Men's Rights Activists (MRA's), Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW), and pick-up artists (PUA's). According to the United States Secret Service, incels have some of the most extreme ideologies involving hatred towards women, objectification of females, and often condone violence towards women.

In this study, I was able to address the one dimensional nature of written incel communication that has been coded previously in research by now having interactive, live, synchronous communication through open-ended interviews with self-identified incels about their experiences with aggrieved entitlement from various online communities. Daly and Reed (2021) have completed the first exploratory research in interviewing actual self-identified incels which is only the beginning of having the incel community comment on their lived experiences. With over 50 mass violence events to date whereby lone actors have demonstrated qualities in relation to extremist incel ideologies, this social phenomenon of incels within online communities needs to be better explored by researchers (Van Brunt & Taylor, 2021).

Since Daly and Reed (2021) were some of the first researchers that directly engaged self-identified incels, and they used this exploratory research as a call to action to build upon this research particularly since as most of the previous research up to the present moment in time has been around thematic analysis of incel online postings Daly and Laskovtsov (2022) stated

Future research in criminology, criminal justice, and mental health research related to incels should consider including incels in the research to gain a more complete picture of the issues rather than simply relying on a single online post or online interactions to represent the whole of human behavior. (p. 26)

Furthermore, Daly and Reed encouraged other researchers to build upon their exploratory research as they interviewed a small sample size of 10 participants.

Daly and Reed (2021) stated “It is our hope that this publication- which aims to understand incel experiences from an unbiased perspective- may pave the way for more positive direct relationships between researchers and incels” (p. 29). Moreover, Daly and Reed expressed hope around researchers directly engaging this group online in order to start a process of incel social reintegration away from insular radicalized thinking. In fact, if self-identified incels can express their lived experiences as well as the social nuance of their phenomenology, then risk factors as well as vulnerability points for radicalized thinking processes may be explored and interventions to help others with a propensity towards violence might be established on a larger social change level. The meaningful gap in literature was that more synchronous open ended interviews needed to be completed with actual self-identified incels particularly around aggrieved entitlement to

explain their lived experiences so that the potential for radicalization, extremist thinking and the rise in domestic terrorism as well as mass violence events can be understood.

Purpose Statement

My purpose of this interpretative phenomenological study was to improve the understanding of the lived experiences of incels with aggrieved entitlement who participate in online communities to better inform deradicalization interventions. Aggrieved entitlement is a term coined by Kimmel (2013) used to describe the intense frustrations that some patriarchal males may feel because of a sense of displacement that comes from feminism as well as other social changes whereby there is more gender equality, racial equality, and less economic equality. Within the domain of relationship and enhanced female equality, displaced males who espouse patriarchal entitlement may experience humiliation which becomes a source of their rage which is projected towards women (Kimmel). Since “aggrieved entitlement” is a “gendered emotion” (often experienced by males in Kimmel’s social context), options such as violence may feel restorative as individuals become more radicalized as well as follow extremist ideologies that promote misogyny (p.75). Kimmel’s aggrieved entitlement is a theory related to the personal grievances that many incels experience because of their lack of romantic prospects as well as humiliation around their loss of power over women.

Overall, the phenomenon of interest was how incels are part of an identifiable online community who post regularly about their frustrations or grievances and have their own ideology as well as terms (Van Brunt & Taylor, 2021). Terminology around phenomenology as well as lived experiences of participants was also integrated into the

study. The problem in the studies of incels so far is that the lived experience of self-identified incels has not been fully identified by researchers as qualitative research is in the early stages.

A major focus of my interpretative phenomenological study was to be able to address the one-dimensional nature of written communication that has been coded previously by having interactive, live, synchronous communication through open ended interviews with self-identified incels from various online communities that can be used to inform deradicalization interventions. Then the process of potential incel radicalization through extremist incel ideology that can be used as justification for domestic terrorist or mass violence attacks can be better understood on a threat assessment level by researchers. Clearly, not all self-identified incels are dangerous or have a propensity towards violence; however, the process of radicalization needs to be understood by researchers as part of threat assessment so that this data can be used by them to inform deradicalization programming and interventions.

Such research fits within a constructivist epistemology because the participants were sharing their own lived experiences or personal truths according to a phenomenological qualitative approach. In accordance with constructivism as well as ontology, there is no one universal truth or reality established because each participant has their own lived experiences to share as a contribution to the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

Phenomena must be contextualized so that qualitative researchers are able to reflect on how individuals make meaning of their experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

The naturalistic setting was an exploration of online communities with hashtags or threads related to self-identified incels. Similar to the work of Daly and Reed (2021), I contacted potential self-identified incels online through social media platforms and discussion groups to engage them in qualitative interviews with open-ended questions about their lived experiences with aggrieved entitlement. The work of Daly and Reed were some of the first researchers to directly engage self-identified incels, and as such, they provided exploratory research with a call to action to build upon this research as most of the previous research up to this present moment in time involved thematic analysis of online postings and documents by self-identified members of incel communities.

The challenge with only using data from static posts devoid of social context is that researchers do not have the fuller dimension, nor can they understand the social nuances of such experiences of participants because there is not back and forth discourse of conversation (Daly & Reed, 2021). Therefore, there is an opportunity to have data become more dimensional by adding an additional element of lived experiences to responses by interviewing participants using open ended questions in real time.

Incel language as well as ideologies are not just an expression of frustration, and instead often consist of misogynistic, hegemonic, and toxic overtures that contribute to demeaning, violent, objectified, as well as vitriolic language towards women (Maxwell et al., 2020). The hegemonic masculinity framework of men establishing dominant social positions and promoting gender inequality has been one of the most popular conceptual frameworks in the incel research field thus far for understanding incel ideologies. In fact,

according to incels and their ideologies, desirable women are often referenced to as “Stacys” who have affections for particular masculine male-types referred to as “Chads” (Van Brunt & Taylor, 2021. p.4). Other mass terror murderers such as Rodger who killed three roommates and attacked a female sorority house or with Sodini who walked into an LA Fitness Center and shot seven women (killing three of them) are canonized as saints in online incel ideologies (Van Brunt & Taylor). In fact, Eliot Rodger is often referenced as a “Supreme Gentleman” and because of being a “Beta Male” (less desirable to Stacy-types), he killed people (Van Brunt & Taylor, p. 15-16). As such, there are often incel references online to “Beta Uprising” and forms of violent recourse to even the biological discrimination that is believed to occur when “beta males” (who are not Alpha Chads) are rejected by beautiful women who inadvertently remind them of a predestined biological reality of never being desired and as such forced into involuntary celibacy (Van Brunt & Taylor, p.11). Therefore, online incel ideologies can lead to radicalized thinking for individuals who have low self-esteems, mental health issues, and propensity towards misogyny or even violence (Van Brunt & Taylor).

Kimmel’s (2013) concept of aggrieved entitlement as well as De Coensel’s (2018) meta framework or integrated funnel model as a way of understanding radicalization and the trajectory towards extremism are important frameworks for exploring the context of incels’ lived experiences within inceldom ideology. With these frameworks in mind, the layered as well as nuanced understanding of incel lived experience around aggrieved entitlement were explored. As a qualitative study, the terminology around

phenomenology as well as lived experience of incels was integrated by myself into both the phenomenological approach and research question.

Research Question

The qualitative research question that I explored was “How do self-identified incels give meaning to and perceive experiences of aggrieved entitlement?” The core of the issue addressed was around the opportunity through qualitative research to capture dimension with the phenomenology and lived experiences of self-identified incels around aggrieved entitlement who participate in online communities. One challenge in the incel research field so far is that the lived experience of self-identified incels has not fully identified by researchers, as qualitative research is in the early stages.

In this study, I addressed the one-dimensional nature of written communication that has been coded previously by having interactive, live, synchronous communication through open-ended interviews with self-identified incels from various online communities. The process of potential radicalization through extremist incel ideology that can be used as justification for domestic terrorist or mass violence attacks can now be better understood on a threat assessment level by researchers. With contextualization of lived experiences of the participants, I was able to better understand their phenomenology. Such knowledge and deeper understandings of these lived experiences for incels are helpful in the development of conceptual models for researchers around this phenomenon.

Theoretical Framework

As represented in the research literature, hegemonic masculinity is an important framework to use by researchers in understanding dynamics of self-identified members of the incel community because men with a shared interest in social positions of advantage may use hegemonic masculinities to uphold unequal gender relations (Daly & Reed, 2021). The predominant narrative then becomes that women are a commodity of value around their looks as well as sexual appeal as appraised by men (Daly & Reed). The challenge with hegemonic masculinity narratives, is that within incel culture masculine dominance is maintained through verbal or even physical retaliation when they feel their masculinity is challenged by rejection of sex by certain desirable females (Stacys) (Daly & Reed). Such incel defenses may include retaliatory vitriolic toxic language or even actions around threats that become justified as well as intensified through online expressions within the subculture (Thorburn et al., 2022). Therefore, any framings of gender and masculine identity are bound to this hegemonic power imbalance in genders which can be used by men to justify toxic comments, encourage violence or further objectification of women within incel ideologies, or reinforce further dialogue as part of the subculture (Thorburn et al.).

Conceptual Framework

The theories and concepts that grounded this study included the Kimmel (2013) concept of aggrieved entitlement and the De Coensel (2018) meta-framework or integrated funnel model for understanding radicalization. Kimmel's concept of aggrieved entitlement is grounded in the sociological construct of 'relative deprivation theory'

whereby groups feel like there is a permanent barrier to their upward mobility or chance to fulfill desired dreams and goals. Within Kimmel's specific description of aggrieved entitlement, White men in the United States and other places such as Canada feel displaced as a result of feminism as well as other social changes whereby there is more gender equality, racial equality, and less economic equality (Kimmel). In fact, Kimmel stated, "the era of unquestioned and unchallenged male entitlement is over" (xixxx). Within the domain of relationships and enhanced female equality, displaced males may experience humiliation which becomes a source of their frustration or even rage (Kimmel). Since aggrieved entitlement is a "gendered emotion" often experienced by males in Kimmel's social context, options such as violence may feel restorative as individuals become radicalized as well as follow extremist ideologies (p. 75). Such was the case noted by Kimmel with various lone actors who either wrote manifestos and/or posted about their rage online before then committing acts of murder on other individuals including women as targets. Kimmel's aggrieved entitlement is a theory that can be related to the personal grievances that many incels experience because of their lack of romantic prospects as well as humiliation around their loss of power over women. My qualitative study involved interviews with incels around their lived experiences with aggrieved entitlement to better understand grievances which likely served as a foundation for their incel ideological belief systems or world views.

Another important conceptual framework for this study was De Coensel's (2018) meta-framework or integrated funnel model as a way of understanding radicalization and the trajectory towards extremism as well as terrorism as part of a non-linear process. De

Coensel completed a thematic synthesis of 28 processual models of radicalization which then informed a meta-framework which included eight themes and 33 concepts in order to support potential criminal interventions from being implemented too early in the radicalization process on the pathway to violent extremism. The De Coensel integrated funnel model served as the conceptional framework for me in order to make sense of how my study participants may have, through their lived experiences, dealt with personal grievances that led to further radicalization or even promotion of violence towards women.

Nature of the Study

The frameworks of Kimmel and De Coensel were used by myself as anchors that supported the nature of my study to explore larger complex dynamics of incels. For example, sociological shifts in demographics as well as economics likely impact incels' personal grievances which fuels radicalization with aggrieved entitlement as described by Kimmel or results in a complex non-linear descent into adoption of extremist ideologies promoting mass violence outlined by the De Coensel meta-framework and integrated funnel model. Overall, I was able to take new findings from my study to support previous findings in research as participants provided even more nuanced understandings from their individual social contexts around these larger masculine struggles which are not entirely articulated by researchers within conceptual models.

The purpose of my interpretative phenomenological study was to improve the understanding of the lived experiences of self-identified incels with aggrieved entitlement who participate in online communities to better inform deradicalization interventions. By

understanding the lived experiences of incels online with aggrieved entitlement, I was better able to identify key issues as well as insights. Overall, I have used the Kimmel concept of aggrieved entitlement to ground my study in a social context by providing larger sociological understandings of why many incels may have personal grievances with the seismic social shifts in demographics as well as economics within the last two decades. Meanwhile, I used the De Coensel meta-framework or integrated funnel model for understanding radicalization with an enriched conceptual design for acknowledging personal grievances of incels, who to varying degrees, may be descending into more radicalized thinking with the adoption of extremist ideologies to the point of promoting mass violence particularly towards women. Overall, I was able to use the De Coensel framework to provide a nonlinear multidimensional view of various progressive stages of adoption around extremist ideologies as a way of wrestling with personal grievances, senses of betrayal, or even confusion around social dynamics that many incels may experience.

In order to address the research question in this qualitative study, I used the specific research design of interpretative phenomenological analysis as outlined by Smith et al. (2022) with semistructured individual interviews, exploratory note taking, experiential statements, and themes. As part of the planned research design, I completed individual interviews and cycles of coding to identify experiential statements as well as themes. Furthermore, I maintained management of bias through bracketing, analytical notes, and a reflexive journal.

With the potential for radicalization and domestic terrorism, radicalized ideologies are important to explore by researchers. In fact, Fowler (2022) described how the Southern Poverty Law Center described online incel ideology as an “online male supremacy ecosystem” and lists self-identified incels as an identified hate group in spite of not having an official hierarchical infrastructure (p. 2). By understanding the lived experiences of self-identified incels online, issues around radicalization can be better understood within a larger social context by researchers. In qualitative research, themes are likely to arise once saturation within the participant sample has been achieved (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). If self-identified incels who participate in online communities can share their lived experiences around aggrieved entitlement, then this larger issue around hegemonic masculinity, objectification of women, and potential reinforcement of violence towards women can be identified by researchers and addressed to inform intervention measures as well as potential deradicalization programming.

Definitions

Terms such as phenomenology and lived experiences of participants were important so that I was better able to understand their world views. Other definitions that I considered and expanded upon further in the appendix were incel terminologies and slang terms commonly used within incel ideology.

Assumptions

Since there have been over 50 documented events of mass violence whereby lone actors demonstrated characteristics in relation to incel ideologies, there are concerns by researchers in the threat assessment community about radicalized thinking as well as

extremist ideologies that may be linked to or serve as a catalyst for domestic terrorism (Van Brunt & Taylor). There are aspects of thinking within incel ideologies that are believed by researchers to be radicalized, however, each self-identified incel has their own unique lived experiences and participants may have different affiliations within a network of larger incel community members. There is a continuum of radicalization as per De Coensel's radicalization funnel, although not all incels may engage in extremist views (Van Brunt & Taylor). All participants' comments in this study were taken within the context of their own unique experiences by myself as the researcher.

Scope and Delimitations

The problem is that the lived experience of self-identified incels has not been fully identified as qualitative research from researchers is in the early stages. My study focus was to address the one-dimensional nature of written communication that has been coded previously by now having interactive, live, synchronous communication through open-ended interviews with self-identified incels from various online communities. Then the process of potential radicalization through extremist incel ideology that can be used by incels as justification for domestic terrorist or mass violence attacks may be better understood by researchers on a threat assessment level.

Participants were adult (age 19 and older) males who self-identified as incels and are active within online communities. I posted information about my study to recruit self-identified incels through Twitter as per the research process with a framework of hegemonic masculinity first completed at an exploratory level with the study of Daly and Reed (2021). The theoretical framework I used was Kimmel's concept of aggrieved

entitlement to explore toxic masculine discourse that men can use to perpetuate gender inequity as well as promote violence against women and De Coensel's version of the radicalization funnel particularly around extremist incel ideologies. The challenge of bias and transferability could have been unchecked because I am a feminist and the participants who are part of the incel community online were likely to espouse misogynistic world views (see Van Brunt & Taylor, 2021). Therefore, I engaged in member checking, analytic memos, and a reflexive journal throughout the research process. Also, not all self-identified incels are radicalized or hold extremist views so I needed to be careful of capturing their lived experiences without making assumptions that they had extremist views. Each individual participant had their own lived experiences.

Limitations

Participants connected with me with an expression of interest in my study through their social media platforms and I gave each person a research name pseudonym once they agreed to participate in my study as well as accepted the conditions around informed consent. A challenge with dependability was that there was no way for me, as the researcher, of confirming the true identity of individuals and their comments around lived experiences I coded at face value based on their comments for the data.

Furthermore, with the anonymity of the internet and no real true confirmation of identity, participants could have made comments out of shock value and, as such, their words were not really reflective of their actual thoughts. Therefore, I prompted participants around their lived experience by expanding with stories so as to flesh out the social nuances of participants' actual situations as well as social phenomenon as a self-

identified incel. Finally, there were several communities of incels so the lived experiences of one participant may not have entire generalizability to the entire group of larger membership of this community.

Significance

My study needed to be conducted because in the larger threat assessment field there are concerns with what appears to be the potential for domestic terrorism through radicalized incel ideologies (Van Brunt & Taylor, 2021). If researchers understand the lived experiences of incel online communities, then the potential for domestic terrorism may be explored, insights into the escalation cycle of radicalized thinking can be examined, and this overall population of frustrated people self-identifying as incels will be better understood as a social phenomenon particularly around aggrieved entitlement. Clearly, not all self-identified incels have any inclinations towards violence; however, this group of individuals with a high internet presence are of interest to researchers (Maxwell et al., 2021).

The potential social implications of my study are that insights around radicalization, indoctrination, and incel ideologies can be better explored by researchers as part of deradicalization interventions. Also, self-identifying incels can share their lived experiences around aggrieved entitlement so that the perceived social rejection of this fringe online community may be understood to explore whether there is emerging social phenomenon in society leading to changes in overall dating as well as relationships especially with the advent of dating apps which is a contentious issue for many incels.

Summary

The problem is that the lived experience of self-identified incels has not fully been identified as qualitative research is in the early stages. As a researcher, I was able to address the one-dimensional nature of written communication that has been coded previously by having interactive, live, synchronous communication through open-ended interviews with self-identified incels from various online communities who were able to provide insights into their lived experiences around aggrieved entitlement. Then, the process of potential radicalization through extremist incel ideology that can be used as justification for domestic terrorist or mass violence attacks may be better understood on a threat assessment level by researchers.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The research problem was that the lived experience of self-identified incels has not been fully identified by researchers as qualitative research is in the early stages. In this interpretative phenomenological study, I was able to address the one-dimensional nature of written communication that has been coded previously in research by now having interactive, live, synchronous communication through open-ended interviews with self-identified incels from various online communities. Daly and Reed (2021) completed the first exploratory research in interviewing actual self-identified incels which was only the beginning of having the incel community comment on their lived experiences. With over 50 mass violence events to date whereby lone actors demonstrated characteristics in relation to extremist incel ideologies, this social phenomenon of incels within online communities needs to be better explored (Van Brunt & Taylor, 2021).

Although researchers have investigated this issue, the topic has not been explored in this way with qualitative interviews of incels around their lived experiences of aggrieved entitlement. Daly and Reed (2021) were some of the first researchers to directly engage self-identified incels about their lived experiences within a hegemonic masculinity framework, and as such, their research was exploratory with a call to action to build upon this research. Most of the previous research in the incel field (which started in 2018) up to the present moment in time has been around thematic analysis of static online postings and documents by self-identified members of incel communities online (Daly & Reed). Daly and Laskovtsov (2022) stated,

Future research in criminology, criminal justice, and mental health research related to incels should consider including incels in the research to gain a more complete picture of the issues rather than simply relying on a single online post or online interactions to represent the whole of human behavior. (p. 26)

Furthermore, Daly and Reed encouraged other researchers to build upon their exploratory research of interviewing self-identified incels online particularly since they had a small sample size of only 10 participants.

Overall, there are larger considerations for researchers who are trying to engage a secretive live population such as incels that may be hesitant to participate in research. With such a consideration, Daly and Reed stated, “It is our hope that this publication- which aims to understand incel experiences from an unbiased perspective- may pave the way for more positive direct relationships between researchers and incels.” Moreover, Daly and Reed expressed hope around researchers directly engaging this group online in order to start a process of social reintegration for incels away from insular radicalized thinking. In fact, if self-identified incels can express their lived experiences as well as phenomenology, then risk factors as well as vulnerability points for radicalized thinking processes can be explored and interventions to help others with a propensity towards violence may be established on a larger social change level. The meaningful gap in literature was that more synchronous and asynchronous open-ended interviews needed to be completed with actual self-identified incels to explain their lived experiences with aggrieved entitlement so that the potential for radicalization, extremist thinking and the

possible rise in domestic terrorism as well as mass violence events could be understood by researchers.

In this interpretative phenomenological study, I was able to address the one dimensional nature of written incel communication that has been coded previously in research by now having interactive, live, synchronous communication through open-ended interviews with self-identified incels from various online communities. Daly and Reed (2021) completed the first exploratory research in interviewing actual self-identified incels which was only the beginning of having the incel community comment on their lived experiences. Furthermore, Kimmel (2013) coined the term “aggrieved entitlement” in order to describe the frustrations, loss of status, and rage that white males who are often connected with radicalized groups feel as they scapegoat others such as women as well as immigrant populations with toxic discourse online as a way of managing their upsets around seismic demographic changes and economic losses. My dissertation was a qualitative study using an interpretative phenomenological approach to understand the lived experiences of self-identified incels with aggrieved entitlement who participate in online communities. Overall, I was able to address the research problem of understanding the lived experiences of self-identified incels as a gap in literature, and participants’ comments served as important data towards understanding the social phenomenon of self-identified incels online as they provided key insights that could be used for deradicalization interventions. With over 50 mass violence events to date whereby lone actors demonstrated characteristics in relation to extremist incel ideologies, this social

phenomenon of incels within online communities needed to be better explored by researchers (Van Brunt & Taylor, 2021).

Literature Search Strategy

Overall, I completed a literature review that involved Google scholar search on the internet along with a review of the data bases in the Walden University library. Search terms I used were related to “incel thematic analysis” so that I could find a bulk of qualitative studies which consisted of roughly 48 articles particularly since qualitative and quantitative research in this area has only started since 2018 (see Van Brunt & Taylor, 2021). Furthermore, my strategy was to use reference mining on each article with cross-referencing strategies to ensure that there was a representation of many research articles for this field particularly with a focus on qualitative research.

Theoretical Foundation

As represented in the research literature thus far, hegemonic masculinity is an important framework used by researchers in understanding dynamics of self-identified members of the incel community because men with a shared interest in social positions of advantage can use hegemonic masculinities to uphold unequal gender relations (Daly & Reed, 2021). The predominant narrative then becomes that women are a commodity of value around their looks as well as sexual appeal as appraised by men (Daly & Reed). Thus, the challenge with hegemonic masculinity narratives, is that within incel culture masculine dominance is maintained by incels and when there are perceived slights against their masculine ideals or value (as culturally desirable women allegedly reject incels), then they justify retaliatory vitriolic toxic language or even actions around threats

as part of online expressions within the subculture (Thorburn et al., 2022). Therefore, any framings of gender and masculine identity for incels are bound to this hegemonic power imbalance in genders which can be used to justify toxic comments, encourage violence, or further objectification of women within incel ideologies, or reinforce further dialogue as part of the subculture (Thorburn et al.).

Conceptual Framework

The theories and/or concepts I used to ground this study included the Kimmel (2013) concept of aggrieved entitlement and the De Coensel (2018) meta-framework or integrated funnel model for understanding radicalization. Kimmel's concept of aggrieved entitlement is grounded in the sociological construct of relative deprivation theory whereby groups feel like there is a permanent barrier to their upward mobility or chance to fulfill desired dreams and goals. Within Kimmel's specific description of aggrieved entitlement, White men in the United States and other places such as Canada feel displaced because of feminism as well as other social changes whereby there is more gender equality, racial equality, and less economic equality (Kimmel). Furthermore, Kimmel stated "the era of unquestioned and unchallenged male entitlement is over." (xix xx). Within the domain of relationships and enhanced female equality, displaced males may experience humiliation which becomes a source of their rage (Kimmel). Since aggrieved entitlement is a "gendered emotion" often experienced by males in Kimmel's social context, options such as violence may feel restorative as individuals become radicalized as well as follow extremist ideologies promoting mass violence (p.75). Such was the case noted by Kimmel with various incel lone actors who either wrote manifestos

and/or posted about their rage online before then committing acts of murder on other individuals including women as targets. Kimmel's aggrieved entitlement is a theory related to the personal grievances that many incels experience because of their lack of romantic prospects as well as humiliation around their loss of power over women. My qualitative study involved interviews with incels around their lived experiences with aggrieved entitlement to better understand likely grievances which served as a foundation for their incel ideological belief systems or world views.

Another important conceptual framework for this study was De Coensel's (2018) meta-framework or integrated funnel model as a way of understanding radicalization and the trajectory towards extremism as well as terrorism as part of a nonlinear process. De Coensel completed a thematic synthesis of 28 processual models of radicalization which then informed a meta-framework which included eight themes and 33 concepts in order to support potential criminal interventions from being implemented too early in the radicalization process on the pathway to violent extremism. The De Coensel integrated funnel model served as the conceptual framework for making sense of how my study participants may have, through their lived experiences, dealt with personal grievances that led to further radicalization or even promotion of violence towards women.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and Concepts

Research in self-identified incels within online communities in the early developmental stage with many qualitative studies emerging on the research scene starting in 2018. The bulk of these studies are primarily qualitative with other quantitative

studies involving incel identifier screens or surveys identifying incel traits (see Collins & Clark, 2021; Scaptura & Boyle, 2020; Van Brunt & Taylor, 2021).

Of the qualitative studies, the focus has been primarily on thematic coding around language in reference to theoretical models around hegemonic masculinity (Daly & Reed, 2021) The thematic coding analyzed is primarily through online posts (Fowler, 2021; Glace et al., 2021; Hintz & Baker, 2021; Liggett O'Malley et al., 2022; Maxwell et al., 2020; Menzie, 2019; O'Donnell, 2021; Preston et al., 2021). Daly and Laskovtsov (2022) state:

For qualitative research, most of the existing research examines the vitriolic rhetoric of incel forums and highlights the potential for large-scale incel violence, and thus, it is critical for researchers to explore the underlying issues that may lead to the suicide and self-harm that appear to be more likely outcome for men who are incels. (p. 26)

Primary modes of qualitative analyzation have been through theme content analysis, ethnographic content analysis, discourse analysis, and inductive qualitative analysis (Fowler, 2021; Glace et al., 2021; Hintz & Baker, 2021; Liggett O'Malley et al., 2022; Menzie, 2019; O'Donnell, 2021; Preston et al., 2021;). Some specific examples include Maxwell et al. (2020) and the thematic content analysis from Reddit posts which include patriarchal male ideals, constructed tropes of women as typical Stacy-like characters, and reinforcement of incel identities. Liggett O'Malley et al. completed inductive qualitative analysis of over 8,000 posts and identified vitriolic language around the evilness of women, masculine or male oppression values, and dating as a type of sexual marketplace.

Meanwhile, Preston et al. fulfilled a qualitative analysis of 9,062 posts on a popular incel forum filled with essentialist views and dehumanizing commentary towards women. Likewise, Glace et al. explored content analysis of over 400 posts from an incel forum Reddit and determined the prevalence of hybrid masculinity whereby men publicly claim powerlessness and inequality to women as if to fit into feminist ideologies only to then pivot towards more violent objectified language towards females. Similarly, Fowler initiated a discourse analysis of 98 discussion threads to explore the unique language of incel ideology. Finally, Menzie completed ethnographic content analysis to study gendered constructions around incel ideologies through subreddit posts of self-identified incels. Certain themes involved sexual deficits, femmephobia, and patterns of symbolizing women as status symbols or signs of acquisition around wealth.

Thorburn et al. (2022) identified important themes in the title around the construction of masculine ideals within the incel community, definitions around gender, and violence that stems from vitriolic as well as misogynistic language. Then, when many incel community members experience perceived masculine humiliation in the world, the results may be lashing out with words in incel forums that takes the form of aggrieved entitlement (Thorburn et al.). Researcher observations are part of a framework of theories such as hegemonic masculinity as well as constructions of Kimmel's (2013) aggrieved entitlement (Thorburn et al.). Furthermore, Thorburn et al. used important traditions of observation and journaling while engaging in reflexive thematic analysis to identify common themes from the data which is often part of ethnography practices (Patton, 2015). Thorburn et al. explained the culture of online inceldom and how personal

romantic failures by self-identified incels are often externalized into ideologies that support misogyny as well as femmephobia related to biological determinism. Thus, the potential seeds of radicalized thinking and domestic terrorism with extreme incel ideology can become a threat assessment issue when self-identified incels take this ideology out into a retribution level through mass violence (Van Brunt & Taylor, 2021).

The overall aim of Thorburn et al. (2022) was to use digital ethnography to understand the gendered as well as group identities as well as narratives online of self-identified incels and describe their research as a type of snapshot of a subculture. There are limitations around how this forum may not necessarily be representative of all self-identified incel members' experiences that lie along a continuum with extremism being to the far side of ideologies. Furthermore, Thorburn et al. did not share their practices around reflexivity or positionality by discussing the deconstruction of any biases brought to the research process.

Other researchers have shifted from thematic analysis of general incel ideologies to more specialty areas of focus. Hintz and Baker (2021) analyzed 77 narrative posts on Reddit to examine how people start to step away from incel ideology to start the process of deradicalization. Meanwhile, O'Donnell (2021) specifically explored the textual analysis of six mass murderers linked to incel ideologies to understand the social construction of influences on masculinity linked to mass violence. As part of an original focus, Daly and Lakovstov (2022) examined the incel sub-Reddits of one incel to analyze identifiers of suicidal ideations along with the complexity of grievances or resentments that came from incel ideology.

Vallegra and Zurbriggen (2022) deconstructed 227 posts on the manosphere. There were reflexive thematic analysis themes that included gender essentialism. For example, women were accused of maintaining vested motives around deceiving, manipulating, and using promiscuity by trading sex for power. Typologies included of men as alphas, betas, and incels (Vallegra & Zurbriggen). Chang (2020) examined the concept of the term femoid through r/braincel reddit thread. Finally, Lindsay (2021) was able to determine themes around threatened masculinity. Qualitative researchers in the field of incel research have contributed to a foundational understanding of some key aspects of incel lived experience. With my study, I was able to build upon those existing themes by then contributing even more social nuance as well as layers of insight to these areas identified within incel lived experiences as noted in incel online forum posts by researchers.

On a deeper research level, there are limitations around thematic analysis of static posts online as Papadamou et al. (2020) described how research on the manosphere has been theoretical and qualitative in nature. Such qualitative studies are important as they inform frameworks and conceptualization of inceldom (Papadamou et al.). Meanwhile, Tastenhoye et al. (2020) cautioned the view that the examination of an incel worldview through qualitative discourse is limited in that there is an assumption around continuity and such qualitative studies have little empirical evidence particularly since posts are accepted verbatim without context. Furthermore, incels themselves may be cautious around participating in research (Tastenhoye et al.). Finally, Speckhard et al. (2020) determined that the quantity of studies on incels may be increasing, but their quality and

breadth may lack dimension. Instead, Speckhard et al. suggested that if researchers want to know the internal mindset of incels, then such incel participants need to be directly engaged. Baele et al. (2023) supported the view that with the growth of the manosphere that there is more of an expanded bank of data, but that some of this research provides a “static one-dimensional portrayal” of incels in a “highly dynamic and multi-layered environment” (p. 1). In fact, Baele et al. comments on the lack of documented nuanced insights by incels so that whether inceldom is a violent extremist ideology cannot necessarily be concluded.

The social phenomenon of inceldom is layered as well as complex. For example, Daly and Reed (2021) identified self-identified incel patterns within the participant group around retaliatory posting often referred to as “shit posting” in which there are violent, objectified, and hegemonic claims diminishing the dignity of women. Meanwhile, researchers have explored thematic analysis of incels by capturing implications of incel misogynistic discourse and this self-perpetuating cycle of vitriolic resentment. For example, Byerly (2020) examined media coverage of incels January 1, 2018 to July 30, 2019 as they highlighted the rage incels may feel as a result of women supposedly denying them sex. This conceptual fixation point around lack of sex has resulted in satirical posts of ridicule towards incels online in social media as studied by Dynel (2020). Within such instances, incels are mocked as well as they become the subject of humorous posts (Dynel).

On the darker side of extremism, much has been researched around case examples of incel mass murderers. In particular the case study of incel mass murder Elliott Rodger

has been analyzed by Bratich and Banet-Weiser (2019), Brooks et al. (2022), Bruzuskiwicz (2020), Byerly (2020), Collins and Clark (2021), Cottee (2021), Fowler (2021), Grunau et al. (2022), Hoffman et al. (2020), Pelzer et al. (2021), Ryan Kelly and Aunspach (2020), Speckhard et al. (2020), Wood et al. (2022), Vito et al., (2018), and Wood et al. (2022). Other incel mass murders have been examined by Byerly (2020), Maxwell et al. (2020), Hoffman et al., (2020), Tastenhoye et al., (2022), The Department of Homeland Security and U.S. Secret Service (2022), Tomkinson et al., (2020), and Moskalenko et al., (2022).

To move from case conceptualizations of high profile incel mass murderers to understanding the layers of incel thinking as displayed in this subculture, the contextualization of lived experiences of participants and their phenomenology must be understood by the researcher (see Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Such knowledge and deeper understandings of these lived experiences is helpful in the development of conceptual models around phenomenon that are experienced (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Thus, my research focus on incels, completed primarily through thematic analysis, has unearthed a layer of personal grievance central to the incel identity. In fact, a large homogenizing variable that connects all incels is their frustration with what they perceive as a fixed dating order and their inability to achieve social status by securing sexual connections with women of their choice (see Liggett O'Malley et al., 2022; Maxwell et al., 2020; Preston et al., 2020; Thorburn et al., 2022).

The Emergence of the Incel Subculture and their Grievances

According to the United States Secret Service (2020) defines incels as: “men who feel unable to obtain romantic or sexual relationships with women, to which they feel entitled.” (p. 3). Furthermore, Moskalenko et al. (2022) describes incels as an online community of males who feel marginalized because they are unable to find a sexual partner of their choice. As a result of such displacement, incels tend to blame society for placing too much emphasis on physical appearance and for being the victims of women who hold the power of control around sexual consent. Such incel personal grievances then manifest as misogynistic dialogue online that promotes mass violence against women (Van Brunt & Taylor, 2021). There have been a number of incidents in which individuals engaged in mass violence by shooting or running over targeted women while paying tribute to what has been referred to as a beta rebellion within the incel movement (Van Brunt & Taylor).

Such incel rage as well as grievance stems from a narrative around personal deficit (Cottee, 2021). In fact, Collins and Clark (2021) described a nuanced aspect of involuntary celibacy in that incels often experience an increase in personal distress because of a sense of lowered self-determination in relation to their states of involuntary celibacy. Furthermore, incels have a type of online notoriety or even infamy because of their outrageous misogynistic discourse and inflammatory reactionary extremism against feminist ideals or conventions (Labba, 2019). Donnelly et al., (2001) described: “The term involuntary celibate refers to an increase in personal distress as a result of the perception of decreased self-agency because of one’s current state of sexual inactivity or

celibacy (Collins & Clark, 2021, p.159). According to a 2020 survey of incels.co forum users, the vast majority are young, middle-class white males who live with their parents and have never had sex or true intimacy with a woman (Cottee, 2021; Hoffman et al., 2020). Over 80% of the incels claimed to suffer from depression, while over a quarter self-identified as being on the autism spectrum (Cottee; Hoffman et al.). As of 2021, there have been over 50 violent incidents with associated incel themes (Tastenhoye et al., 2022). Collins and Clark (2021) cite that since 1989, there have been approximately 20 confirmed cases of violent incel attacks in the US, Canada, and Europe (ADL, 2020).

Overall, inceldom is part of a discourse or even a larger digital eco system whereby individuals make sense of their own reality through a system that is layered with personal meaning around resentments that have a historical foundation (Hintz & Baker, 2021). Originally, the concept of involuntary celibacy was started by a Canadian female as a type of project to gather people together to discuss loneliness and involuntary celibacy which then was emotionally hijacked or taken over by the incel cause and online movement of single males writing with themes centered around grievances as well as misogyny (Hintz and Baker). Then such a concept of involuntary celibacy that was grounded in honest intentions originally, was amalgamated into a type of subculture filled with “discursive persuasion” (Messerschmidt, 2019, p.86). With the alignment of incel narratives, inceldom became part of a social movement in society and was grounded in online exchanges between incels through forum posts (Brzuskiwicz, 2020). Furthermore, within inceldom is a type of “radical milieu” whereby the focus is on an externalized locus of control whereby incels are preoccupied with social dynamics and

securing a sexual partner of their choice which seems out of their realm of influence (Burzuskiewicz, p.86). Various tropes around themes of victimhood with “red pill” and “black pill” ideologies emerged amongst incels (Brzuskiewicz). Furthermore, online incelism has become a type of “fringe echo chamber” whereby incel participants reinforce negative beliefs as well as thinking about women (Labba, 2019, p.16). Overall, the incel forum culture becomes toxic through a process of negative reinforcement of participants’ growing discontent instead of supporting each other in mature ways (Pelzer et al., 2021, p.18).

On a larger scale, the incel world view has three tenants which include misogyny, victimhood, and fatalism (Tastenhoye et al., 2022; p. 2). VanBrunt and Taylor (2021) described a type of incel triangle of entitlement, jealousy, and misogyny. Within incel ideology there is a “mental framework” in which larger social concepts with the discourse are identified (Dyner, 2020, p. 3). Terms such as chads, stacys, red pill and black pill, normies, lookmaxxing become such commonplace within the incel discourse. (Van Brunt and Taylor).

Framing Incel Grievances

Grievances are firmly entrenched within incel discourse and entitlement is often at the base of such incel resentments (Collins and Clark, 2020). In fact, Collins and Clark define entitlement within an incel context as: “Entitlement refers to the belief that incels often feel that they deserve privilege, esteem, or recognition that they have not earned” (p. 161). Such grievances have been contextualized by researchers in relation to disillusionment and anger, embattled masculinity, backlash to feminism, misandry,

weaponization of asexuality and appropriation, status threats, aggrieved entitlement, and failure of neoliberalism with regards to gynocentric order, issue of social reproduction, and incels as failed Pick Up Artists (PUA's).

Disillusionment and Anger

Incels will often utilize forums as a venue for sharing their discontentment with their inability to have sex with women of their choice (O'Donnell, 2021). Consequently, there appears to be a disconnect between how incels complain about their circumstances by recruiting sympathy while then utilizing dehumanizing as well as vitriolic language promoting violence towards women in other contexts (Glance et al., 2021). Hoffman et al. (2020) described how militant factions of the incel community integrate into the alternative right (alt-right) with right wing extremists online as they all share or even identify with common grievances against the larger society. Texas Law Enforcement describes what begins as a personal grievance due to perceived rejection now morphs into the incel rebellion (Hoffman et al., 2020). Likewise, Ryan Kelly and Aunspach (2020) explored how incels impose a self-proclaimed exile out of sexual pursuits while then identifying feminism as well as genetics as the reason for their marginalization from the dating market. Meanwhile, Hintz and Baker (2021) identified a type of deteriorated "sexual marketplace value" that incels believe they have that then becomes a common bonding point into inceldom (p. 3054). Likewise, Bruzskiewicz (2020) expanded on this self-imposed oppression by describing how incels often share through their discourse, as posted within online forums, how they are trapped in a lack of self-determination because of cultural factors related to lookism (societal values based on appearance) and classism

that relates to social inequality (p. 13). Similarly, Moskalenko et al. (2022) explained how incels tend to criticize society around a focus on physical appearances and that women have so much sexual power around consent as such grievances then often translate into violent misogyny towards women. Within this process, larger issues of masculinity are questioned by incels who may feel that their masculinity is being challenged by the social progress of women with enhanced gender equality in society.

Embattled Masculinity

The dynamic of embattled masculinity as part of incel lived experiences expressed through their discourse is complex as well as multi-layered. Cosma and Gurevich (2020) describe how embattled masculinity is the theme or how privilege should be maintained as part of an incel mindset. For example, Cosma and Gurevich explored how privilege should be maintained by “sexual command of women” (p. 42). Within an incel mindset, women’s bodies are viewed as commodities to be conquered by men through pressure around sex as a form of control (Cosma and Gurevich). An important part of this view is that real men are then viewed by incels as leaders within the sexual domain (Cosma & Gurevich). When this mindset becomes unsuccessful within sexual dynamics, participants of the manosphere (including incels) position themselves as victims of feminism and with great entitlement, they justify aggression as a response. In fact, Cosma and Gurevich examined this online misogynistic view of “men as consumers of women’s bodies” and that women are there as “masculine markers” that “prop up masculinity” (p. 51; p. 58). Women are then viewed by incels as commodities as well as

status symbols within the incel context as desirable sexual objectified females serve as accessories for men's masculine egos.

In addition to this dynamic within the manosphere, Pelzer et al. (2021) described how within online forums within the manosphere, male participants reinforce each other's destructive feelings by exacerbating views related to depression as well as rage. Furthermore, Beale et al. (2023) explained the echo chamber effect of online manosphere forums that cause further polarization as well as division between men and women by fueling destructive dynamics through vitriolic masculine dialogue. In many contexts, such incel discourse results in an online discourse where some more extremist members are motivated towards violence against women as part of a feminism backlash (Gruneau et al., 2022).

Backlash to Feminism

Overall common anti-feminist sentiment within the manosphere then becomes part of what Bratich and Banet-Weiser (2019) call an "emerging network of misogyny" (p. 5007). Within what is referred to as a red pill view of reality (anti-feminist sentiment), men reinforce each other around their loss of control over women (Bratich & Banet-Weiser). In fact, Diaz and Valiji (2019) describe how such festering anti-feminist resentments then manifest into an ideology whereby female empowerment is equated with male victimization as well as a loss of personal power or discrimination. As part of a black pill ideology, incels blame women for their fixed disempowerment of never having sex with desirable women of their choice (Sharkey, 2021). Part of such personalized disempowerment can result in what participants of the manosphere feel is misandry.

Misandry

Within the manosphere, Ryan Kelly and Aunspach (2020) describe how a toxic male culture forms and a dynamic of misandry emerges where male participants start to see themselves as victims of political power. In fact, women are viewed by these men as “political gatekeepers” with decision-making power around men’s lives (Fowler, 2021, p.7). For example, Stacy’s are sexually desirable women who hold maximum levels of power around sexual consent (Ryan Kelly & Aunspach, 2020). Chads are alpha males who have sexual access to “Stacy’s” who desire them (Ryan Kelly & Aunspach, p. 13). Meanwhile, regular incels become “blackpillers” who accept that they have no political agency to influence “Stacy’s” so essentially they give up on the game of sexual pursuit by accepting their own misandry (Ryan Kelly & Aunspach, p. 19). Meanwhile, some male participants declare themselves as asexual and accelerate this sense of misandry into the weaponization of asexuality as well as engage in appropriation by claiming similar status as marginalized groups who suffer from prejudice.

Weaponization of Asexuality and Appropriation

In fact, Ryan Kelly and Aunspach (2020) demonstrated how incel mass murder Elliot Rodger developed a manifesto and then used asexuality as an extension or corrupt form of male entitlement (p. 162). At a deeper level, Rodgers expressed in his manifesto “My Twisted World” how he engaged in a type of “superior morality” by having “masculine restraint” around sexual relationships with desirable females of his choice (Ryan Kelly & Aunspach, p. 167). This form of repressed asexuality then becomes appropriated by incels and in Rodger’s case was used as a “call to arms” to justify

violence against women (Ryan Kelly & Aunspach, p. 167). Glace et al. (2020) demonstrated how incels appropriate disempowerment or victimization of marginalized groups to support their worldviews of being disenfranchised themselves. Overall, incels are then preoccupied with any threats to their social status or sense of power particularly with sexual women of their choice.

Status Threat

Within this larger power dynamic, Scaptura and Boyle (2020) examined how such male participants online in incel groups claim to lose their power to external factors whereby their entire senses of masculinity are under threat. As a result of women's progress and social equality, incels are aggrieved by a loss of power as well as influence (Scaptura & Boyle). In the larger focus of research, Diaz and Valijji (2019) described the role of "aggrieved masculinity" and the loss of masculine status as part of a backlash to feminism (p. 40). There is a deeper dimension that Collins and Clark (2020) explored around how male entitlement whereby men believe in their own masculine privilege becomes thwarted and results in misogyny. On another level aggrieved entitlement is an important factor in this dynamic.

Aggrieved Entitlement

In fact, Hoffman et al. (2020) expanded on Kimmel's (2013) work on "aggrieved entitlement" as a way of showing how this sense of masculine victimization can lead to the acceleration of extremism within masculine discourse (p.28). Furthermore, "aggrieved entitlement" is a major variable in mass shootings along with the acceleration of the incel subculture (Hoffman et al.). With aggrieved entitlement, men feel like they

have lost valuable status as well as influence (Kimmel, p. preface x). Kimmel expanded on this sense of aggrieved entitlement as a deeper sense people express when they feel something that is rightfully their own is taken away, which in the instances of these men includes the fall of patriarchy as well as power of influence over women.

On a dynamic level, aggrieved entitlement consists of a spirit of vengeance as Ware (2021) describes through incel forum comments how incels were pleased that sexual dynamics were then limited in the dating sexual marketplace because of the global pandemic covid-19. These layers of masculine disempowerment discourses online continue because of reinforced themes around loss as well as entitlement (Bratich & Banet-Weiser, 2019). Even mass shootings by incels consist of a “gendered dimension” with men originally feeling disempowered by women (Bratich & Banet-Weiser, p. 5005). O’Donnell (2021) expanded on Kimmel’s (2013) exploration of how men feel powerless to external social dynamics whereby women are believed to have a more power as well as privilege. Likewise, Thorburn et al. (2022) explained how aggrieved entitlement can be linked to themes of humiliation, angry rhetoric, and revenge fantasies. Such aggrieved entitlement is then a variable within a larger context that involves the failure of neoliberalism.

Failure of Neoliberalism

Essentially, Bratich and Banet-Weiser (2019) explored how women represent status within a masculine hierarchy in the incel culture. Within a type of red pill ideology, the incel mindset is synonymous with the values of what Bratich and Banet-Weiser refer to as a “neoliberal confidence culture” (p. 5010). As part of neoliberalism, there is a view

that in western society, people can have rightfully whatever they desire particularly if they invest in businesses or establish wealth through whatever means, and then enjoy the benefits of having maximum levels of self-agency which includes gaining access to sexually desirable women. Within neoliberalism confidence culture, men in particular can have the expensive homes, cars, and good-looking women just by being confident (Bratich & Banet-Weiser). The problem was with the economic crisis of 2008, whereby this subset of confident people had devastating losses in finances and their levels of confidence could not save them from a larger economic downturn (Bratich & Banet-Weiser). Therefore, a larger “culture of mistrust” formed within a “post truth era” whereby individuals in society realized that the neoliberal dream of maximum self-agency with confidence was a distant dream and could never become a reality (Bratich & Banet-Weiser, p. 5010). In fact, governments built on the neoliberalism dream were even failing to deliver the economic opportunities that should have been available to members of society (Bratich & Banet-Weiser, p.5011). Even the larger PUA (Pick Up Artist) industry that taught men how to court women with confidence was proved to be a sham as incels realized that no matter how confident they were, the barrier of their unattractive looks in the sexual market place would always impede their progress (Bratich & Banet-Weiser, p. 5014).

Therefore, larger numbers of failed PUA’s who had bought the books and paid for the online programs were incels (Bratich & Banet-Weiser). Furthermore, more men realized that their expectations related “social reproduction” whereby men hoped women would gladly provide them with sexual comfort on command while being preoccupied

with selflessly serving such men was a fantasy (Bratich & Banet-Weiser, p. 5014). In fact, there was a larger realization among failed PUA's that male entitlement around sex would never be stronger than female consent over sex (Bratich & Banet-Weiser).

With patriarchal fantasies of sexual domination, failed PUA's were then feeling aggrieved as they had to depend on women for sex who they felt maintained more power and control over decision-making (Bratich & Banet-Weiser). As a reaction, failed PUA's then grew in resentment and appropriated marginalized groups as they viewed themselves as victims to feminism with this advancement in gender equality (Bratich & Banet-Weiser). In the most extreme cases, failed PUA's or incels engaged in "honor terrorism" by directly retaliating against women with violence in order to get back their power (Bratich & Banet-Weiser, p. 5019). Bratich and Banet-Weiser described how "networked misogyny", "online harassment", and "guided trolling" or cyberbullying served as variations of this larger concept of honor terrorism whereby men retaliated against women's empowerment and emerging gender equality (p. 5019). Essentially, incels were forming an aggressive backlash against feminism which was predominant in their misogynistic discourse themes in relation to grievances (Daly & Reed, 2021).

Discourse Themes Related to Incels' Grievances

At the heart of such incels' resentments were personal grievances. Specific themes around grievances that are predominant within the larger research on incels emerged. As part of a self-perpetuating cycle of refueled resentments grounded in vitriolic misogynistic discourse, incels would identify with different themes which would then fan the flames of aggrieved entitlement even further. Such themes included

misogynistic masculine discourse that reinforces gender inequity, reduced social market narratives that fuel grievances, and devious female manipulator tropes.

Theme 1: Misogynistic Masculine Discourse Reinforces Gender Inequity

From the incel point of view, manhood is equated with self-agency around sexual relations whereby men who can choose their desirable partners at will are highly revered as part of a masculine hierarchy (Vito et al., 2018). Thus, incels promote “hegemonic masculine ideals” whereby males are clearly the more dominant force who leverage influence over women for opportunities around sex (Vito et al., p.89). Meanwhile, women are viewed as sexual objects there to bolster as well as validate men’s senses of manhood (Vito et al., p. 89). Similarly, Tranchese and Sugiura (2021) demonstrated how incel forum discourse is in a similar vein of pornography which both contain themes of normalizing violence against women. Furthermore, Farrell et al. (2019) determined out of six million incel posts that there were nine lexicons of misogynistic rhetoric and that levels of misogyny were increasing in incel forums along with even stronger backlashes to feminism. Connell (1987) utilized a framework of hegemonic masculinity to describe the dominant power men can leverage over women so that patriarchy is part of a solidification of this social power structure (Maxwell et al., 2020).

Moreover, as a result of established patriarchy, society is organized in different ways and with a sense of “hypermasculinity”, potential for radicalization or even extremist thinking is more likely to take shape (Maxwell et al., p.1855). Liggett O’Malley et al. (2022) shared how men who experience social threats to their masculinity are more likely to promote ideologies whereby women serve subordinating roles within a larger

patriarchal system. As part of this dynamic, incels may then weaponize language. In fact, Chang (2020) described how incels will often use the term femoid to reinforce women as other and as dehumanized in order to establish dominant social power.

Vito et al. (2018) shared how the ability to subordinate women and have sex with them from a place of power is viewed as a symbol of manhood for incels. Within this dynamic, Connell (2015) conceptualized hegemonic masculinity as a way that men promote masculinity in order to maintain leveraged power associations over women as a way to legitimize as well as maintain the patriarchal system (Zurbiggen, 2022). As part of this larger social ecosphere, there is a “patriarchal hegemony” whereby women are vilified and men who embrace women’s empowerment are viewed as “normie men” or even “cucks” (cuckolds) within a larger masculine hierarchy (Hoskin, 2019, p. 21). As part of the larger incel digital landscape, incels often feel like their social market value is compromised because they do not have maximum sexual agency in spite of patriarchal social systems which leads to more personal grievances as well as resentments.

Theme 2: Reduced Social Market Value Narrative Fuels Grievances

At the heart of incel resentment and grievances is their criticism of social media whereby women are then able to locate as well as engage with the most attractive men of their choice (Preston et al., 2021, p. 834). Within this larger view, incels focus on attractive women as social capital which then bolsters their social status if they are able to partner with such desirable females (Menzie, 2019, p. 9). Then there is the larger concept of social market value capital which is the ability to attract sexually desirable women (Maxwell et al., 2020). Incels believe that they are on the lower end of having any social

market capital because the attractive women (Stacys) are more focused on physically attractive men with more material resources (Chads) (Maxwell et al.). Menzie stated: “In incel imagery, women have exclusive control over the sexual marketplace and deny access to those deemed unworthy” (p.15). Incels then maintain further grievances as they view sexually desirable women as fickle and essentially an “unstable form of capital” (Hintz & Baker, 2021, p.25). In addition, Cosma and Gurevich (2020) described how within incel discourse, women’s bodies are then viewed as commodities that are then used to “bolster men’s masculinity” (p. 604). Overall, Tastenhoye et al. (2022) described how incels’ views of the sexual marketplace is grounded within hierarchy and based strongly on certain physical features (p. 2). Therefore, women’s hypergamous nature or genetic tendency to want to match with other genetically strong males is the reason for inceldom and why incels experience so much rejection (Tastenhoye et al.).

Then there is the issue of dating app distortions which impacts the sexual marketplace. Preston et al. (2021) described dating apps as “...an unfair distribution of sexual access to women producing a hyperstratification of the sexual marketplace (p. 835). With dating apps, incels have commented on the unfair advantage of women’s abilities to more easily access men of their choice (Preston et al.). Brooks et al (2022) tested the hypothesis that incel activity was directly related to whereby there was a stronger representation of females and less males as part of a more competitive dating pool. Incels were more prevalent in their posts in areas whereby there were more male-biased sex ratios, few single women, and higher income disparities between social classes but less gender gaps in income (Brooks et al.).

Furthermore, Brooks et al., (2022) found that self-identified incels often blame their celibacy on the marketplace share of alpha males (Chads) who gain the affection of desirable women (Stacys). Likewise, Preston et al. (2021) state: “the social impacts of dating apps are a central concern for incels” (p. 826). In fact, incels often believe that men inflate the egos of women on dating apps by given them attention which then creates “sexual marketplace distortions” whereby many females have a false sense of confidence with all of the attention they get from other men (p. 823). As a result of dating apps, incels are then reminded of their lowered status in the masculine hierarchy and violent narratives often become a way for them to reclaim back their masculine power (Lindsay, 2021, p. 30; Preston et al.). The challenge is that incels then feel frustrated with the masculine hierarchy whereby less attractive men lose their marketplace share or prospects for sexual relationships because of their looks while women focus on more attractive partnering opportunities (Lindsay; Preston et al.).

Daly and Reed (2021) described how incels will then retaliate against the masculine hierarchy by “shit posting” as a way of reacting against circumstances of which they have no control in the world of dating selection (p.14). In fact, Liggett O’Malley et al. (2022) believe that the dating market place is led by females who follow are more genetic-based natural law of selection whereby alpha males have the greatest selection of female sexual partners. Such marketplace competition then becomes both a barrier as well as a grievance for incels (Liggett O’Mally et al., p. 4991). Connell (1992) described how “the hegemonic ideal of masculinity is not achievable by most men in

society as it upholds euro-centric, heterosexual, middle-upper class and privileged norms.” (Vito et al., 2018, p. 89). Biological determinism also becomes a factor.

Thorburn et al. (2022) described biological determinism as “self-described biological inferiority” (p. 12). Therefore Liggett O’Malley et al. (2022) explained how incels have a fatalistic view of their own sexual attractiveness as well as self-worth since their value comes from genetics with physical appearance that is often beyond their control (Thorburn et al.). Vallegra et al. (2020) described how many incels believe that surgery is one of the options for dealing with the oppression of devalued physical appearance qualities within the sexual marketplace. Furthermore, Moskalenko et al. (2022) suggested that with biological determinism that 20% of men gain access to 80% of the market share of dating due to their attractiveness which means that incels often feel defeated by these fixed dynamics. As a result, such incel resentment then results in the perpetuation of anger at women that takes the form of the devious female manipulator trope.

Theme 3: Devious Female Manipulator Trope

In fact, Chang (2020) studied incel discourses and identified that there was a monstrous feminine trope whereby women are able to deviously oppress men (p 3). Within a “phallogocentric tradition”, women are considered the other or outside of a masculine norm as they serve as an outgroup (Chang, p.9). Terms such as “femoid” are often used to describe women as not even having human-like qualities (Chang, p. 13). In fact, some incels even believe in a “matriarchal gynocentric dictatorship”, whereby with each decade men lose more of their privilege as well as power to women (Chang, p. 19).

Within incel discourse, women are viewed as manipulative as well as toxic with capabilities of ruining men's lives (Maxwell et al., 2020).

With a type of devious manipulator trope perpetuated by incels, women are believed to devalue themselves with promiscuity as well as availability to powerful alpha males while then rejecting incels (Maxwell et al., 2020). As part of a focus on negative incel-driven narratives, Brzuskiwicz (2020) described: "Homogenisation and dehumanisation of women are constants in incel narratives" (p. 6). Furthermore, there are even beliefs as posted in incel forums that some incels believe that accusations of rape or sexual assault by women are frequently part of the devious manipulator role that women play in order to entrap men as well as leverage power over them (Maxwell et al.). The energy of this collective incel community and social identity becomes a social movement with tendencies towards violent extremism which need to be examined.

Incel Ideology and the Progression into Radicalization or even Violent Extremism

When like-minded individuals gather with each other and reinforce key messaging, validate similar beliefs, and share common world views, then such groups become homogenous. In fact, Pelzer et al. (2021) described the destructive nature of "incel forum culture" as incels further reinforce each other's negative feelings while then scapegoating external groups like women to blame for their problems (p.18). Moreover, Baele et al. (2023) used Myer's paradigm of polarization to explain how similar people reinforce each other to become radicalized and that the forums serve as types of "echo chambers" that repetitively spread disinformation, misogyny, or even hatred as incels create their own polarized group separate from the rest of society (p.4). Similarly, Davies

et al. (2021) shared how extremism is often a gradual process grounded in socialization around problematic believe systems that can promote violence. In fact, Moskalenko et al. (2022) described “Mass-casualty incel attacks have led the security services in the US, Canada, and the UK to classify incels as a violent extremist threat” (p. 1). Meanwhile, De counsel (2018) has developed a meta framework or integrated funnel model for sharing a non-linear pathway that explains progression into radicalization or even violent extremism. The ways that each incel decides to cope is a result of different pathway choices.

Pathways of Coping

Entry into incel forum culture involves the acceptance of a “red pill” reality whereby men accept their problems are really the result of feminism and that they are an oppressed group that is losing more of their political agency (Fowler, 2021; Wright et al., 2020). Meanwhile, a “black pill” reality involves the deeper level of acceptance or submission to the realization that this oppressed reality will never change because of fixed biological determinism or other social factors (Brzuskiwicz, 2020). Therefore, incels bond together in their own sense of victimhood as well as oppression. In fact, Fowler (2021) states: “Taking the blackpill is a threshold. It moves you away from the political agency that all other groups believe is possible” (p.19). Therefore, incels then surrender to their powerlessness and gain power through group affiliation around their own self-imposed oppression.

There are varying layers of coping in the process as part of inceldom. Some men will just accept the red pill reality as part of a deeper feminism backlash as they post

misogynistic forum posts as part of the manosphere. Such groups as MGTOW (men go their own way) decide to “Remove themselves from the struggle” (Fowler, 2021, p.18). In other words, MGTOW men who become incels by accepting the “black pill” just give up on trying to find sexual partners. As part of this sense of personal defeat, some incels fail to cope with the complexity of their grievances, and as such, develop suicidal ideations (Daly & Laskovtsov, 2022). Some incels may try to get surgery or change their appearances by engaging in “looksmaxxing” or trying to maximize their features or looks (Daly & Laskovtsov). Then there is also a smaller population of incels who can become deradicalized by rejecting incel ideology.

This deradicalization involves, as Moore (2017) describes, the need to “subvert norms” as well as “identity categories” of incel ideology (Hintz & Baker, 2021, p.3052). In fact, Hintz and Baker described how incels can redefine their narratives by “undoing identity ties to the discourse of incelism” through “diachronic separation” (p.3052; 3059). Essentially, incels free themselves from radicalization by questioning the framework, experience, and world view provided to them as an explanation of their grievances. An important part of such freedom is to regain back a sense of political agency and not accept the self-imposed impression which likely starts with questioning the overall structure of the masculine hierarchy as well as the objectification or even commodification of women that is grounded deeply within misogyny.

Informing Deradicalization Interventions

The purpose of this interpretative phenomenological study was to improve the understanding of the lived experiences of incels with aggrieved entitlement who

participate in online communities in order to better inform deradicalization interventions. The field of deradicalization intervention, however, is in the early stages and is of particular interest particularly with the rise in domestic terror events (Abrams, 2021). As a result, psychologists are actively exploring how to "... prevent, reverse or neutralize the threat of radicalization" (Abrams, p.1). With deradicalization, individuals develop less extremist views, but within the process of "disengagement", these same people leave group affiliations that are violent or who engage in criminal activity (Abrams). According to Abrams, disengagement may be a more realistic goal than deradicalization particularly when studies such as the START Profiles of Individual Radicalization in the US (PIRUS) show that many radicalized individuals may stop extremist behaviors particularly around violence, but they still uphold radicalized viewpoints or worldviews.

Within the field of deradicalization, there are "push factors" whereby radicalized individuals become disenchanted with group dynamics and leave their affiliations or "pull factors" which means that people naturally progress and grow out of radicalized group membership because they have new relationships, employment opportunities, start a family etc. (Abrams, 2021). Ligon et al. (2019) completed one hundred exit interviews with extremists who left group affiliations primarily because of their larger discontentment with the membership or organization (Abrams). Another intervention strategy has been for former affiliates of extremist groups to work with members to help them deradicalize through peer supports (Abrams). Such deradicalization organizations as ExitUSA are founded upon these principles of peer support from former members of extremist groups who reach out to support current group participants (Abrams). A logical

conclusion may be to explore previous methodologies or interventions from experiences with international terrorism.

Although there has been much experience with international terrorism on US soil, these experiences do not necessarily fit with current domestic terrorism trajectories. In terms of larger deradicalization strategies, Martha Crenshaw from Stanford University and former president of the International Society of Political Psychology suggests that experience with Islamic extremists does not necessarily fit within the context of domestic terrorism or radicalization in Western countries (Abrams, 2021). Instead, much research focus has been on prevention techniques around how to “inoculate messaging” to prevent radicalization (Abrams).

Braddock (2019) suggests that an important part of such inoculation of extremist messaging involves warning potential followers of extremist ideologies about propaganda prior to exposure if possible during searches online (Abrams, 2021). With this approach, extremist messaging then becomes less credible to viewers (Abrams). Moonshot is an organization that has expanded upon the strategy of The Redirect Method (TRM) whereby open-source methodology is used through targeted advertising to provide alternative messaging such as mental health supports when individuals begin searching out extremist-related key search terms (Radicalization Awareness Network, 2021). After a pilot project in August 2015 to March 2016, such redirection technology with Moonshot has been deployed in 39 countries within 24 different languages (Radicalization Awareness Network).

Helmus and Klein (2018) report that the “field is still immature” and that changes in audience worldviews or even behavioral changes with exposure to such redirection technology are difficult to measure (p.4). Therefore, exploration of deradicalization interventions is still in the developmental stage. By understanding the nuances of incel grievances and the social context of their lived experiences, such data can be used to inform further deradicalization interventions that are quantifiable with impact.

In summary, the field of incel research has been built upon thematic analysis of incel forum post communication so that scholars are able to gain a glimpse into the incel mindset as well as lived experience. A major challenge, however, is that these forum posts are often out of context and without proper screening or verification, may not even be valid in some instances particularly if participants are postering with bravado to meet the conditions of drama necessary for exciting forums to gain followers. Therefore, researchers in the field are now wanting to engage directly with incels to learn more about their lived experiences which can then inform deradicalization interventions. Daly and Reed (2021) were one of the first researchers to directly interview incels and engage this reluctant population into research. Now with an expanded subculture who are quite verbal about their grievances, there are opportunities to develop more nuanced understandings of the lived experiences of incels particularly as they manage their grievances or even struggle with issues of aggrieved entitlement.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The phenomenon that I explored in this interpretative phenomenological research study was to understand the lived experiences of incels with aggrieved entitlement who participate in online communities to better inform deradicalization interventions. Overall, the research problem was that the lived experience of self-identified incels has not been fully identified by researchers as qualitative research on incels is in the early stages. I addressed the one-dimensional nature of written communication as part of online forums that has been coded previously in qualitative research by now having interactive, live, synchronous communication through open-ended interviews with incels from various online communities. Therefore, this was a next level in qualitative research as I interviewed incels directly to capture the depth of their lived experiences particularly with aggrieved entitlement. The potential social implications of this study are that insights around aggrieved entitlement can be better explored by researchers as part of deradicalization interventions. Also, self-identifying incels shared their lived experiences so that the perceived social rejection of this fringe online community could be understood by researchers along with the incel grievance potential which could lead to further radicalized thinking or even adoption of extremist ideologies.

My study needed to be conducted because in the threat assessment field there are larger concerns with what appears to be the potential for domestic terrorism through radicalized incel ideologies (see Van Brunt & Taylor, 2021). If researchers can understand the lived experiences of incel online communities particularly around issues of aggrieved entitlement, then the potential for violent extremism may be explored,

insights into the escalation cycle of radicalized thinking may be examined, and this overall population of frustrated people self-identifying as incels can be better understood by researchers as a social phenomenon. In this chapter, there is a review of the research design and rationale, role of the researcher, methodology, instrumentation, procedures for recruitment participation along with data collection, the data analysis plan, and issues of trustworthiness which will include ethical procedures.

Research Design and Rationale

The qualitative research question I explored was “How do self-identified incels give meaning to and perceive experiences of aggrieved entitlement?” There is an opportunity through qualitative research to capture more depth with the phenomenology and lived experiences of incels with aggrieved entitlement issues who participate in online communities. Therefore, quantitative designs around capturing data that shows statistical significance around common incel experiences is not appropriate since researchers are still learning more about this elusive population who are not always forthcoming about outwardly identifying as incels to mainstream society. As a result, with qualitative designs, researchers can learn more about the lived experiences of incels before such data can be calculated as part of larger quantitative research models.

A significant challenge is that the lived experience of self-identified incels is not fully identified as qualitative research in this area is in the early stages. With contextualization of lived experiences of the participants, the researcher can better understand their phenomenology (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Such knowledge and deeper understandings of incel lived experiences with aggrieved entitlement may be helpful in

the development of conceptual models around phenomenon that are experienced for the purposes of deradicalization interventions. Since not enough is known about the lived experiences of incels, qualitative research focused on phenomenological analysis is appropriate instead of utilizing quantitative research designs that quantify or even categorize common themes with data of statistical significance that has not yet been fully identified within the larger research field of incels.

Research Tradition

The research tradition I chose for this study is qualitative because the common themes among incels living with experiences of aggrieved entitlement is not fully understood particularly since incels are an elusive population who are able to hide behind the anonymity of the internet with their online posts. Therefore, conceptualizing categories of lived experience according to predominance or statistical significance within quantitative research designs is not appropriate at this stage in the research field as more information-rich cases of incel experiences need to be understood according to qualitative designs. With interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), researchers focus on how individuals make meaning of their life experiences (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). Overall, I chose the methodology of IPA within the qualitative options because of the small participant size that were interviewed in-depth because, as an elusive incel population, their lived experiences and the layers of social context have not been fully recognized by researchers.

Within the tradition of IPA, there are three underlying foundations which include phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). Therefore,

there is an epistemological view whereby researchers focus on the meaning individuals give to experiences and rich contextual data collected from naturalistic settings informs the analysis as part of phenomenology (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). Such a qualitative approach is suitable for studying the subculture of incels because the quantitative focus on testing hypotheses and quantifying data into categories, volumes, or strengths of associations is not appropriate particularly since the incel subculture is an emerging social phenomenon with layers of contextualized experiences for participants (Pietkiewicz & Smith; Van Brunt & Taylor, 2021).

With a focus on IPA as the research tradition, I was preoccupied with the quality of participant experiences rather than causal relationships as witnessed in quantitative research and there is an additional level of “epistemological reflexivity” whereby the researcher focuses on an enhancement of understanding participants’ lived experiences in relation to the confines of the research question (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012, p. 1). Also, with a focus on “eidetic reduction”, I examined each participants’ unique experiences to see how these phenomena are distinguishable from others so that there is not preset categories or criteria (Pietkiewicz & Smith, p. 2). Other important aspects of the IPA research tradition include hermeneutics whereby the researcher tries to understand the mindset of participants through enriched experiences presented within their personal worlds (Pietkiewicz & Smith). In fact, within IPA there is a type of double hermeneutic or dual interpretation as the participant makes sense of their experiences while the researcher engages in meaning making of such descriptions from the participants (Pietkiewicz & Smith).

Another important foundational aspect of IPA is idiography so that the researcher views the unique context of each single case in detail before exploring any universal themes that emerge from the data (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). A focus on idiography is particularly important for studying the lived experiences of incels because individual incel beliefs are along a continuum of radicalized or even extremist thinking and the reasons for self-identification with the larger decentralized incel culture is still in the early stages of understanding in the research field. Therefore, themes I generated from individual narratives were used in my facilitation of finding better understandings of individual experiences of incels and their senses of aggrieved entitlement.

Like the work of Daly and Reed (2021), I contacted self-identified incels online through social media platforms and discussion groups to engage them in qualitative interviews with open-ended questions about their lived experiences with aggrieved entitlement. Daly and Reed were some of the first researchers to directly engage self-identified incels, and as such, they provided exploratory research with a call to action to build upon this research as most of the previous research up to the present moment in time has been around thematic analysis of online postings and documents by self-identified members of incel communities. The challenge for researchers with only using data from static posts devoid of social context is that they do not have the fuller dimension, nor can they understand the social nuances of such experiences of participants because there is no back and forth discourse of conversation between incels who posted online and the researchers. Therefore, there is an opportunity for researchers to have data become more in-depth by adding an additional element of lived experiences to responses

by interviewing participants using open-ended questions in real time within an IPA research approach.

Role of the Researcher

The purpose of my research study was to understand the experiences of incels with aggrieved entitlement who participate in online communities. With an identified purpose, qualitative researchers can then have established parameters as well as content relevant to the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Therefore, within the purposes of this study a focus exclusively on the lived experiences of incels with aggrieved entitlement who participate in online communication was explored by myself. By understanding the phenomenology of self-identified incels who participate online, I could gain more insight into their social meaning of such experiences along with various coping strategies.

The role of the researcher using an IPA framework is to facilitate a natural flow of conversation and inquiry with participants to understand at an in-depth level their lived experiences with aggrieved entitlement as incels (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). As part of IPA, researchers use a balance of two levels of analysis which include “emic” perspectives which flows from each participant and the “etic” that includes the researcher’s psychological concepts used to make sense of the data (Pietkiewicz & Smith, p. 6). Therefore, I had to be careful to not engage in reductionism or conform data into preconstructed understandings so bracketing of any preconceptions was a critical component of my research process (Pietkiewicz & Smith).

Overall, my relationship to the problem studied is that I am both a teacher and a counselor as well as a mother of daughters who were unable to identify themselves online

as females within gaming communities because of the vitriolic, misogynistic language that occurs when young male's identities in groups are hidden behind a screen of technology. Also, I had a professional teaching experience in 2021 whereby nine boys in an English 11 class expressed high levels of misogynistic as well as vitriolic language that condoned incel experiences to a degree in which I felt unsafe in the classroom with the level of derogatory comments as well as volatility around establishing masculine dominance they had with each other and towards me. In fact, according to a poll with the NASUWT Teacher's Union, 70% of teachers had experienced misogyny from pupils and there was an increasing level of violent objectification of females that could be linked to incel ideologies or influences online (Guardian, 2022). In a *60 Minutes* interview (2022), the Director of the FBI, Wray shared that one of the leading concerns the FBI had around national security was with radicalized lone actors and partners who could engage in domestic terrorism acts related to online radicalization (CBS News, 2022). Finally, concerns around incel ideologies are part of regular trend updates from staff of Safer Schools Together (2022) as part of their digital threat assessment trainings. With online reinforcement of incel ideologies, the perpetuation of femmephobia can grow along with enhanced radicalized thinking which may serve as justifications for violent domestic acts of terrorism against scapegoated female groups that incels condone through extremist online posts (Van Brunt & Taylor, 2021).

Bias

Ravitch and Carl (2021) reiterated the critical importance of managing bias which should be at the center of inquiry. In fact, Ravitch and Carl shared how researchers must

examine their own bias as part of an ethical responsibility. Within qualitative design, the researcher is part of the research and is to a large degree managing the representations of the participants which contributes to the data (Ravitch & Carl). Such representations should not be skewed through a researcher lens of implicit or even explicit bias (Ravitch & Carl).

An important part of managing bias for the researcher is to sort out their own perceptions of phenomenon while setting aside or bracketing prior knowledge as well as assumptions (Tufford & Newman, 2010). Therefore, I concentrated on having an open mind to other individuals' experiences in order to manage bias (see Tufford & Newman, 2010). In particular, I am a teacher/counselor as well as a mother of daughters who have all recently experienced aggressive vitriolic misogynistic language online or in person and are self-identified feminists. Therefore, I worked hard to manage accountabilities around potential bias as I prepared to be open-minded as a researcher and engaged with the participants with a level of neutrality as well as curious investigation while also engaging in member checking, a reflexive journal, and supervision with committee members.

I have trained to be a threat assessment manager and private consultant so exposure to radicalized thinking as well as vitriolic language as well as aggression is a part of this forensic field. Therefore, I was committed to the aforementioned accountabilities and worked hard through journaling, analytic memos, and supervision to mitigate bias. Also, I was aware of researcher positionality in the research process (see Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Finally, there is an important key point to keep revisiting which is

that not all self-identified incels with radicalized thinking have potential towards violence, so it is critical for researchers not to categorize this group with domestic terrorism tendencies even if some other lone actors have engaged in mass violent attacks.

An important way of monitoring implicit bias is to engage in member checking to ensure that a qualitative researcher is truly capturing the essence of participants' lived experiences (Laureate Education, 2010). Also, as a way of moderating explicit bias, a researcher should be careful to capture the actual statements verbatim from participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Therefore, I followed informed consent guidelines as regulated by the institutional review board (IRB) and audio-recorded interviews to find ways to capture the integrity of what was being said factually while modulating the pace of each interview. I remained vigilant about not filtering participant comments through biased perceptions. Finally, I engaged in peer reviews of the research process while respecting confidentiality guidelines.

Within the threat assessment field there is a large difference between transient as well as substantive threats and even if self-identified incels use vitriolic language filled with violent misogynistic messages, this does not mean that they are violent (Safer Schools Together, 2022). I was careful not to make references or connections from self-identified incel comments to threats or assume that this group of individuals had any links with domestic terrorism. Language and actions are very different and even if such research contributes to the field of threat assessment, this does not mean that individuals who self-identify as incels are a threat in any way. Furthermore, I ensured I monitored bias particularly as I am a female who was interviewing males and I maintained a

feminist perspective or worldview. Therefore, the methodology I used as well as instrumentation served as scaffolding for keeping the research process at a level of structure while also allowing for flexibility so that participants were able to share the richness of their lived experiences.

Methodology

As part of an IPA framework, my focus was on a homogenous population so that each participant case could be fully analyzed with their own unique contributions to the social phenomenon of incel experience with aggrieved entitlement.

Population

The term incel or associations with this term are often stigmatized by people in the general population online and appear to be the source of many derogatory jokes through memes. In fact, associations with “being an incel” are equated to a status as a type of outlier or social failure who cannot meet the social norms of developing meaningful romantic relations with others (Van Brunt & Taylor, 2021). Therefore, self-identified incels are part of a hidden subculture of individuals who prescribe to a particular worldview (Van Brunt & Taylor). Also, there is particular language as well as ideology that incels will prescribe to within their online discourse as part of very specific chat rooms or social media platforms (Van Brunt & Taylor).

Since self-identified incels are part of a hidden online subculture, I followed Daly and Reed’s (2021) practice as I used the social media platform Twitter to search specific hashtag threads such as #incel, #blackpilled, and #inceltears and located males who

espoused incel types of words as well as ideologies. I announced the study through this platform and participants reached out to me with an expressed interest to participate.

Sampling Strategy and Participant Selection

To be included in this study, participants, as part of my purposive sampling strategy, were invited by me or provided with my contact information through a snowball sampling method as they were referred to the research study by other incels. Participants had to be male adults (over the age of 19), self-identify as incels, and participated in online communities who expressed incel beliefs or ideologies. Excluded participants included females, individuals who were not comfortable with the informed consent guidelines, people who dropped out of research, and finally others who did not espouse incel beliefs or ideologies.

Saturation

Sample saturation is the point in which there is no new information or themes that are being observed within the data from participants (Guest et al., 2006). Participants were part of a purposive sample in that I selected them according to a predetermined criteria relevant to the research objectives. Important considerations around sample size and saturation that I considered were whether the sample of participants were homogenous because similar themes may be achieved more quickly since participants share common world views (Guest et al.). Daly and Reed (2021), in an exploratory study, of which my research study is based, reached full saturation at 10 participants.

The challenge then is for researchers to flesh out responses to capture the nuances of participant world views (Guest et al., 2006). Baker et al. (2012) suggested that there

may be smaller numbers of participants in cases whereby populations of participants are hidden or are hard to access. Often there would be a mean of participants around 30 for qualitative studies, but by considering the labor as well as time constraints of coding so many participant interviews, a more realistic amount may be 12 (Baker et al.).

Meanwhile, Mason (2010) described how by using a cultural consensus model as prescribed by Atran et al. (2005), that a consensus may likely to occur with 10 participants.

Within an IPA framework, the researcher focuses on information-rich individual cases and studies have included one, four, nine, or even 15 participants (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). Saturation in the IPA context depends on the depth of analysis, the richness of individual participant cases, and logistical considerations (Pietkiewicz & Smith).

Overall, I determined saturation in my study as part of a process of coding data as it came in from each participant response so that I knew when I was reaching the end of the data because there were no new contributing themes or expanded aspects of participants' lived experiences with aggrieved entitlement.

In general, the aim for the researcher within a homogenous sample as part of IPA is on the depth of analysis and not the breadth of numbers of participants covered so the result was that my study did not necessarily align with exact qualitative research numbers. Instead, as I coded for larger themes as well as subthemes, similarity in responses started to emerge whereby there were no new insights to be gained so saturation was established at that point. I anticipated being able to reach saturation at four to 12 participants as logistics as well as pragmatics around being able to gain participants

in this elusive subculture was another consideration and may have even served as a limitation of the study. My focus was not on achieving numbers of participants to reach saturation, but instead on the coding of data as it came in from participants so that there was clarity when the end of the data had been reached and there were no new emerging themes from more participants.

Instrumentation

In particular, with an interpretative phenomenological focus as outlined by Smith et al. (2022), I used semi-structured individual interviews, exploratory note taking, experiential statements, and themes. Self-identified incels contacted me as the researcher online through Twitter as they expressed interest in my study. Participants engaged in audio-recorded interviews after they reviewed informed consent guidelines as they confirmed such consent via e-mail. I reviewed any limitations of confidentiality prior to the interview which participants knew was recorded for research purposes while their privacy was maintained at all times. Since technology was the backdrop of the interview guide process, I was able to establish an added level of neutrality as well as healthy detachment because participants were able to be comfortable in their own personal environments while maintaining optimal privacy.

As part of an IPA framework, I used one to one interviews for instrumentation. In fact, I organized a flexible script of open-ended questions with prompts so as to guide an inquiry conversation whereby I could capture rich, detailed accounts of each participant's experiences around the social phenomenon of being an incel with issues of aggrieved entitlement. Dialogue was in real time as I facilitated a natural flow of conversation that

consisted of prompts related to sensory perceptions, emotional feelings, and individual experiences (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). These interviews were audio recorded and verbatim transcripts for an audit trail as well as for facilitation of the coding process were created by myself as the researcher (Pietkiewicz & Smith). Furthermore, I monitored how the interview affected each participant and was prepared to stop the interview as well as refer them to counseling supports if they appeared to be in distress (Pietkiewicz & Smith).

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation and Data Collection

Overall, I followed an interpretative phenomenological approach as outlined by Smith et al. (2022). Participants learned of the study through Twitter and had engaged in the informed consent procedures as outlined by the IRB in the ethics review. Furthermore, participants were able to maintain anonymity through their social media name or handle which was not published in research because they were provided with a pseudonym participant number.

Interview Guide Process

The process in establishing the interview guide was a backwards forward process whereby I had already examined the exploratory interview guide of an established phenomenological study of self-identified incels in which Daly and Reed (2021) reached out to self-identified incels on Twitter and interviewed them on the Discord server. Now the process I used was to double-check to see if these questions were a fit for this interpretative phenomenological analysis study that focused on issues of aggrieved entitlement. An important consideration within an IPA framework for

researchers is that these open-ended questions within the interview guide can be used by researchers to help to facilitate a natural flow of conversation that is inquiry-based (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). Therefore, the first question researchers use should be part of developing rapport and can be easily answered by participants (Pietkiewicz & Smith). Within the following questions designed by researchers, there should also be prompts that include sensory perceptions, thoughts, associations, stories, and individual interpretations so that data presented can be rich as well as nuanced within each participant's social context (Pietkiewicz & Smith).

As part of this process, I researched how to formulate phenomenological qualitative questions. Bevan (2014) suggested that phenomenological interview guide questions should be based on themes that relate to contextualized experiences of phenomenon being studied in a way that participants can clarify their experiences. Also, participants should be able to describe their experiences in the way they experience such phenomenon using their own language, expressions, and with extensive details (Bevan). Benner (1994) recommended that phenomenological interview questions be asked in the language participants would use for themselves (Bevan). As recommended by Bevan, the researcher then carefully listens as well as follows-up with probing as well as clarification. This way participants are able to reflect on the meaning of their experiences as they share details throughout the interview (Bevan).

After confirming that the Daly and Reed (2021) interview guide questions were a fit for the phenomenological approach, I reviewed the Walden University interview guide worksheet and confirmed that the questions were aligned with the research

question, each question was open-ended, there was a neutral tone, none of the questions were leading questions, the questions consisted of follow-up questions or probes, only one question was asked at a time, there was a first question warm-up question, the content of questions were consistent with participants' culture and that the final question was an opportunity for participants to share more details (Walden University, 2022).

Then I edited the interview guide according to feedback from peers and an instructor through an online workshop. The final draft of the interview questions were as follows:

1. How long have you been learning about incel ideas and what is this experience like for you?

(Prompt): What does it feel like to be an incel?

2. What does it mean for you to be an incel?

(Prompt): Do you have a story, thoughts, or any feelings about being an incel that you wish to share?

3. Tell me about your experience with online forums?

(Prompt): What are some of your challenges and what does that feel like for you?

4. What is your personal experience of posting online about incel ideals?

(Prompt): Did you have a story or want to share more about your feelings about online posting?

5. What do you think are the factors that led to your inceldom?

(Prompt): Are there larger reasons or feelings that made you interested in being an incel?

6. Is there something that you need people to understand about challenges or grievances that you may or may not have?

(Prompt): For example, do you feel like there are additional challenges being an incel?

7. How do you feel about the way the media portrays incels?

(Prompt): Is there are story or a time in which you read about incels that you want to share about?

8. Are there challenges around self-identifying as an incel? If so, what?

(Prompt): What does that feel like to come out as an incel?

9. What does the black pill mean to the incel community?

(Prompt): Is there a new level of feeling or experience that happens when incels acknowledge the black pill reality?

10. Tell me about your personal experience around romantic relationships?

(Prompt): Maybe you wish to share a little with a story or describe a time in life and what that was like for you?

11. What else do you want people to know about incels and your own experiences?

(Prompt): Do you have strong feelings about any part of being an incel?

12. Is there anything else you would like to share?

(Prompt): This is a time when you may want to share your feelings or experiences about something we have not covered but that is important for you to express.

Types of Questions

The types of questions I asked included opinion and value questions, feeling questions, and background questions around length of time as an incel (see Patton, 2015). In order to establish trust as well as rapport with participants, I tried to use words that made sense to participants which included incel jargon, but with humility, I did not claim to be well-versed in such terms. Furthermore, I engaged in member checking to see if such words were being used correctly (see Patton, 2015)? Also, I used empathy in order to communicate a sense of respect for participants at all times because they were the experts regarding their own lived experiences (see Patton). In all instances, I tried to maintain empathic neutrality so that participants felt understood as well as supported (see Patton).

Debriefing Procedures

Overall, I thanked participants at the end of the interview particularly since they were contributing to a larger understanding of the incel community for researchers. I reminded each participant of a counseling resource should they have had any upset feelings after the interview they wished to process. Also, I reiterated to participants the informed consent and guidelines around confidentiality so that the information they shared was secure with no identifiers related to their identities. Finally, participants were able to visit a website to view the final results posted at the closure of this study.

Data Analysis Plan

The core of the issue that I addressed was around the opportunity through qualitative research to capture dimension with the phenomenology and lived experiences

with aggrieved entitlement of incels who participate in online communities. With contextualization of lived experiences of the participants, I was better to understand their phenomenology (see Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Such knowledge and deeper understandings of these lived experiences around aggrieved entitlement may be helpful for researchers in the development of conceptual models around phenomenon that are experienced.

As follows, the qualitative research question I used was: How do self-identified incels give meaning to and perceive experiences of aggrieved entitlement? The one-to-one interviews with an interview guide in relation to this experience of incels with issues of aggrieved entitlement were audio recorded by myself as well as transcribed. Data from the interviews was coded according to the IPA framework as follows:

First Stage Analysis Process

First, I read the transcripts as well as listened to the audio recordings of the interviews numerous times as a way of immersing herself into the data (see Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). Then I made notes about observations as well as reflections about the interview experience while noting other participant comments that were significant (Pietkiewicz & Smith). As part of an initial analysis by myself as the researcher, I focused on the content, language, and context of comments stated by participants (Pietkiewicz & Smith). While immersing myself in the data, I considered personal reflexivity of how participants' gender, age, social status, and rapport levels impacted their interpretation of the data (Pietkiewicz & Smith). Of particular note, I highlighted distinctive phrasing and/or emotional responses of participants which served as a gateway to deeper layers of rich contextual meaning of personal experiences (Pietkiewicz &

Smith). Therefore, at this first stage I included an analyzation from the original script to exploratory comments based on a review of the audio recordings and verbatim transcripts from the initial one-to-one interviews (Pietkiewicz & Smith).

Second Stage Emergent Themes

At this stage, I utilized an IPA framework and worked with the notes to transform this data into emergent themes (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). Then I worked on developing concise phrases into a higher level of abstraction that related to larger psychological conceptualizations while still capturing each participant's authentic accounts of their experiences (Pietkiewicz & Smith). Such a process was part of the double hermeneutic circle whereby I took parts of each participant's key phrasing or meaning and linked to higher psychological abstractions that are then related back to the authentic source of participant's expressions of experience (see Pietkiewicz & Smith). Therefore, I organized the official transcript into emerging themes by the researcher at this second stage (Pietkiewicz & Smith).

Third Stage Clustering of Themes

During this third stage of analysis, I examined relationships in the data and cluster themes by exploring connections between emerging themes through grouping them together into conceptual similarities along with larger descriptive labels (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). As part of a larger process, I established themes from the entire transcript were before connections or clusters were created which meant that some themes may have had a weak base so they were not utilized in the final analysis (Pietkiewicz & Smith). Underlying themes included superordinate as well as sub-themes

which I linked to short extracts from the audio recorded interviews and I could easily trace them through line numbers from the original transcripts (Pietkiewicz & Smith).

Final Stage of Narrative Account

At this final stage, I utilized an IPA framework and took the themes to provide a narrative account by outlining participants' experiences in a way that conceptualized their own words as part of a detailed interpretative analysis (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). The narrative account I used consisted of a discussion section that related these identified themes to existing literature by reflecting on the research, examining implications of the study, and providing ideas for future development (Pietkiewicz & Smith). Overall, theories emerged from the data and by following rigorous analysis, I captured the lived experience of the participants according to their own interpretations that were then grounded in larger psychological considerations while trying to manage my own preconceptions in the process (Pietkiewicz & Smith).

Software Considerations

With the phenomenological approach QDA (qualitative data analysis) software, not many scholars encourage this type of technology (Kelleher Sohn, 2017). In fact, many scholars openly state that QDA is not appropriate for phenomenological research and instead is better for grounded theory approaches as well as ethnography (Kelleher Sohn). Such scholars argue that coding, abstracting, and generalizations do not correspond to phenomenological insights (Kelleher Sohn). In fact, many phenomenological qualitative researchers suggest that there is a richness in describing as well as interpreting the essence of lived human experience without computer software so

that they can better feel as well as explore the phenomenon of interest (Kelleher Sohn). Furthermore, some phenomenological scholars have described a type of coding trap that can occur when interview scripts are segmented or organized according to default templates (Kelleher Sohn). Even if QDA software is used, phenomenological qualitative researchers still need to step out of the data and gain a larger experiential view of the larger patterns and not the count of codes apparent in the data (Kelleher Sohn). For these aforementioned reasons, I captured the stages of IPA analysis along with verbatim transcript sections, exploratory notes, and emerging themes through simple EXCEL spreadsheet software along with color-coded notes within three different notebooks.

Discrepant Cases

Overall, I aimed to obtain a homogenous sample and each case was explored uniquely within an IPA framework. Inevitably, there were themes that had a “weak evidential base” when clustered together in the larger analysis that I did not include in the larger narrative account or final analysis summary (see Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012, p.8). Essentially, I worked hard to capture the nuances and essence of each participant’s contributions as an incel to their lived experience with aggrieved entitlement. Furthermore, I considered larger issues of trustworthiness as part of legitimizing the authenticity of this research study.

Issues of Trustworthiness

I conducted my interviews in the privacy of an IP address blocked laptop using zoom communication and for the participant with asynchronous communication, I used a discord server online in a private chat room. Ahead of time, participants gave consent to

the interviews and explored the limitations of confidentiality. Participants also gave permission to be audio recorded for the interviews and were directed to a website to further explore anonymous results and themes identified through the research process. Therefore, participants were assured by myself that there were no personally identifying information in the reporting of their answers or within the collection of data. Also, participants were reminded by myself that participation in the study was voluntary and personal consent could be withdrawn at any time. Participants were within the IRB guidelines of recruitment as adults and did not represent any vulnerable populations.

Credibility

With credibility, the phenomenon has been accurately captured along with the nuances of that social phenomenon (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). By completing ten interviews with self-identified incels while engaging in in-depth, open-ended questions as well as reflexive questioning that is part of the IPA framework, my hope was to be able to accurately portray the lived experience of many incels with issues of aggrieved entitlement. Furthermore, the participants were part of a homogenous group of incels with aggrieved entitlement issues who interacted within online communities so the data was representative of this participant population. I noted any research limitations within the study findings.

Other strategies that I used to ensure credibility and that the analysis of data accurately reflected the reality as seen by participants, was to engage in member checking. I provided participants with verbatim transcripts from interviews which participants reviewed in order to ensure comments stated were representative of their

experiences as well as feelings and were an expression of their phenomenology. Then I took transcribed data that I triangulated from all participants as I formed the clusters of themes represented that were referenced to original transcripts so that there was a clear audit trail as shown in the columns of the excel spreadsheet that captured the data as well as analysis process. Finally, I maintained a reflexive journal that could be reviewed by the chair and second committee member which consisted of bracketing any forms of bias to clearly outline the evolution of data analysis.

Transferability

With transferability, future researchers can follow the steps of the researcher to replicate studies (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Daly and Reed (2021) have essentially created a blueprint of qualitative interviews with self-identified incels by talking directly with them through open-ended questions within a phenomenological tradition. This was an exploratory study and the gap was to be able to extend or even build-up such findings from this Daly and Reed research. As a researcher, I was building upon this tradition by then utilizing an IPA framework to provide in-depth, information-rich cases in order to understand the lived experiences of incels with issues of aggrieved entitlement. Therefore, future researchers could utilize this IPA designed research to then extend further into their findings while continuing the tradition of directly interviewing incels with open-ended questions as part of larger inquiry-based conversations.

Strategies that I used for maintaining transferability included having a clear audit trail, reflexive journal, excel coding and analysis, verbatim transcripts, audio recording of interviews, and thick descriptions of participant responses in interviews which are clearly

outlined in Chapter four for the purposes of full transparency around the stages of the research process. Therefore, future researchers will be able to build from this blue print of research to continue on with their own studies.

Dependability

With dependability, participant phenomena is captured within a natural context and can be evaluated by the researcher to other future researchers with full confidence as well as trustworthiness (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Overall, I used a lot of procedural details as well as an audit trail of accountability through the verbatim transcripts and IPA framework which consisted of exploratory comments, emerging themes, along with sub themes. Furthermore, I used bracketing to acknowledge any preconceptions or bias along with member checking to ensure there was accuracy of interpretation. Therefore, other researchers can see the integrity in the research that has been provided as I was transparent with the procedures. Moreover, I used the resources of my chair and second committee member who had the option to review the verbatim transcripts and ensure audio recordings for accountability purposes.

Confirmability

With confirmability, the researcher is a trusted part of the research process and has engaged in strategies for monitoring bias (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). In this study, I maintained confirmability by member checking and had participants review the interview transcripts to ensure that I had replicated a true understanding of their lived experiences. Furthermore, I triangulated data through clustering of themes to ensure that I was not merely relaying personal preferences or even biases as a researcher. Other strategies

included my consideration of the range of variation of responses as I checked for outliers or disconfirmation of data themes. Finally, I engaged in reflexive questions to manage bias in terms of considering surprising data results, potential favorability around particular points of view, possibilities around sampling bias and generalizations that were not methodologically sound, unconscious influences on responses such as participant desires for social desirability, procedural consistency, and the overall accuracy of results.

Ethical Procedures

The questions I asked in interviews were of a personal nature. On an ethical level, I wanted to ensure that I was following Principle A of Beneficence and nonmaleficence by doing no harm (American Psychological Association, 2017). Therefore, I did not want to trigger participants into accessing upsetting frustrations resulted in them feeling worse after the interview was over. Therefore, individuals knew as part of the informed consent with myself ahead of time what some of the twelve questions were and that their confidentiality was guaranteed because I only knew their social media handle which was then transferred into a pseudonym number code for research. Overall, I provided clients with a hotline number for counseling if they were feeling like their disclosures triggered previous traumas. As part of informed consent, I let individuals know that if they had an imminent plan to harm themselves or others that this was a limit of confidentiality that I would have to report to authorities.

Another ethical issue is reciprocity. Individuals gave up their time and were being vulnerable with personal information as participants (see Patton, 2015). As a way of respecting such time and valuing the effort individuals gave in helping me to understand

the incel subculture, I provided them with a twenty-five dollar gift card for their efforts. Overall, I worked with the IRB to ensure that such actions fit within ethical guidelines.

In-depth qualitative interviewing is a critical tool for qualitative research (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). With such data collection, I chose questions that were open-ended whereby there could be rich as well as detailed information (see Rubin & Rubin). Prior to utilizing this method of data collection, however, the ability for researchers to choose participants is important so that they will provide information that is in-depth for the study (Ravitch & Carl).

The research participants came from international online communities as they self-identified as incels. As part of a purposive sampling strategy, I accepted participants who demonstrated posts or responses that had themes around incel ideologies. If individuals self-identified as an incel and were receptive to engaging in a detailed qualitative interview, then I chose them as participants until I reached saturation for this study. Overall, I demonstrated scholarly rigor by identifying themes from the participant data and was mindful of saturation which is the point in which there is no new data coming from the interviews (see Guest et al., 2006; see Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Researchers use purposeful sample sizes to assist with saturation (Guest et al.).

Likewise, I utilized in-depth interviews of ten self-identified incels who participated in online communities. After the interviews, I coded various themes that I identified. Furthermore, I bracketed potential bias or inherent assumptions throughout the research process.

Summary

Overall, I built my interpretative phenomenological analysis study upon the existing research field by answering Daly and Reed's (2021) call to action around interviewing actual incels to gain nuanced understandings of their lived experiences. By using an interpretative phenomenological methodology and research design, I was able to establish a deeper dimensional understanding of their lived experiences with aggrieved entitlement to better inform deradicalization interventions. My research is part of a field that has an abundance of thematic analysis and coding of incel communication from researchers through online forums, but that does not yet have the broader social context or added dimension that comes from personalized incel interviews.

Chapter 4: Results

My purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the lived experiences of self-identified incels with aggrieved entitlement to better inform deradicalization interventions. Overall, I addressed another important gap with incel research because much of the research has been on studying one dimensional incel posts on online forums without having deeper levels of social context, nuance, or expressions of lived experience by incels. Daly and Reed (2021) were one of the first researchers to engage in open-ended interviews with incels. While building on this exploratory study in the field of research, my aim with this study was to understand the lived experiences of incels particularly around issues of aggrieved entitlement as frustrations can become a threat assessment issue due to previous incidents of mass violence by self-identified incels (see Van Brunt & Taylor, 2021). The qualitative research question I explored was “How do self-identified incels give meaning to and perceive experiences of aggrieved entitlement?” In fact, the core of the issue to be addressed was around the opportunity through qualitative research to capture dimension with the phenomenology and lived experiences of self-identified incels around aggrieved entitlement who participated in online communities. In this chapter, I provide an overview of the setting for research, background demographics of participants, the data collection process, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, results, and summary of research for this study.

Setting

The setting of the open ended recorded interviews was at my home office with nine of the participants opting to meet on Zoom communication. All participants chose a

camera off option while they could see me with my camera on. I told participants ahead of time that they had a camera off option which they all chose to use during the interviews. I was in a private, quiet, confidential setting. Likewise, all participants were in a quiet confidential setting and other than the odd connection issue in which questions may have had to be repeated or clarified, there were no other distractions. Overall, participants did not have personal or organizational conditions that would have been an influence on their experiences at the time of the study or impacted my interpretation of the study results. The 6th participant chose to answer questions on a discord server which was synchronous as well as asynchronous over several weeks in October 2023 as well as November 2023.

Demographics

In this qualitative study, I shared the opportunity on Twitter for self-identified incels to participate in open-ended interviews. All participants were over the age of 19 and identified as male incels. Further demographic information was not collected due to privacy reasons so that I could maintain the confidentiality of all participants. In terms of responses, one participant replied at first via Twitter, and then as part of a snowball sample method, he invited three of his online self-identified incel friends to participate in the study. Six other participants communicated a desire to participate in the study because of the Twitter connection and knowledge of such a study. The 10 interviews were conducted between September 25, 2023, to October 14, 2023. Two other participants not included in the study had completed the informed consent policy process but did not continue to the interview stage. Another three possible participants shared interest in

participating but I had achieved saturation towards the ninth participant and definitely by the 10th participant whereby there were no new themes/information being assimilated into the interviews. Nine of the participants met via Zoom communication while they had a camera off option and I had the camera on. I audio-recorded the interviews, and the participants had an opportunity to engage in member checking by previewing their own transcripts. One participant chose to communicate via a discord server in writing and I gave him the opportunity to edit his own responses which he took advantage of as this interview extended over time asynchronously from October 6, 2023, to November 5, 2023.

Furthermore, the participants followed the informed consent procedures and declared themselves to be over the age of 19, identified as male and were cisgender male, shared their understanding of the study being voluntary, as well as confirmed that they were self-identified incels who participated in online forums. These 10 participants made connections through the social media platform Twitter and expressed interest in participating in this research. The following participants were coded as T1 (2 years as a self-identified incel), D2 (1 year as a self-identified incel), D3 (3-5 years as a self-identified incel), D4 (4 years as a self-identified incel), B5 (5 years as a self-identified incel), DS6 (6 years as a self-identified incel), L7 (4 years as a self-identified incel), A8 (4-5 years as a self-identified incel), D9 (3 years as a self-identified incel), and R10 (10 years as a self-identified incel). Overall, I did not request demographics in terms of location, age, and so forth in order to maintain maximum levels of confidentiality for the participants involved in this study.

Data Collection

There were 10 participants for my study and the location, frequency, as well as duration of the data that I collected from the open-ended audio recorded interviews is as follows. I recorded time zones for the interviews in the Pacific time zone while participants may have been in regions requiring central or eastern time zones. Participant #1 (T1) on September 25, 2023, at 2pm length of interview for 23 minutes (23.36). Similarly, participant #2 (D2) on September 26, 2023, at 5am for 30 minutes (30.40). Then participant #3 (D3) on September 26, 2023, at 9am for 17 minutes (17.43). Likewise, participant #4 (D4) on October 5, 2023, at 9am for 21 minutes (21.02). Participant #5 (B5) on October 6, 2023, at 4pm for 21 minutes (21.14). Participant #7 (L7) on October 9, 2023, at 7am for 15 minutes (15.24). Then participant #8 (A8) on October 9, 2023, at 3pm for 40 minutes (40.01). Participant #9 (D9) on October 14, 2023 at 7am for 25 minutes (25.27). Finally, Participant #10 (R10) on October 14, 2023, at 11am for 16 minutes (16.42). Participant #6 would not do Zoom communication and wished to participate on a discord server synchronously and asynchronously between October 6, 2023, to November 5, 2023.

I completed all interviews at my home office on my personal secure laptop. Overall, I audio-recorded the data on my secure cell phone and encrypted mp4 files were then located on my personal laptop. Real names of participants were never stated or even acknowledged in the audio-recorded interview process. Participants did not share any personal identifiers or demographic information during the interviews with me. The only identifier information for participants was via personalized e-mail names sent through the

informed consent process via my Walden University e-mail. The only unusual circumstances encountered in data collection was that Participant #6 did not want to use Zoom communication. I checked with my dissertation chair to ensure that asynchronous/synchronous communication via discord for Participant #6 was valid which was confirmed.

Data Analysis

In general, I fulfilled the data analysis according to an IPA model which included four stages. After each interview, I reviewed generated transcripts and listened to the audio recordings of the interviews numerous times as a way of immersing myself into the data (see Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). I added any preliminary inquiries, comments, or musings in a column on the Excel spread sheet once all the portions of the transcribed interviews were copied into a larger Excel document. Then I made notes about observations as well as reflections around the interview process in a reflexive journal. My initial analysis focused on content, language, and context of comments stated by participants. While immersing myself in the data, I considered personal reflexivity and how my gender, age, social status, and rapport levels with participants impacted their interpretation of the data (see Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). I fully captured this process within the reflexive journal. Of particular note, I highlighted distinctive phrasing and/or emotional responses of participants which included rich contextual meaning of personal participant experiences (see Pietkiewicz & Smith). Therefore, my first stage of analysis included my analyzation from the original script to exploratory comments based on a

review of the audio recordings and verbatim transcripts from the initial one-to-one interviews (see Pietkiewicz & Smith).

Within the second stage of coding, I paid attention to the building of emergent themes which were noted in a second column on an Excel spreadsheet beside each participants' pasted replies to each question from the transcripts. At this stage I used an IPA framework to transform the data into emergent themes (see Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). I worked on developing concise phrases or descriptors around lived experience identified by the participants. At this stage, such themes I used were related to a higher level of abstraction that related to larger psychological conceptualizations that captured each participants' authentic accounts of their experiences (see Pietkiewicz & Smith).

Within the third stage clustering of themes, I looked for relationships between data points and the clustering of themes by exploring connections between emergent themes grouped together into conceptual similarities along with larger descriptive labels (see Pietkiewicz & Smith). As part of a larger process, I established themes from the entire transcripts. Underlying the themes were superordinate as well as subthemes which I linked to short extracts from the transcript that were easily traceable through line numbers from the transcript (see Pietkiewicz & Smith).

At the final stage of the narrative account, I used an IPA framework and took the themes to provide a narrative account by outlining participants' experiences in a way that conceptualized their own words while providing a detailed interpretative analysis (see Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). The narrative account I created consisted of a discussion section that related to the identified themes which I documented primarily in a third

column on the excel document with an extended second excel document as I explored responses between each participant.

Specific Codes, Categories, and Themes

Overall, I organized all participants' responses into linear emergent themes through a clustering of similar lived experiences. In addition to these lived experiences, each participant had their own independent trajectories or coping mechanisms that were unique to them with some overlap between participants. These emergent themes I identified included (a) self-identified flaw(s) related to a biosocial-physical origin, (b) crossing a threshold which will be identified as a frustration barrier, (c) developing a seeker mentality, (d) emersion into the incel community at large, (e) selecting a sect or grouping of incels, (f) living with persecution, and then (g) aggrieved entitlement. Once participants struggled with aggrieved entitlement then a trajectory of coping mechanisms form such as (a) dealing with depression, (b) reinforced bonding with the sect or grouping, (c) leaving social media to challenge themselves in "the real world", (d) addiction and/or self-destruction, and (e) further anger, misogyny, or even violence towards women which then leads to a next stage of extremism. My further exploration of the superordinate themes and clusters are expressed in Table 1 below.

Table 1*Superordinate Themes and Clusters*

Interview questions	Superordinate theme	Theme cluster	Participant
Q1 Q2	Self-identified flaw(s) related to a bio-social-physical origin	-Involuntary nature of celibacy -Challenges around physicality and other self-identified flaws -Biological determinism -Fixed mindset	T1, D2, D3, D4, B5, DS6, L7, A8, D9, R10
Q2, Q3, Q4, Q5, Q6	Crossing a threshold identified as a frustration barrier	-Jealousy -Giving up -Acceptance -The choice to work on self to manage frustration -General resentment -Losing friends -Bitterness towards women about sex and standards -Managing loneliness -Depression	T1, D2, D3, D4, B5, DS6, L7, A8, R10
Q3, Q4	Developing a seeker mentality	-Journey -Finding solutions	T1, D2, B5, L7, DS6, D9
Q3, Q4, Q5	Immersion into the incel community at large	-Common bond with others -Ability to express myself -Variety within the community (different levels) -Belonging -Solidarity -Company	T1, D2, D3, D4, B5, DS6, L7, A8, D9, R10
Q3, Q4, Q5	Selecting a sect or grouping of incels	-Helpful -Welcoming -Spectrum	T1, D2, D4, L7, A8, D9

Interview questions	Superordinate theme	Theme cluster	Participant
Q7, Q8, Q9, Q10	Living with persecution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Stigma of incel identity -Violated with posts taken down and feeling attacked -Misunderstanding by media -Feeling judged -Feeling judged by other incels -Feeling objectified by media, researchers, and documentarians 	T1, D2, D4, B5, SP6, L7, A8, D9, R10
Q8, Q9, Q10, Q11	Aggrieved entitlement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Bitterness -Resentment -Anger at women -Retaliation -Vindication 	T1, D2, D3, D4, B5, SP6, L7, A8, D9, R10
Q10, Q11, Q12	Coping mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Dealing with depression -Reinforced bonding with sect/grouping -Leaving social media to challenge themselves in the real world -Addiction and/or self-destruction -Further anger, misogyny or even violence towards women which can lead to extremism 	T1, D2, D3, D4, B5, DS6, L7, A8, D9, R10

Results

Overall, the purpose of my qualitative study was to understand the lived experiences of self-identified incels with aggrieved entitlement to better inform deradicalization interventions. The qualitative research question I explored was “How do self-identified incels give meaning to and perceive experiences of aggrieved entitlement?”

The lived experience of these self-identified incel participants that I identified is layered and fits within the larger superordinate themes as well as clusters identified in Table 1. The following participant narratives that I used support each superordinate theme as well as the cluster.

Superordinate Theme 1: Self-Identified Flaw(S) Related to a Bio-Social-Physical Origin

Perhaps one of the most salient themes within the data is in relation to the *involuntary nature of celibacy* which is essentially the heart of what it means to be an incel (involuntary celibate) who is trapped in his circumstances of not being able to have sexual relations with attractive females. Participant DS6 described the term incel as: “My take on an incel is simply this: A person, who despite their best efforts (and yes, effort should be made, otherwise it would not be involuntary) cannot obtain genuine, romantic and/or sexual relationships. Nothing more.” At the heart of this experience is the involuntary nature of being trapped in circumstances beyond one’s control. For example, DS6 stated

Incels don't choose incelhood. Nobody hates incelhood more than incels. To claim it is a choice, or that they want to be incel, is a massive oversight and an ignorant placement of blame which barely matches the actual reason one may join an incel community."

This involuntary nature of celibacy is grounded in a sense of powerlessness as part of a larger label. T1 stated: "I consider myself some type of like involuntary celibate." D3 accentuated the fixed state of having involuntary celibacy as "or the way I define it, is someone, especially a man who is unable to be in a romantic relationship with women." D4 concurred that this is "some sort of like involuntary decision ." Meanwhile, B5 explained "I just feel like it feels different like a different thing entirely. It's just different than from like a normal person, like as people we are not like normal people ." DS6 explained "I was an incel before I ever knew what the word meant. It's a life circumstance."

The powerlessness of this circumstance of being trapped in involuntary celibacy is due in large part to self-identified flaws related to a bio-social-physical origin. T1 described his challenges around his size and a potential communication disorder as he stated:

I had like issues with my size And also like like I have a hard time and sum it up as weird. So my conversations, like some of them were weird. It was like really hard like finding someone who takes you seriously.

Similarly, D2 identifies issues with being an "introvert" which led to [dating] as "it turned really bad" so that "led me to be an incel" as he then experienced "social

isolation". Likewise, D2 then suffered from "low self-esteem" and a "mental health issue". Other challenges for D2 included communication issues and "rejection". Essentially D2 surmised "when I thought that my physical appearance got me from getting a social partner." In addition, D3 described himself as an "introvert", "shy", and having issues with "weight", "height", and "body appearance". Thus, D3 believed [these issues] "made me not to be not to have successful relationship or long lasting relationships because of my many insecurities." Meanwhile, D4 explained that [he is] "shy and socially awkward. But which kind of like prevents, myself like from being in any like, consensual, like sexual relationship Therefore like, I'm unable to engage in any sexual activity." As a result of such challenges, D4 stated "it's also like made it hard to, even at approach a girl and talk to her." A8 shared similar issues around being "shy" and having "low self-esteem". D9 expressed a common social awkwardness by describing himself as an "introvert" and "I think my approach is not very good". In the end, D9 explored the reasons for his challenges around dating as possibly to do with [having a] "talking inability" and possibly that his lack of success may be by not having a car. R10 described

And I really don't feel like I look that good. So being rejected just makes me feel less of myself. There are not really more factors just that I approach women, and they tend to just push me away.

Meanwhile, B5 stated, "think, for me, I think it's just like my appearance. It's probably my my skin color. yeah." Essentially, all the participants, as part of their involuntary celibacy struggle with self-identified flaws related to a bio-social-physical origin.

Likewise, L7 and DS6 were able to articulate this bio-social-physical origin of struggle within the incel experience. L7 stated:

I guess like from my perspective, I guess basically a group of people who were unable to like succeed in the dating sector because of whatever flaw depending on every person. It may be a flaw, maybe in the physical situation as physical statutes, or may be a flaw in their character. So like it needs to be developed in some way.okay, let's say. It's not been easy for me. Okay, there are some challenges and some flaws especially with highly communicated people. And it has not like, really worked in my favor. So I'd say, I've had like, lots of failed relationships,

Thus, the general acknowledgment of incels around failure in the “dating sector” as described by L7 is a unanimous experience and part of the involuntary celibate lived experience. DS6 articulated a similar experience by stating:

I finally know what I am, I know that I'm not the only person going through it. I was an incel before I ever knew what the word meant. It's a life circumstance. All I can say without writing an essay on it is that it hurts. Because it's not just about ‘no sex’ as everyone likes to assume. It's a total rejection by most people for superficial reasons.

Essentially DS6 described this fixed state of having certain bio-social-physical flaws as a “life circumstance” as incels experience “rejection” for “superficial reasons” likely based on physical appearances. More specifically, DS6 expanded on the residual impact of such rejections due to bio-social-physical flaws when he stated:

Society in general actually does note that looks, neurotypicality, wealth, and power, etc, do make a difference. This isn't new. It's referenced and displayed in all forms of media spanning back generations. The 'Ugly Duckling,' or Rudolph: Both old tales of the 'weird looking' being who is an outcast. Ignoring those 'ugly laws' that have existed throughout history, outcast members of a group have been observable in many species; not just humans, and to consider humans any different would be denying a basic tenet of animal behavior. It's only a problem when people like us – incels – who are negatively affected, mention it. (How dare we not learn our place?)

Therefore, social judgement and rejection become commonplace within the incel experience of coming to terms with bio-social-physical flaws as recognized by both themselves as well as society at large.

Superordinate Theme 2: Crossing a Threshold Identified as a Frustration Barrier

Another important theme within the lived incel experience as identified by the participants in this study are *feelings related to deep-rooted frustrations*. One of the first identifiable frustrations for incels was in terms of *jealousy*. T1 described his feelings of “resentment” and “bitterness” [particularly with] “let’s say towards people who are like, really successful in dating.” Similarly, D3 explored how “frustration comes when you see that maybe your peers, your friends they are in healthy relationships” when [he has] “never been in a serious relationship.” Meanwhile, A8 described the larger experience of jealousy and frustration by sharing an example of how:

You have a crush on a girl that feels way above your standards. So with

low self-esteem, you can't even walk up to and talk to her. But then there's this guy, this perfect guy, that's athletic, you know. Ripped out Guy, and he doesn't even have to go talk to her. She goes to meet him." A8 then described how this experience is "very sad."

Some incels will then encounter a crossroads with this frustration and larger feelings of jealousy either by giving up or with finding a level of *acceptance* in their struggles. D2 described: "But it was kinda hard for me to have one [relationship], though I really really real like I really wanted to. But it wasn't easy getting one like. I then ended up giving up." As a result of such feelings of defeat, D3 explains how he started to engage in "social withdrawal" and stated "you don't want to interact with people, you just want to be yourself. And that leads to negative thought patterns negative everything, you see in about relationship dating it's just negative." Meanwhile, some participants found acceptance with their frustrations.

D2 described a deeper level of acceptance as well as self-realization when he stated:

if I can tell, I have, just I. Okay, if it okay, have me, that's enough. Having me is enough. So I have to cope with that. But I came around it, and can't say like, I haven't given up lately. But I just had to accept. Yeah, just had to accept. Okay. like we're not that evil. It's just a situation which we found ourselves in, so we had to accept ourselves so that they should connect. They should make it easier for us to adapt to the surroundings and all

that other things like a they should get more, connected.

As a result, D2 said he “came around it” by finding a level of acceptance of his circumstances as well as a connection to the community of other incels. Similarly, D4 shared [that there are] “ways to work through them.” Meanwhile, B5 explains: “And it's something like I have come to terms with. That's it.” Similarly, L7 describes “acceptance of a reality in this case.” D2 provided further insight into this level of acceptance by suggesting the experience “ain’t bad” because he found a way to “adapt in it, and “to learn with it, and relate to it in a good way.” T1 established a type of victory over this sense of giving up as he described:

Sometimes you like face like some certain issues yourself, like for myself,

I was a recluse and have worked out issues for myself and that for like that,

working on yourself is like really helpful and also like else to help with

some mental health issues because you might feel like you're so isolated.

Meanwhile, D2 described [a process of feeling] “and at first your self-esteem is brought down” until he started to work on “improving, my physical appearance” in hopes of finding a “sexual partner.” D2 acknowledged his journey around self-improvement and enhancing community, while he identified others in the incel community as not coping with such frustrations. As such, D2 stated: “So like, some of the people in the incel communities, ha! Are very aggressive have anger issues and other so like.” Therefore, not all incels within online communities manage these frustrations proactively with a focus on growth as well as self-improvement. Similarly, D9 [has a mindset of] “trying to find solutions.” Overall, D4 explained:

For myself I guess every incel has its own identity. Are there some incels, who were like really violent and hateful, misogynistic but I guess that also other incels, who, like are really aware of themselves in terms of like awareness of how they have losed and like like acting like positively towards addressing it.

Therefore, incels with this lived experience of frustration may choose to address these challenges positively with “looksmaxxing” [improving looks or appearance] as described by L7 in which he stated as “on a personal level. I guess it's sort of like a revelation of like understanding yourself.” L7 summarized this issue when he stated: “basically, I guess it all depends on whatever incel and whatever they identify with”. Therefore, there is an element of choice on how to cope with adversity within the incel lived experience particularly around frustration issues in dating.

Some incels experience further *frustration* due to losses of friends once they self-identify as an incel as was the case for D3 who stated: “when you say you're an incel, you feel like there's like social challenges” and that “You may lose your friends.” With compounding social challenges, incels with these high levels of frustration may then turn such bitterness towards women. D3 described feeling “frustrated” [because] “When I start a relationship it ends up in in the trenches.” More specifically, D3 described “you feel frustrated. And instead, maybe of working instead of working on yourself you turn it on women. Yeah, you feel that resentment and bitterness on women.” A8 expanded upon this frustration by stating:

Yes! It's generalized because, yeah, because we can't get what we

want from women. So I guess we just turn it into frustration.

Just a natural like reaction. Then if we can't get what we want
then fuck women then!

Therefore, A8 sees women as an impediment to having sex and this experience results in further frustration. R10 explained: "say a lot of people that just wants to have sex. And it's not a crime to want to have sex and that's what I want people to know about incels." In fact, A8 suggests that there would not be "frustrations" if women would lower their standards and "not be so picky and choosy." A8 described "things have to change and I think they need some sort of reorientation and how they and all they think I mean, I mean it's alarming how women pick their partners, nowadays just, to just too, complex."

Furthermore, A8 expanded on these frustrations and the barrier to sex when he stated:

The standards like the way women are behaving right now
like the way the trends change are new. You know it has to be
back to the old days, you know all women should be, submissive and
caring to their husbands. And you know there are more. But right
now, everything is changing, and I think the world should go back
to those old days where women are women and men, are men. Which
right now just everything, is just just fucked up, you know.

In this description, A8 explained how frustrations form because women hold too high of standards around choosing their partnerships with more attractive men. He suggests a world whereby women are "submissive and caring to their husbands" which then reflects an older era or "those old days" whereby women knew their passive social

roles and “women are women and men, are men.” A8’s frustration was quite apparent when he described social roles changing and how this is “just fucked up.” In fact, A8 stated:

Yes, it makes us frustrated and angry, very angry, you know, because we have this standard that we, while we that we expect women to follow. But you just seem to be, you know outgrowing it and just coming up with their own standards every day, every single fucking day we get new you know. New rules from them and new everything. Just just it's just something new with them every day.

According to A8, the social experience with women is frustrating and incites anger within him. He is lost and does not know his social place as he grapples with a shifting society whereby social norms in the dating world appear to be more complex according to his experience. A8 continued to describe how [women] “swallow the new world order” and instead [females should] “stop taking on bad motives.” Instead, according to A8 “women are everywhere right now, like they should they should focus on the good role models like our mothers and our grandmothers.” In fact, A8 shared more insights to these frustrations when he stated: “I’m done like, you know, with feminism and gender equality things like that. I don’t support them.” Overall, A8 struggles with finding his place in modern social roles as he states: “So that’s just the way I feel feel like it’s just the new order. It wasn’t like that before. So it’s definitely in the water. It wasn’t like that.” A8 has challenges with finding peace with his frustrations as he grows further resentments while

hoping that the gender roles of today return to a former state of being that is more patriarchal in nature.

Other incels manifest these frustrations on a more internal level as D4 complained about [being] “so alone while A8 shares the other side of this journey by identifying emotional layers of *depression*. A8 stated “You know it's just depressing and sad more depressing.” Similarly, DS6 described his lack of romantic relationships as “a constant failure.” DS6 stated: “Which just seems like reality being cruel.” Therefore, participants in this study as incels described their battles with *frustration* at not having successful sexual relationships that is layered in feelings of *jealousy*, *acceptance* at times, and grounded in *resentment*. Essentially, such incels are contending with a *frustration barrier* to accessing romantic relations with females of their choice. Some incels then develop a type of “seeker mentality” whereby they work hard to find solutions to their social quandaries.

Superordinate Theme 3: Developing a Seeker Mentality

T1 eluded to a type of “mixed like experience” whereby he has “sort of like worked myself out in some way” by finding sought after solutions to his social challenges. This drive for being proactive and trying to find solutions to feelings of rejection, isolation and so on is part of a larger theme cluster that will be referred to as a type of “seeker mentality.” T1 explained:

Sometimes you like face like some certain issues yourself, like for myself, I was a recluse and have worked out issues for myself. And that for like that, working on yourself is like really helpful and also like else to help with some

mental health issues because you might feel like you're so isolated. And you're not like. I feel like you're not like any community that would be helpful. So I guess like that form of identity. That you are not alone. You can work on yourself is something that really I identify with.

T1 successfully breaks out of his sense of social isolation by seeking community.

Likewise, D2 describes his social circumstances as “challenging”, but [that he can] “learn how to develop myself from the incel community that I am in.” In fact, D2 has achieved a state whereby after seeking solutions, he is “coping” and his narrative of his overall incel experience is mixed with “advantages and disadvantages.” Meanwhile, B5 described a “journey” or even “a very long journey” that “you know, mentally grow to” and learn to “accommodate.” L7 explained how he sought to “find some type of identity and try and find ways to like to be better in this case, like with a larger community.” Moreover, L7 explained: “And it led to me to like referring the whole, like incel ideal ideology and such identifying like on a personal level.” D9 summarized how “I would try to find solutions to some of our issues.” Many participants in this study embarked on a journey of exploring emotional issues and self-discovery as part of a larger *seeker mentality*.

Superordinate Theme 4: Immersion Into the Incel Community at Large

As part of developing a *seeker mentality*, participants in the study then focused their energies into immersing themselves into a larger incel community. In fact, all participants described a unique bond around social experiences that helped them to forge connections with other similar individuals within the incel online community. T1 described a “self-realization” whereby he could find a “welcoming community” that

served as a type of “safe space where I can find people who like suffered the same issues as myself.” This bond was so strong that T1 describes his connection with other incels as a “form of identity.” D4 finds “solace” and “support from others. So to try to like search for people. People, like facing the same issues myself which led me to like incel communities.” The community is like a bond of brothers who have a type of unconditional acceptance for each other. D9 described “We are not normal you think about. Probably all of most of us are diagnosed with some sort of shit. I don't know some sort of stuff. And now it's actually normal.” R10 explains a type of empowerment he feels by connection into the larger incel community. In fact, R10 states: “When I, when I post online, when I talk about outings, how I feel and why remain those rejects, I don't know, I kind of feel like communicating with people.” While in community, R10 appears to overcome any sense of being an outcast or a reject because of his larger social connections online with other incels. R10 experienced a positive sense of community when he described: “This makes me voice out about how things should be. I feel really good.”

Many of the participants describe the ability to feel unconditional acceptance and enjoy with the freedom to express themselves within the larger incel community. D2 explained: “Well, we can express ourselves, share ideas on what type of who we are so like. It has also greatly helped us.” Moreover, D2 explained how with this community, he can “be open and free to be yourself.” Likewise, B5 referred to the incel community as a “safe space.” In fact, B5 expanded on this idea further by saying: I feel like it feels liberating. It feels like, yeah, he feels like, you're free. And it feels like a part of

something unique and free.” Meanwhile, R10 stated that as a member of the incel community, “Yeah it’s something I am proud of.” Therefore, there appears to be a high degree of acceptance within the incel *community* for other incels.

All of the participants described, however, that there is a spectrum of incels who function at different levels and are not all the same. T1 described the emotional landscape of incel communities as:

I guess it different. It's it's difficult, because, as I said, it's like incels are like at different levels. Like there they can be really hateful and have resentment.

Therefore, coming out is like you have to be like really strong cause you face lots of negative comments.

Therefore, even incels themselves have to navigate varying degrees of anger, hatred, resentment or even possible emotional toxicity from other incels. D2 explained that misogyny is not even a universal trait of all incels. In fact, D2 stated:

Yeah. I would like like people to know that like which everybody in the incel community, not every incel person has this situation towards the women and all that, and also so that misogynistic and all that like, do not perceive us in a wrong way, because not everyone the same.

Likewise, D4 explained:

Are there some incels, who were like really violent and hateful, misogynistic but I guess that also other incels, who, like are really aware of themselves in terms of like awareness of how they have losed and like like acting like positively towards addressing it.

D4 identified some other fellow incels as “violent” and “hateful” so that these incels are “like really rooted in that way ” while others so that there are almost “two are faces of incels” Meanwhile, B5 categorized incels online as “very expressive” while others are a kind of a “closet type.” At a deeper level, B5 stated these varying levels of incels is “very fascinating actually” and “it’s a very beautiful thing to see” particularly as incels can find a space to be free to function without alienation. L7 has a pragmatic view on the differing levels of incels within the same online communities as he stated:

basically, I guess it all depends on whatever incel and whatever they identify with. I guess the ideas are based on a personal level. Like it may be the ideas of like looksmaxxing or like improving yourself. Sometimes there are also like ideas which are so negative, like misogynistic ideas, like presented by different people depending on how they view themselves as incels.

Furthermore, A8 described the larger incel community as:

I would say it's evenly distributed because I've met a lot of radical incels. There are all very, very wild wild views on very wide range of, you know, beliefs and ideologies at the same time I've seen a lot of. And incels, as a like me, I think, like me. and or they they think for themselves or not, just, you know, follow the crowd.

Therefore, amongst the community are incels according to A8’s view that are “radical” and hold “very, very wild wild views.” A8 takes pride in not just being a follower of other incels’ ideas.

Furthermore, within the incel community, participants described advantages such as belonging, solidarity, and community. T1 explained how the incel community is like “And I sort of like find some sort of like cloud of welcoming people in such communities, cause they like really offer some insight into that.” D3 expressed a feeling of “belonging” while B5 believed [the incel community] “for me it is a place for me.” R10 shared that “I discuss with people like me. So it makes me feel good. D3 experienced solidarity and stated “I feel comfortable in numbers when I’m online.” L7 described a larger process of “You have a lot of learning like understanding the whole incel communities in themselves, the ideologies what they stand by, and also like a personal, like identification of myself.” D9 explained the delight he has online by stating: “We have cool guys with me, though.”

Another advantage is the level of company as well as companionship that many participants feel being part of the incel online communities. D2 described “I can easily. If I ever, if I'm experiencing something I have someone to I can talk to, because I let's say, like I meet some professionals who are also in the incel community.” Likewise, D9 even described comradery that extends to zoom calls as he states: “Yeah, I yeah, I have some, some some sort of friends. We talked great to. We do, we do, we do zoom calls. we have problems, we have community have friends that sort of shit.” The levels of comradery that incels feel has been achieved through a process of selecting a *sect* or grouping of incels online. In other words, participants describe how they go through a process of almost like choosing their social tribe.

Superordinate Theme 5: Selecting a Sect or Grouping of Incels

Although T1 described previously “the cloud of welcoming people in such communities”, he also shared how “I guess there are incels who like are really hateful and that misogyny sticks and are frustrated.” In fact, T1 described incels online communities as a type of “spectrum.” Moreover, T1 shared “Even incels like, have like some sort of mixed view.” T1 described them as “substructures” of incels. Within those “factions” of incels, they cannot even agree amongst themselves as to whether incels should date or not. L7 described this process of finding incel communities as a “journey.” In fact, L7 stated: “ I guess the journey of finding people. On the online sector. Guess it was kinda hard because you are looking like for particular sects of people that like feature ideas, and whatever you think about.” Therefore, there is much diversity within the incel communities online. A larger unifying challenge, however, is that all of the participants described encountering as well as dealing with *persecution*.

Superordinate Theme 6: Living with Persecution

Persecution involves individuals’ feelings of perceived hostility from other people particularly around their own political or ideological beliefs. Many of the participants have experienced stigma related to having an incel identity. A8 explained “So they assume you are psychopaths. Or that we don’t like going out or stay in all day, you know.” D9 described the challenges he encounters since many people believe he is “sexist.” Likewise, D2 stated that he lives with many stereotypes from people who do not understand his inceldom. B5 suggested “there shouldn't be like a stigma to you know, life

choices and decisions.” Therefore, there is a vulnerability in expressing incel related messaging online.

Aside from any sense of stigma, many participants expressed an even higher level of *persecution* because of being censored on the internet. T1 described “It's kind of hard for yourself like expressing yourself in such communities, because sometimes you also like, get like random messages from random people with random abuses. I mean, it's kinda hard times.” In addition, T1 described a type of online harassment that often occurs by saying: “Therefore, coming out is like you have to be like really strong cause you face lots of negative comments and people like us like flogging a DM.” This sense of “flogging a DM” is when a mob of individuals send direct personal messages or a “DM” so that there is a type of mass communication of criticism or what T1 refers to as “random abuses.”

Furthermore, T1 described the violating effects of having “content removed” or “and sometimes some communities that I've been in I've been flagged and closed down because of reports of being misogynistic and such.” D4 corroborated this type of experience by stating: “And therefore it's kinda hard navigating through this community, then most communities are even banned because of, let's say, tell me like comments such as violent comments like misogynistic comments towards women.” In fact, D4 even expressed “I guess, the online space is like really, as I said repressive towards these communities.” There appears to be some type of external force of censorship and judgement that D4 explained when he says “they sort of determine like people in these communities as well, as violent and hold sexual views and also have, like many issues

which I guess may not be the case for all themselves, I guess.” As a result, there is a larger awareness by participants that they are in the crosshairs of persecution with censorship because of their online community violations with misogynistic commentary. Perhaps the largest feelings of *persecution* from participants relates to their experiences of being misunderstood by the *media*.

Participants in this study feel misunderstood by the media particularly in light of past issues with mass violence in society by domestic terrorists claiming to be incels. A8 explained:

They [media] see incels as psychopaths and mentally deranged. More than just because of some things that happened in the past with so many incels on some communities, you know, some communities were making errors out of those bad eggs among us. I just feel like most of us as incels are harmless what the media portrays us as dangerous and dangerous ourselves, dangerous to our society and it's just, wrong.

Therefore, A8 described a sense of extreme judgement with descriptors such as “psychopaths” and “mentally deranged.” D2 suggested “Then the media also doesn't or hasn't done enough on the side of educating people on the incel communities.” Similarly, D4 stated “I guess the media is like totally negative towards incels so. I guess the perspective is that incels are really hostile and negative.” B5 described a type of “media bias” that is “not really true” with incels. Participants such as A8 feel like he lives in the shadow of other incels who have committed violent actions when he says: “Well, mostly the the that was what the media started using against us. You know, there was another

one again. So this is a guy who runs into like 10 people.” A8 was referring to the 2018 Toronto van attack whereby a self-identified incel Alek Minassian ran over pedestrians. A8 described how many incels “didn’t support” such actions but they “keep it to ourselves.”

Likewise, D9 feels misunderstood as well as judged by the media as he stated “They think we beat up ladies, anyhow.” In terms of perceptions of incels as domestic terrorists, D9 suggested “probably what has done what has been what has happened in the past.” In fact, D9 stated “what's the media thinks is totally wrong in that [this] “doesn't mean we are all violent.” R10 suggested “It [media] portrays us as bad people. They feel we are harmful to the society which I don't. I don't think so.” B5 confirmed this experience by stating “We are misunderstood a lot.” L7 suggested “I guess the idea that you're violent. It needs to be erased from people's mind because it's not the case for most incels.” A8 elaborated on this sense of persecutory judgement by stating: “Oh, like I said earlier. It's you know, it's very controversial, and people will see me as a mentally deranged idiot. Mainly needing therapies and that kind of thing. Because they don't really understand what it's like to be.” In fact, A8 suggested “So they assume you are psychopaths.” Likewise, D9 explains “They [media think we're we're unbalanced. And that's not actually what we are”. R10 summed up this experience of persecution as “Yeah, there are challenges like people don't like you. Everyone, just like hates you generally except for the people who feel the same way like you.”

D2 suggested there is a solution to this *persecution* as he works towards larger peace as well as understanding by stating “Okay. But really, once people generally try to

promote the empathy and compassion towards us. They should also, they like, I say they should address the issue of toxic masculinity.” With toxic masculinity, there are larger misogynistic undertones, and with D2’s solutions, he believes on one side there should be “empathy and compassion” but that on the other end incels need to clean up issues around “toxic masculinity.” Such issues between incels and the media are not the only challenge as participants also describe experiences around internal polarization within the online community.

In fact, L7 described a higher level of online conflict by stating: “In these communities, online communities are such a hostile towards themselves because there is a general misunderstanding and what they stand for and sometimes it’s so hurtful. There are lots of hurtful comments towards incels.” Internally within the incel community, D2 identifies issues of “radicalization and violence.” D2 stated “So like when they [other radicalized incels] create a barrier between us and them as they are. We are peaceful and they are violent. They are ridiculous and all that. So we implement a barrier between us and them.” Instead, D2 suggested that his group is “really cool [and] chill. And we have no issues with people.” Therefore, within the inner domains of the incel community there is polarization amongst it’s members. Another issue related to persecution are the resentments many participants feel around being objectified by the media, researchers, and documentarians.

In fact, T1 described “the lack of information cause when one is like labeled an incel.” T1 explains how this lack of information relates to assumptions that people may have that all incels espouse “misogyny” and express “hateful” comments. DS6 elaborated

on this sense of misunderstanding as well as objectification by media, researchers and documentarians by stating:

What most people do is label "incel" (improper usage of the word) as an ideology, mindset, religion, cult, set of beliefs, attitude, behavior. Which is tragically false. Misogyny is often attributed to incels, yet many incels have no misogynist streak at all. It's more an excuse to throw blame unto rejects. The social status quo. The same old social hierarchy shit that began at nursery, and has adapted through to adulthood. They're very much true on that point. Most media has the opposite opinion though. Now I'll be the first to admit, I expect most 'researchers' and 'documentary' creators, to be very dishonest towards us for a cheap degree.

In fact, DS6 even describes researchers and documentarians as "platforming nazis" who do not consider "existing data showing otherwise." Furthermore, DS6 explains a "scummy tactic" in "documentary production" as production sensationalism as he states: "Most people are very pushy, usually when they're trying to shit out a documentary within a 6 month period. And they always end up latching onto the most vulnerable." Such frustrations amongst participants can then compound and manifest into a level of what is referred to as a term coined by Michael Kimmel (2021) called "aggrieved entitlement."

Superordinate Theme 7: Aggrieved Entitlement

Participant DS6 explained the dimensions of frustration which then forms into larger feelings of *aggrievement* when he stated:

Most people complain when I bring up the example of people being scared

of dogs because ‘OMG how dare you compare us to animals.’ They completely miss the point and have to throw out that red herring. Fact is if you've been very poorly treated by a specific demographic all your life with hate directed towards you every step of the way, you'll become very cautious. It may not always be rational, but sometimes it is. And so many people miss this detail. A lot of us have been mistreated by women (but also men too and we don't discount this), and it can generate fear, caution, etc. Not always hatred. Even guys in this community who look up to me, I'll give them a reality check. I don't hate women, and nor should they. I just hate how they treat me. But that also goes for a lot of men too. It's just how most people treat us. Misanthropy is better than directing hate at a single gender I feel.

Furthermore, DS6 explained how this larger mistrust becomes generalized as he says: “But as a default. I can't trust most of ‘humanity’. Likewise, A8 has aggrievement that expands into a larger element of entitlement when he says:

this sort of repulsiveness and anger against women right now. Yes! It's generalized because, yeah, because we can't get what we want from women. So I guess we just turn it into frustration. Just a natural like reaction. Then if we can't get what we want then fuck women then!

A8's rage is gendered and he feels like women are blocking him from the sex he wants as well as deserves. D3 explains how *aggrieved entitlement* forms as he states: “you feel frustrated. And instead, maybe of working instead of working on yourself you turn it on

women. Yeah, you feel that resentment and bitterness on women.” R10 explains his process around aggrieved entitlement as: “Yeah, it's annoying. Knowing women rejects you. You know. And as a man, you should be able to enforce power over women. Yeah you know.” Overall, R10 explores this dynamic and how he continues to pursue attractive women who are not “giving it to me” [sex] and that “I can't settle for less.” D3 considers this level of aggrieved entitlement to be pervasive as he states: “Okay, I can say most incels. They have that resentment, that bitterness towards women.” The bitterness incels feel can turn into a level of acting-out or harassment. D3 explains: “Second, most incels, they advocate for women, harassment like you know violence against women. That's why that I can say it. It is true. Yeah, and also and also, they are like, they are lonely, they are like, lone wolves.”

D4 suggests that *aggrieved entitlement* relates to the control that females have in sexual dynamics. In fact D4 explains: “That female, like control, like most sexual aspects. Therefore, like men, have to actually program themselves in a way that we have to work on that place.” A8 reiterates this dynamic of men “relying on women.” B5 appears disillusioned as he explains “They [women] probably just love you because of the financial benefits and stuff like that.” A8 even suggests that women “need some sort of reorientation” so that they are not “so picky and choosy” in the dating domain. In fact, A8 believes that this sense of aggrieved entitlement does not have to occur as “We [incels] just don't like the standards women set nowadays not really.” Therefore, with this logic A8 espouses, there would be no challenges for incels if women would just lower their standards.

These feelings of *aggrieved entitlement* amongst incels then takes energy as well as form in the interplay of language online. A8 describes a type of “code” or incel language that is more like a “satirical view” as he states: “We follow this code to like to understand ourselves better. Just we. We don't really mean it like that just sometimes, just like satire. Satirical view, you know like what we say, Chad's and Normies and Stacy's just to be satirical. We don't really feel that some guys out there that are, you know, top there.” A8 admits that his opinion may not be shared by other incels as he states “But most may disagree with me.” With this coded language, incels are then able to reinforce their connections and solidify their brotherhood with each other.

Some participants express aggrieved entitlement in a more nefarious manner by promoting dissention against women online. A8 explains:

Personally, I think I express my anger at women most of the time, because I'm always very, very highly critical of women online like mistakes and make I, you know, I make sure I make the most out of it, and I have very bad relationships with women in general, even to my mother.

In fact, A8 further explains a type of vindication that he experiences:

yeah, like, I said, I'm very, very critical of women online, like about all, you know, relationship issues that a guy and a girl had and most of the time I try to make it the girl's fault, you know, trying to make it the woman's fault at all times. That kind of situation. I just make sure the women are the villains. Like that's my role online. That's my like role online to make sure the women are the villains and are always wrong. You know in every situation. Yeah.

With this type of online behavior and retaliation towards women, A8 does clarify that “I have no tendency for violence” but he does recognize that other incels “they actually have a violent past and they are more exposed to all this.” According to A8, “some of us are like violent naturally, and it's you know, it comes out when they turn their frustration on to women. So just it happens a lot. It happens a lot.” Furthermore, A8 expresses delight when he can make women look bad as he says:

definitely makes me feel better, a lot better when I see when I see women losing the line, you know. Getting the heat. That makes me feel better. I get my turn back in that kind of shit you know. Yes. That's the way it is.

A8 has a resentment towards female liberation as he states “I'm done like, you know, with feminism.” With empowered feelings of aggrieved entitlement, A8 describes how a self-sufficiency independent of women begins to form within the incel community. A8 states:

Let's see to, you know, to create their own fantasies, and like sex always now, and masturbation and porn and create like our own satisfaction for ourselves. We don't wanna depend on the women themselves. You know what's what we create our own satisfaction. We kind of shut out the women and let them go fuck themselves .

In fact, A8 describes a type of coping mechanism as he states: “we, the the terms we use on Stacy's and Becky's or femoids were of just use them when we're trying to like, you know, just trying to cope.” A8 expresses the underlying loneliness and his desire for a woman who will respond to his patriarchal authority as he states:

We can actually get some but doesn't really matter. Like if I if I want to get into a relationship, I just want a woman, though you know that is submissive, that is, has a great personality would make me feel better about myself. It doesn't really matter if she's a Stacy or Becky, or wherever you know. I just want someone that is just perfect for me.

R10 describes the reinforcing nature of the incel community as he states:

Yeah, it feels good cause. I'm able to talk to people like me interact with them. And we share the experiences. And at times we fantasize about having power over women with each other. So it feels it feels really good. Being online with my friends with people like me.

Therefore, participants have experiences with aggrieved entitlement as a way of dealing with their frustrations online. There are other *coping responses* which are explored in superordinate theme #8.

Superordinate Theme 8: Coping Mechanisms

A common experience amongst participants includes feelings of *depression*. D3 explains: "It can lead to depression. And most importantly, social withdrawal like, you don't want to interact with people, you just want to be yourself. And that leads to negative thought patterns negative everything, you see in about relationship dating it's just negative." Likewise, D4 describes being "quite depressive in some way." Similarly, A8 expresses: "Yeah some probably depressed. Like me. I'm I do depression. And so I feel it's mostly depression. That's because we have. You feel helpless. Now we can't change situation in. It doesn't seem like it's gonna change in a very long time." Therefore, for

some incels there is an underlying hopelessness in this social disconnection around romantic relationships with inceldom.

Then some participants transform those feelings of powerlessness as well as depression into reinforced bonding with their incel community. R10 describes: "I discuss with people like me. So it makes me feel good." D9 explains "we have problems, we have community have friends that sort of shit." In fact, D9 describes a type of *group sexual voyaging* online whereby he can sublimate sexual energy into excitement-seeking with other fellow incels. D9 explains "Then most times we all do video calls together saying trying to sex chat ourselves. It's what I mean, but I mean my, my new guys, my my friends do." In fact, D9 describes how they will "plug in zoom" and "And times, probably just trying to just and try to mix with other girls". B5 describes how within his incel community "I feel like we have the same base thinking, like, we think we have we think about the basic things." L7 explains that this social connection within the incel community is not necessarily automatic in nature. For example, L7 states "it was kinda hard because you are looking like for particular sects of people that like feature ideas, and whatever you think about." Other participants do not necessarily delight in the incel community as D3 is contemplative by saying: "I'm trying to leave that community." Meanwhile, SP6 manages feelings of hopelessness not necessarily by bonding or even leaving the community but with problem drinking as he describes himself at times as "drunk as fuck." Then A8 copes through escapism by stating:

like, right right now, I I watch a lot of porn, you know, and I watch a lot of movies.

And my life is mostly inside and online. So I created, like, sort of like, created my

own world. In my room. So like I rule my room right now. So that is my coping mechanism.

As a master of his own domain, A8 [uses]

sex always now, and masturbation and porn and create like our own satisfaction for ourselves. We don't wanna depend on the women themselves. You know what's what we create our own satisfaction. We kind of shut out the women and let them go fuck themselves.

Such independence does not last long as participants such as A8 take this energy of resentment and continue forward with a pathway of misogyny or even promotion of violence towards women. A8 states:

Most of the time. I feel like it's just they just force hate on women and incite some violence against them. Most of the time I just feel like they are saying it and they don't mean it. They are just trying to vent out. Because of most of it. They just stay in one room, and they just they're just making words, you know, they are just boasting and just writing because they can't actually do it. So I know most of them incite violence against women and they are very hateful and angry, and it's threatening but I feel like they can't do it

A8 believes that much of this process is around venting and that “incels [have] anger and just say shit about women, cause it makes them actually, also, it makes us feel better.” In fact, A8 suggests: “Because of most of it. They just stay in one room, and they just they're just making words, you know, they are just boasting and just writing because they

can't actually do it." D9 fully recognizes he is in a community of incels who are radicalized as well as violent as he states:

Hmm. I think one of the reason why they have been violent is it's probably the approachability and they are turned down multiple times. He actually gets angry and tends to to do otherwise. You do. He tends to probably fight and it's actually very wrong. We do. I'm sorry we don't. That's it's a normal. It's a normal thing to be torn down by. You guys do too much. And so I think that's main difference between us.

Furthermore, A8 acknowledges that there is a "fraction of the community" that engages in "immortalizing" previous violent incels who moved towards mass violence but that this is more of an effect of the media who "brought that on" with media bias reports of previous domestic terrorists claiming to be incels. Therefore, most participants are coping by finding their similar sects or groups on the internet. The media, however, has played a large role in incels' feelings of being misunderstood as well as stereotyped.

Discrepant Cases

D3 is a discrepant case in many ways because of his desire to want to leave the incel community. In fact, D3 states:

Okay, I would like to say, that I'm trying I'm trying to. I'm trying to leave that community. Actually, I am. I'm considering, maybe deleting Twitter and reddit it for some time. Okay. yeah. And just maybe you know, socializing with the people? Well, to leave those communities where the negative comments, the negative hatred, the bitterness.

D3 does not want to continue on in managing “negative hatred” or “the bitterness” within some online incel communities.

In summary, the results of these open-ended interviews include real lived experiences of incels who are managing frustrations, social isolation, reinforced bonding with their communities, and finally aggrieved entitlement. Such findings are part of a process used by myself as a researcher to establish trustworthiness.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Issues around trustworthiness often involve credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability which were assured by myself as the researcher through the consistency of strategies as outlined in Chapter 3. Below is a review of the implementation and/or adjustment to consistency strategies for each area.

Credibility

With credibility, the phenomenon has been accurately captured along with the nuances of that social phenomenon (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Ten interviews with self-identified incels were completed by myself using in-depth, open-ended questions according to reflexive questioning that was part of the IPA framework. I worked to accurately portray the lived experiences of the incels with issues of aggrieved entitlement. Furthermore, the participants were part of a homogenous group of incels with aggrieved entitlement issues who regularly interacted with online communities. I audio-recorded these interviews and used verbatim transcripts. As a method of ensuring credibility and accurate analysis of data, I invited participants to engage in member checking as they received a password protected, encrypted copy of the transcript from

their individual interviews. Participant #6 also took advantage of member checking and used the edit option on his asynchronous responses as part of the discord server option.

As part of credibility, I triangulated the transcribed data from all participants as part of clusters of themes that were represented on an excel spreadsheet and that were referenced along with transcript line numbers from the original transcripts. Therefore, I have provided a clear audit trail as shown in the columns of the excel spreadsheet which includes the data as well as analysis process. Also, I have filled notebooks with coding in of originally transcribed text that I color-coded into cluster themes which then formed the superordinate emergent themes as well as supporting clusters. Finally, I maintained a reflexive journal that was available to be reviewed by the chair and second committee member that consisted of bracketing forms of researcher bias.

Transferability

With transferability, future researchers can follow my steps to replicate studies I was building upon this tradition first completed by Daly and Reed (2021) of interviewing self-identified incels through open-ended interview questions. Then I used an IPA framework to provide in depth, information rich cases in order to understand the lived experiences of incels with issues of aggrieved entitlement. Therefore, future researchers can use this IPA designed research to then extend further into their findings while continuing the tradition of directly interviewing incels with open ended questions as part of larger inquiry based conversation.

Strategies that I used for maintaining transferability included having a clear audit trail, reflexive journal, excel coding and analysis, verbatim transcripts, audio recording of

interviews, and thick descriptions of participant responses in interviews which are clearly outlined previously for the purposes of full transparency around the research process. Therefore, future researchers will be able to build from this blue print of research to continue on with their own studies.

Dependability

With dependability, participant phenomena is captured within a natural context and can be evaluated by the researcher to other future researchers with full confidence as well as trustworthiness (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). As part of my study, I followed procedural details as well as an audit trail of accountability through the verbatim transcripts and IPA framework which consisted of exploratory comments and emerging themes as well as sub themes. Furthermore, I used bracketing to acknowledge any preconceptions or bias (as reflected in the reflexive journal) along with member-checking to ensure there is accuracy of interpretation. Therefore, other researchers will see the integrity in the research that has been provided because I was transparent with the procedures. Furthermore, I had access to the resources of my chair and second committee member who were available to review the verbatim transcripts and ensure audio recordings for accountability purposes if needed.

Confirmability

With confirmability, I was a trusted part of the research process and engaged in strategies for monitoring bias (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). In this study, I maintained confirmability by member checking and offered the participants an ability to review the interview transcripts to ensure that I had replicated a true understanding of their lived

experiences. Furthermore, I triangulated data through clustering of themes to ensure that they were not merely relaying my preferences or even biases as a researcher. Other strategies included my consideration of the range of variation of responses and a check for outliers or disconfirmation of data themes which resulted in a discrepant case. Finally, I engaged in reflexive questions to manage bias in terms of considering surprising data results, potential favorability around particular points of view, possibilities around sampling bias and generalizations that were not methodologically sound, unconscious influences on responses such as participant desires for social desirability, procedural consistency, and the overall accuracy of results.

Overall, I conducted interviews in the privacy of my home office which were recorded. Participants gave consent to do the interviews and explored the limitations of confidentiality. Furthermore, participants provided permission to be audio recorded for the interviews and had the opportunity to attend a website to overview a summary of results from the study with no personal or descriptive identifiers. Participants were assured that there were no personally identifying information in the reporting of their answers or within the collection of data. Also, I reminded participants that participation in the study was voluntary and consent could be withdrawn at any time. Finally, participants were within the IRB guidelines of recruitment as adults and were not representative of any vulnerable population.

Summary

The purpose of my qualitative study was to understand the lived experiences of self-identified incels with aggrieved entitlement to better inform deradicalization

interventions. In fact, the qualitative research question I explored was: How do self-identified incels give meaning to and perceive experiences of aggrieved entitlement? The core of the issue I addressed was around the opportunity through qualitative research to capture dimension with the phenomenology and lived experiences of self-identified incels around aggrieved entitlement who participate in online communities. Also, I organized participants' responses into linear emergent themes through a clustering of similar lived participant experiences. In addition to these lived experiences, each participant had their own independent trajectories or coping mechanisms that were unique to them with some overlap between participants.

These emergent themes I identified included: a) self-identified flaw(s) related to a bio-social-physical origin, b) crossing a threshold which will be identified as a frustration barrier, c) developing a seeker mentality, d) emersion into the incel community at large, e) selecting a sect or grouping of incels, f) living with persecution, and then g) aggrieved entitlement. Once participants, struggle with aggrieved entitlement then a trajectory of coping mechanisms form such as i) dealing with depression, ii) reinforced bonding with the sect or grouping, iii) leaving social media to challenge themselves in "the real world", iv) addiction and/or self-destruction, and v) further anger, misogyny, or even violence towards women which then leads to a next stage of extremism. My research findings are in alignment or even an extension upon the existing research on incels and the results of this research will be able to assist in the development of deradicalization interventions.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of my qualitative study was to understand the lived experiences of self-identified incels with aggrieved entitlement to better inform deradicalization interventions. This study was conducted by myself because much of the incel research to do this date has included static one dimensional posts on incel forums online in which researchers do not necessarily capture the social nuances, complex layers of phenomenon, as well as challenges around aggrieved entitlement of many incels. Furthermore, the issue of mass violence by self-identified incels has become a threat assessment issue so there is a strong interest in the field to explore interventions for deradicalization (Van Brunt & Taylor, 2021).

Overall, my logical connections between the framework presented and the nature of my study include providing grounded contexts as well as enhanced social understandings of larger complex dynamics involving incels. For example, sociological shifts in demographics as well as economics likely impact incels' personal grievances which fuels radicalization with aggrieved entitlement as described by Kimmel (2013) or results in a complex nonlinear descent into adoption of extremist ideologies promoting mass violence outlined by the De Coensel (2018) meta-framework or integrated funnel model. With the findings of my research, I can provide more nuanced understandings or social contexts around these larger incel struggles which are not entirely articulated within conceptual models, so as a result, cannot capture the vastness of incel lived experiences.

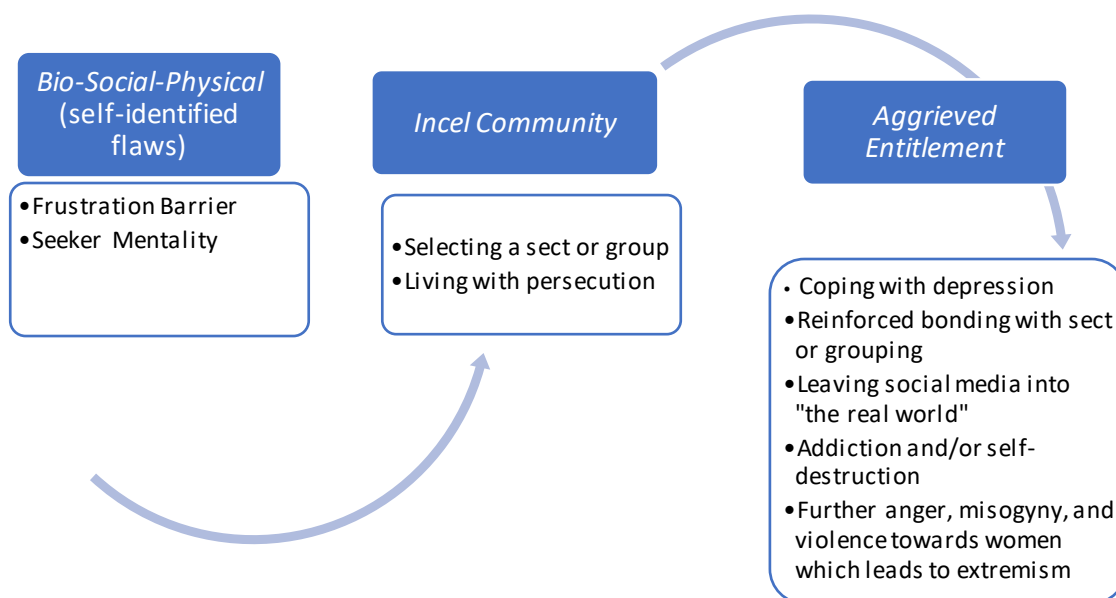
By understanding the lived experiences of incels online with aggrieved entitlement, I was better able to identify key issues as well as insights. I was able to use the Kimmel (2013) concept of aggrieved entitlement to ground my study in a social context by providing larger sociological understandings of why many incels may have personal grievances with the transformation of social gender roles and increase in prominence of feminism ideals. Meanwhile, I was also able to use the De Coensel (2018) meta-framework or integrated funnel model for understanding radicalization which supported this study with an enriched conceptual design for acknowledging personal grievances of incels. Although the incel participants in this study had varying viewpoints on incel ideologies and readily admitted aggrieved frustrations, they do not necessarily engage in promotion of extremist ideologies. Instead, they are regularly surrounded by online incel community members who do participate in such violent messaging against women. An important consideration in the limitations of this study, however, is also that I discouraged participants from admitting violent affiliations, actions, or tendencies as I identified as a mandated reporter to satisfy ethical guidelines of the study. In order to address the research question in this qualitative study, I used a specific research design which included an IPA qualitative framework and below includes an interpretation of the findings in relation to the support or extension of key principles within the incel research field as outlined in chapter two with the literature review.

Interpretation of the findings

As per the study, I identified the below superordinate themes through the open ended interviews with ten self-identified incel participants. My review of these superordinate themes are below in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Superordinate Themes



Discussion

Overall, I was able to use the identified lived experience and coping pathways around aggrieved entitlement within this research to add dimension of social nuance as well as offer sociological depth that supports existing themes in research.

Findings of the Study in Comparison to the Conceptual Framework in Support of Kimmel's Aggrieved Entitlement Construct

Kimmel's (2013) concept of aggrieved entitlement is grounded in the sociological construct of 'relative deprivation theory' whereby groups feel like there is a permanent barrier to their upward mobility or chance to fulfill desired dreams and goals. Within Kimmel's specific description of aggrieved entitlement, White men in the United States and other places such as Canada feel displaced as a result of feminism as well as other social changes whereby there is more gender equality, racial equality, and less economic equality (Kimmel). Kimmel stated "the era of unquestioned and unchallenged male entitlement is over." (xix xx). Within the domain of relationships and enhanced female equality, displaced males may experience humiliation which becomes a source of their rage (Kimmel). Since aggrieved entitlement is a "gendered emotion" often experienced by males in Kimmel's social context, options such as violence may feel restorative as individuals become radicalized as well as follow extremist ideologies promoting mass violence (p.75). Likewise, A8 has aggrievement that expands into a larger element of entitlement when he said:

This sort of repulsiveness and anger against women right now. Yes! It's generalized because, yeah, because we can't get what we want from women. So I guess we just turn it into frustration. Just a natural like reaction.

Furthermore, A8 explained his frustration around women by stating "The standards like the way women are behaving right now ." A8 described such sociological changes as "fucked up." As a result, A8 and his online community "create their own fantasies"

using “masturbation and porn and create like our own satisfaction ourselves .” Such restorative anger and frustration were expressed when A8 stated “We kind of shut out the women and let them go fuck themselves .” R10 described the humiliation of rejection as he stated “Yeah, it’s annoying. Knowing women rejects you you know And as a man, you should be able to enforce power over women . D3 agreed around projecting bitterness on to women . A8 acts out with this bitterness to a new level online.

In fact, A8 stated [he is] “critical of women online .” A8 suggested that “That’s my like role to make sure the women are the villians and are always wrong. You know in every situation .” Therefore, A8 described

definitely makes me feel better, a lot better when I see when I see women losing the line, you know. Getting the heat. That makes me feel better. I get my turn back in that kind of shit you know. Yes. That’s the way it is .

Therefore, Kimmel’s concept of aggrieved entitlement is highly applicable to the lived experience of incels adjusting to the changing emotional landscape of gender roles as well as feminism as they emotionally wrestle with retaliatory feelings against women stemming from rejection.

In Support of De Coensel’s Integrated Funnel Model Conceptual Framework

Another important conceptual framework for this study was De Coensel’s (2018) meta framework or integrated funnel model as a way of understanding radicalization and the trajectory towards extremism as well as terrorism as part of a non-linear process. De Coensel completed a thematic synthesis of 28 processual models of radicalization which then informed a meta-framework which included eight themes and 33 concepts in order

to support potential criminal interventions from being implemented too early in the radicalization process on the pathway to violent extremism. The De Coensel integrated funnel model serves as the conceptional framework that I used as a researcher for making sense of how study participants may have, through their lived experiences, dealt with personal grievances that led to further radicalization or even promotion of violence towards women. Essentially, the incels in this study crossed a threshold of frustration with their bio-physical-social flaws or challenges as they sought solidarity as well as sanctuary within the communities of incel forums. Incel participants in this study have explained the larger landscape of radicalization as well as extremism. A8 described the larger incel community as:

I would say it's evenly distributed because I've met a lot of radical incels. There are all very, very wild wild views on very wide range of, you know, beliefs and ideologies at the same time I've seen a lot of. And incels, as a like me, I think, like me. and or they they think for themselves or not, just, you know, follow the crowd.

Therefore, amongst the community are incels according to A8's view that are "radical incels" who hold "very, very wild wild views". Furthermore, T1 described his frustrations with having "content removed" within communities that he has been involved with online. In fact, T1 stated "I've been flagged and closed down because of reports of being misogynistic and such." As described within the De Coensel integrated funnel model, there is a range of incel representation online as confirmed by participant D4 when he said

Are there some incels, who were like really violent and hateful, misogynistic but I guess that also other incels, who, like are really aware of themselves in terms of like awareness of how they have losed and like like acting like positively towards addressing it .

As within the De Coensel model, A8 confirmed a type of threshold that people cross towards violent extremism when he stated

And in yeah, I I know some and have met some like that online most people who are like that they actually have a violent past and they are more exposed to all this. Like me, I have no tendency for violence. So, because I have not been exposed to violence at all. So, I guess it is just the personality. normally. I just keep to myself. It is the basic personality of the person that matters. personality, basic personality, or the person that matters. Some of us are like violent naturally, and it's you know, it comes out when they turn their frustration on to women. So just it happens a lot. It happens a lot.

Furthermore, the nonlinear nature of the De Coensel integrated funnel is captured in the above comments, and A8 is referring to radicalized violent incels who pass through line 6 and 7 with the traditional boundary of criminal law but who also have already experienced the nonlinear process of Phases 1 to 6 within the radicalization process filled with grievances as well as indoctrination.

Findings of the Study in Support of the Literature

Overall, as a researcher I have been able to show how the framing of incel grievances as described in Chapter 2 have been confirmed by the research of this study

with certain extension points that consist of more social nuance by participants into these issues.

Disillusionment and Anger

Incels will often use forums as a venue for sharing their discontentment with their inabilities to have sex with women of their choice (O'Donnell, 2021). Consequently, there appears to be a disconnect between how incels complain about their circumstances by recruiting sympathy while then utilizing dehumanizing as well as vitriolic language promoting violence towards women in other contexts (Glance et al., 2021). Likewise, Bruzskiewicz (2020) expanded on this self-imposed oppression by describing how incels often share through their discourse, as posted within online forums, how they are trapped in a lack of self-determination because of cultural factors related to lookism (societal values based on appearance) and classism that relates to social inequality (p. 13). Similarly, Moskalenko et al. (2022) explained how incels tend to criticize society around a focus on physical appearances and that women have so much sexual power around consent as such grievances then often translate into violent misogyny towards women.

DS6 captured this sense of profound discontentment with the inability to form romantic relations with women when he states

It's a life circumstance. All I can say without writing an essay on it is that it hurts.

Because it's not just about "no sex" as everyone likes to assume. It's a total rejection by most people for superficial reasons.

Furthermore, A8 expanded on the rage of rejection when he stated: "Yes, it makes us frustrated and angry, very angry, you know, because we have this standard that we, while

we that we expect women to follow ” as his patriarchal expectations around having influence around women are unfulfilled. In addition, A8 discussed transferring this bitterness and rejection on to women which translates into misogyny. A8 stated: “this sort of repulsiveness and anger against women right now. Yes! It’s generalized because, yeah, because we can’t get what we want from women. So I guess we just turn it into frustration. ” Therefore, an important part of the incel lived experience as confirmed by the literature include incels’ feelings of being trapped in a bio-physical-social circumstance that manifests as alienation in a world with realities around classicism as well as lookism.

Embattled Masculinity

Within an incel mindset, women’s bodies are viewed as commodities to be conquered by men through pressure around sex as a form of control (Cosma & Gurevich, 2020). For example, Cosma and Gurevich explored how privilege should be maintained by “sexual command of women” (p. 42). An important part of this view is that real men are then viewed by incels as leaders within the sexual domain (Cosma & Gurevich). A8 accurately described the frustration around not commanding women as he stated: “Then if we can’t get what we want then fuck women then! ” Meanwhile, R10 is emotionally suspended in a push/pull dynamic with women as he stated:

There are not really more factors just that I approach women, and they tend to just push me away . yeah, like, very like attractive women. But when I tried to approach them like, they are not kind of giving it to me and I pursues attractive women who are not giving it to me [sex] and that I can’t settle for less.

Therefore, the incel grievance around embattled masculinity in the literature is supported by this study.

Backlash to Feminism

Overall, common antifeminist sentiment within the manosphere then becomes part of what Bratich and Banet-Weiser (2019) called an “emerging network of misogyny” (p. 5007). Within what is referred to as a red pill view of reality (antifeminist sentiment), men reinforce each other around their loss of control over women (Bratich & Banet-Weiser, 2019). In fact, Diaz and Valiji (2019) described how such festering antifeminist resentments then manifest into an ideology whereby female empowerment is equated with male victimization as well as a loss of personal power or discrimination. As part of a black pill ideology, incels blame women for their fixed disempowerment of never having sex with desirable women of their choice (Sharkey, 2021). Within this study, A8 is quite communicative around this incel backlash to feminism when he states: “I'm done like, you know, with feminism and gender equality things like that. I don't support them .” Furthermore, A8 expressed his backlash by criticizing women online and making women into “villians ”. In fact, A8 suggested that “That's my like role online to make sure the women are the villains and are always wrong. You know in every situation”. Such actions are the equivalent of what Daly and Reed (2021) referred to a “shit posting” or trolling behavior of incels online posting misogynistic and anti-feministic content. Therefore, my study aligns with the research literature around the incel grievance of the backlash towards feminism.

Misandry

Within the manosphere, Ryan Kelly and Aunspach (2020) described how a toxic male culture forms and a dynamic of misandry emerges where male participants start to see themselves as victims of political power. In fact, women are viewed by these men as “political gatekeepers” with decision-making power around men’s lives (Fowler, 2021, p. 7). Such a perceived power dynamic is played out in D9’s description of how he surmises that he is likely not dating because of his “talking inability” and possibly that his lack of success may be due to not having a car . In many ways D9 positions himself as a victim to the superficiality of women who would dare to reject him because of his lack of power and status around access to a vehicle. Overall, misandry is a theme within the literature that is supported by this study.

Weaponization of Asexuality and Appropriation

Glance et al. (2020) demonstrated how incels appropriate disempowerment or victimization of marginalized groups to support their worldviews of being disenfranchised themselves. Overall, incels are then preoccupied with any threats to their social status or sense of power particularly with sexual women of their choice. Within the incel narrative of lived experience, A8 described his unrequited need for relationship as he stated “There are, say views very, very, very lonely. mostly painful cause, you know I lack friends. And I just feel like dejected and alone in the world, you know. Very, very lonely. Dejected. no one wanted.” This same person (A8) that is “dejected” and that “no one wanted” is also the individual at another point in the interview who expresses “repulsiveness and anger at women” as he stated, “We kind of shut out the women and let

them go fuck themselves .” Therefore, the incel lived experience involves complexity around legitimate feelings of rejection as well as dejection, but there are at times elements of weaponization of asexuality and appropriation as a type of sacrificed existence that is used to highlight a type of victim status, with little accountability as to the cause and effect around retaliatory attitudes and/or behaviors. As such, this theme around the weaponization of asexuality as well as appropriation in the literature is in alignment with some data from my study.

Status Threat

Within this larger power dynamic, Scaptura and Boyle (2020) examined how such male participants online in incel groups claim to lose their power to external factors whereby their entire senses of masculinity are under threat. Participant A8 alludes to this larger power dynamic as well as status threat by referring to an older era or “those old days” whereby women knew their passive social roles as “women are women and men, are men.” Therefore, the incel grievance around status threat in the literature is apparent in some of the data from my study.

Aggrieved Entitlement Expanded

Hoffman et al. (2020) expanded on Kimmel’s (2013) work on “aggrieved entitlement” as a way of showing how this sense of masculine victimization can lead to the acceleration of extremism within masculine discourse. According to A8, the social experience with women is frustrating and incites anger within him. He is lost and does not know his social place as he grapples with a shifting society whereby social norms in the dating world appear to be more complex according to his experience. A8 continues to

describe how [women] “swallow the new world order” as part of his entitled backlash to feminism while D9 refers to women as “weird creatures.” R10 explains the dynamic around aggrieved entitlement by stating: “There is just everything I've been talking about since the fact that we get rejected and we feel entitled to sex. But we don't. We don't get it and it doesn't feel good. Yeah.” Therefore, aggrieved entitlement is a central component to the incel experience and the reason why many participants in my study feel like this state of involuntary celibacy is beyond their social control.

Failure of Neoliberalism

Within a type of red pill ideology, the incel mindset is synonymous with the values of what Bratich and Banet-Weiser (2019) refer to as a “neoliberal confidence culture” (p. 5010). As part of neoliberalism, there is a view that in western society, people can have rightfully whatever they desire particularly if they invest in businesses or establish wealth through whatever means, and then enjoy the benefits of having maximum levels of self-agency which includes gaining access to sexually desirable women. Of the participants, A8 articulates the failure of neoliberalism within a common dynamic of men and women. In fact, A8 recalls a time in history whereby women were women and men were men as part of binary gender roles. This was likely a time for A8 whereby the world made sense. In this description, A8 explains how frustrations form because women hold too high of standards around choosing their partnerships with more attractive men. He suggests a world whereby women are “submissive and caring to their husbands” which then reflects an older era or “those old days” whereby women knew their passive social roles and “women are women and men, are men.” Now A8

resentfully refers to an era whereby men are “relying on women” particularly for sex. Therefore, the failure of neoliberalism confidence culture from the research is apparent in the data from my study. Furthermore, three themes from the literature are also in alignment with this study. The first theme includes misogynistic masculine discourse that reinforces gender inequity.

Theme 1: Misogynistic Masculine Discourse Reinforces Gender Inequity

Thus, incels promote “hegemonic masculine ideals” whereby males are clearly the more dominant force who leverage influence over women for opportunities around sex (Vito et al., 2018, p.89). As part of the interviews in this study, R10 states: “say a lot of people that just wants to have sex. And it's not a crime to want to have sex and that’s what I want people to know about incels.” In this dynamic, R10 is retaliating against the consent that women have for sexual relations. D4 describes this dynamic further by explaining: “That female, like control, like most sexual aspects. Therefore, like men, have to actually program themselves in a way that we have to work on that place.” Gender inequity is reinforced through masculine discourse because women are then made to feel bad for exercising their rights to consent around sexual relations because, instead, men have an inherent right to have access to their bodies. D4 is struggling to shift that paradigm whereby he integrates consent into the power dynamic instead of just rightfully taking from women what has been in a patriarchal social culture, a man’s right to sex.

Liggett O’Malley et al. (2022) shared how men who experience social threats to their masculinity are more likely to promote ideologies whereby women serve subordinating roles within a larger patriarchal system. As part of this dynamic, language

becomes weaponized. In fact, Chang (2020) describes how incels will often use the term “femoid” to reinforce women as other and as dehumanized in order to establish dominant social power. In this study, A8 uses the term femoid as a type of coded language of satire but that inherently reinforces misogynistic masculine discourse that promotes gender inequity. A8 describes a type of “code” or incel language that is more like a “satirical view” as he states: “We follow this code to like to understand ourselves better. Just we. We don't really mean it like that just sometimes, just like satire. Satirical view, you know. like what we say, Chad's and Normies and Stacy's just to be satirical.” In fact, A8 describes a type of coping mechanism as he states: “we, the the terms we use on Stacy's and Becky's or femoids were of just use them when we're trying to like, you know, just trying to cope.” Misogynistic language within incel communities then becomes the medium through which incels carry the messaging around the patriarchal dynamic and power relations of men towards women particularly around the issue of sexual consent. Therefore, the theme of misogynistic discourse reinforcing gender inequity in the literature is in alignment with my study.

Theme 2: Reduced Social Market Value Narrative Fuels Grievances

At the heart of incel resentment and grievances is their criticism of social media whereby women are then able to locate as well as engage with the most attractive men of their choice (Preston et al., 2021, p. 834). Within this larger view, incels focus on attractive women as social capital which then bolsters their social status if they are able to partner with such desirable females (Menzie, 2019, p. 9). D9 describes the dynamic of being rejected as [a] “Normal thing to be torn down by”. Likewise, in this study A8

describes the story example of a woman who goes out of her way to talk to a “ripped” guy and ignores him completely. As such, A8 feels torn down by rejection. A8 describes the larger experience of jealousy and frustration by sharing an example of how “you have a crush on a girl that feels way above your standards. So with low self-esteem, you can’t even walk up to and talk to her. But then there’s this guy, this perfect guy, that’s athletic, you know. Ripped out Guy, and he doesn’t even have to go talk to her. She goes to meet him.” A8 then describes how this experience is “very sad.” Later A8 then turns this sadness into anger as he describes essentially how his reduced social market value becomes part of his grievances when he describes: “this sort of repulsiveness and anger against women right now. Therefore, this theme of incels having a reduced social market value narrative fuels grievances is in alignment in the literature is in alignment with my study. The final theme in the research literature is around incels describing a devious female manipulator trope.

Theme 3: Devious Female Manipulator Trope

In fact, Chang (2020) studied incel discourses and identified that there was a monstrous feminine trope whereby women are able to deviously oppress men (p 3). Within a “phallogocentric tradition”, women are considered the other or outside of a masculine norm as they serve as an outgroup (Chang, p.9). Terms such as “femoid” are often used to describe women as not even having human-like qualities (Chang, p. 13). Brzuskiwicz (2020) describes: “Homogenisation and dehumanisation of women are constants in incel narratives” (p. 6). D9 utilizes similar language as he refers to women as “weird creatures.” Also, the lack of trust is apparent when A8 describes the possibilities

of having a relationship and that relationships never really work out because women are always manipulating around issues to do with money. A8 describes:

when women expects to see a tall guy, rich guy like, I said, you know. and just so many, so many, they think, they don't like cause. Many I feel like they're more man than woman. Yeah. So I feel like it's getting to their heads into the room and said, I'm making them feel special, you know. I'm making them feel like, Oh, I'm gonna get the guy. I want that kind of get. So it's affecting their mentality. Proud.

Therefore, according to this description, A8 is sharing a trope whereby women are “proud” which is “affecting their mentality” as they scheme or plan to get the “tall guy, rich guy .” As a result, the final theme of devious female manipulator trope in the research is in alignment with my study.

Discussion

The above themes and framed incel grievances apparent in the literature are all in alignment with my study. As an extension, there was an opportunity for me as a researcher to add layering of social nuance to the lived experiences of incels because they are being personally interviewed in an open interview format as opposed to static one dimensional posts that do not have a social context online. Also, with individual interviews there is an opportunity to synchronously check for clarification or prompt participants to expand with further details.

A central theme of the incel participant experience in this study is the theme around persecution that is not apparent within the research literature. For example, DS6 described his experiences of feeling objectified by researchers, media, and

documentarians who he felt are appropriating his experiences to fuel their own indulgent narratives by sensationalizing the violence potential of incels. In fact, DS6 shares how he will pour himself into a documentary interview for two weeks only to have much of what he said misappropriated with core parts of his commentary on the cutting room floor. Also, with resentment, he even refers to researchers as “platform nazi’s” who already have a predetermined narrative of incels that fuel threat assessment directions that support censorship. Similarly, when asked about thoughts of previous acts of incel violence, SP6 expressed doubts of certain domestic terrorists even being legitimate incels. Furthermore, D6 shared the excitement around these terror attacks by self-identified incels as an exciting time whereby there was some media legitimacy to this group of highly decentralized individuals who self-identify online.

Another important central theme was the level of stigma as well as persecution as multiple participants described their sacrifices in losing friendships, being censored online, mitigating media messages around stereotypes of violent extremism, and the core shame as well as undeniable brokenness that many incels feel inside of themselves at deeper levels. For this reason, SP6 describes how “reality is being cruel” and how inceldom is not a choice but a way of life.

Furthermore, the snowball sample group came from a sect of “looksmaxxers” who are a sub structure of incels that focus on improving their looks and finding self-improvement solutions to their experiences of social alienation. This sub group’s lived experiences are interesting in that they tried to maintain a type of growth mindset as they developed resiliency around challenges, gained valuable advice from each other, and

tried to work their way out of the rejection through the path of self-improvement. Also, this group would even find professionals online and get valuable advice to deal with mental health challenges or other issues.

Another surprising lived experience in the data was how some participants sublimated sexual energy into different outlets rather than enhancing levels of retaliatory misogyny or promotion of violence against women. D9 discussed a type of *group sexual voyaging* (a term to be coined by the researcher of this study) whereby multiple incels engaged in collective sexual chats. I also bore witness to this sexual bantering with a twitter group chat whereby women purposefully entered into group chats with incels to discuss gender ideology and there was a sexual charge of energy as they all dramatically dialogued with each other. Online there are companies that generate pornography with the ability of groups of individuals to then insert dialogue text and I am wondering if this is commonplace in some group sexual voyaging contexts or activities along with sex web cam directed activities whereby men can reclaim back their masculine power in such artificial ways? A8's usage of pornography appeared to be a commonplace as described by him in his group discussions as well as experiences with his forums. Meanwhile, SP6 shared no interest in pornography and thought of the idea of staring at strangers' body parts as uncomfortable as well as intrusive. In future research, researchers may wish to probe more into the details as well as expressions of group sexual voyaging as part of incel interviews.

The experience of the incels I interviewed appeared to have an element of the wild west whereby they were characters "on the run" as websites and forums were

continuously being censored. SP6 was unable to answer for a few days because a number of his sites as well as forums were being under attack with moderation as well as censorship as the power of AI (artificial intelligence) becomes more sophisticated in picking up the misogynistic undertones of incel conversations online. This may mean that incels meet in the lower bowels of the dark web in order to connect in community which may have even more implications if they are able to reinforce each other as part of a wild west echo chamber.

Perhaps the most surprising aspect of my study was that participants are real people with hopes, dreams, and legitimate pain. How they decide to express this pain with an ideology that subjugates women or not is part of a crossroads in their journeys. Many of the snowball sample of “looksmaxxer” incels do not claim to even be misogynistic, while DS6 shares valuable insights about how this not necessarily a female condition but a larger social issue around lookism, classism, and elitism that has been part of the human condition so he trusts no one and chooses misanthropy as well as substance abuse as his coping mechanisms.

Finally, education would be helpful as many participants shared their challenges around social conversational as well as relational skills. The looksmaxxers work together to find solutions, but ultimately incel forums appear to be part of a larger wild west whereby women are the enemy and participants find solace in a little backwater with their own crew or group. SP6 even develops friendships with people who take five or more years to develop a level of trust whereby they share their actual first names. There

appears to be a brotherhood of warriors behind the screen or the rulers of their own rooms as described by A8 and pornography may even be their outlet in many instances.

Furthermore, incel participants do not appear to be doing well adjusting to the fall of neoliberalism confidence culture as they fail to see the dimension as well as personhood of women since they attach with a need to control and objectify women into roles around delivering sexual services. Such incel participants approach relationships as a transaction whereby women are there to make them feel better about themselves instead of being emotional equals. Such a lack of social skills with incels results in social failures as part of incelism. Furthermore, such incels have not learned that women are not an extension of asset and that a fulfilled life is not necessarily having material items and the sexually attractive partner, as men feel like they then can be the masculine envy of other males with all assets in place.

Another element or theme is the complete decentralization of the incel communities as there are not established leaders or alpha males who seek to guide the rest of the incels. Instead, there are decentralized technology warriors lashing out on a screen within an echo chamber of misogyny. The participants of this study bear witness to these dramatic productions and likely at times are participants in the casting of blame on to women, however, the draw to these forums is not about misogyny and is instead about seeking answers for the feelings of isolation as well as disconnection. More interviews need to be completed and the social nuances of such experiences are only starting to be identified by researchers.

Opportunities for Deradicalization Interventions

Disengagement and Prevention

The field of deradicalization intervention, however, is in the early stages and is of particular interest with the rise in domestic terror events (Abrams, 2021). As a result, psychologists are actively exploring how to “prevent, reverse or neutralize the threat of radicalization” (Abrams, p.1). With deradicalization, individuals develop less extremist views, but within the process of “disengagement”, these same people leave group affiliations that are violent or who engage in criminal activity (Abrams). According to Abrams, disengagement may be a more realistic goal than deradicalization particularly when researchers involved in the START Profiles of Individual Radicalization in the US (PIRUS) show that many radicalized individuals may stop extremist behaviors particularly around violence, but they still uphold radicalized viewpoints or worldviews. Within the field of deradicalization, there are “push factors” whereby radicalized individuals become disenchanted with group dynamics and leave their affiliations or “pull factors” which means that people naturally progress and grow out of radicalized group membership because they have new relationships, employment opportunities, start a family etc. (Abrams).

In this study, D4 is an example of someone who is disenchanted with the levels of toxic masculinity and is ready to leave the incel forums to get back into the challenges of the world. In reality, there are incels who “outgrow” this discovery of self phase because they get careers, become married, or expand their understandings of masculinity as well as relationships. Such individuals could benefit from education so that misogynistic

emotional wars and toxic discourse is not an attractive option for young men.

Furthermore, with the strategy of “inoculating the messaging” young boys can learn ahead of time around the messaging they will receive online in manosphere forums as well as develop social skills for healthy relationships (Braddock, 2019). In some way, the incels in this study did not get the expanded toolbox of skills for how to navigate relationships or come to terms with insecurities and more because they learned to project these inadequacies on to women which likely became reinforced through challenges with online dating. There is an opportunity for educators to work with youth to help them understand healthy relationships and identify toxic masculinity, consent, manospheres, misogyny, group sexual voyaging etc.

Helmus and Klein (2018) report that the deradicalization “field is still immature” and that changes in audience worldviews or even behavioral changes with innovations such as redirection technology (whereby mental health pop-up ads as well as advertisements are prominent when misogynistic online forum dialogue is present) are difficult to measure (p.4). Therefore, exploration of deradicalization interventions for researchers is still in the developmental stage. By understanding the nuances of incel grievances and the social context of their lived experiences, such data can be used by researchers to inform further deradicalization interventions that are quantifiable with impact particularly with possible pre and post test intervention measures in helping young people to understand as well as make sense of online dynamics particularly when they encounter toxic social influences.

Limitations of the Study

The following study limitations include my challenges with a participant group whereby confidentiality is maintained as participants do not share their demographics. Without knowing participants' real names, locations, or demographics I had to trust at face value the validity of participants' comments. Due to ethical guidelines and for the protection of participants, I maintained confidentiality along with possible anonymity particularly since participants had a camera off option for interviews.

Another limitation is the amount of 10 participants in the study, and in spite of being a homogenous group, there are actually hundreds of thousands of self-identified incels (ADL, 2020). Within an interpretative phenomenological analysis qualitative model, few participants are required for such studies because of the in depth interviews. Furthermore, another limitation is the fact that as a researcher, I am female and this could result in a gendered power dynamic whereby some participants may have not been fully forthcoming about their levels of misogynistic expression online.

Finally, another limitation is that as per the informed consent and limitations of confidentiality, I advised participants not to share any thoughts or actions of violence about themselves, others, or implicate and identify associates. Therefore, even if participants had a far-reaching presence on DeCoensel's later stages of radicalization or even extremism, they could not share these details with me who had to self-identify as a mandated reporter for ethical reasons. Therefore, participants spoke in generalities about others in the digital ecosphere that they had encountered in their own experience around forums.

Recommendations

Various incel grievances have been documented as well as outlined through my research process as per the literature review from chapter two and the resulting alignment of participant responses from my study. Within this study, further areas of research focus included themes around aggrieved entitlement as well as feelings of persecution that incels expressed. Furthermore, there are incel expressions of outletting sexual frustration which may serve as a diversion to promoting violence against women. Such outlets include group sexual chats, pornography as well as group sexual voyaging. These are experiences that I identified and are not covered within the current existing incel research literature. There is an opportunity for researchers to explore these topics through establishing a tradition of interviewing incels with open ended questions around their lived experiences in order to capture deeper levels of social nuance.

Finally, initial work around confirming the need for detachment as well as inoculating the messaging of online misogyny as part of deradicalization interventions is confirmed by me as a researcher with this study. The lack of skill development in relationships with these participants is apparent and implementation of online education, healthy relationship skill instruction, as well as inoculated messaging around the manosphere could be an area of further exploration for researchers to use with youth and young adults. Another challenge involves the complexity of online dating dynamics which could be further explored by researchers and appears to be a contentious issue with incels who feel rejected purely on lookism.

Implications for Positive Social Change

The potential impact for positive social change is at a societal level as youth learn about healthy relationships as well as have inoculated messaging around the mansphere or online misogyny as part of deradicalization interventions. Such implications mean that incels who are at a seeker stage of development in their incel identity can learn valuable skills around building lasting relationships instead of coping with the enormity of various insecurities in social isolation. As such, the largest positive social change impact may be the ability in this field for researchers to develop strategies to interrupt individual pathways towards radicalization, violent extremism towards women, and general misogyny.

Conclusion

The path towards incelhood, as described by one of the incel participants is not a choice, but is instead, a life circumstance. With a fixed mindset and insufficient relational skill development, incels become vulnerable to an ideology that promotes violence, anger, or even judgement towards women with elements of aggrieved entitlement. The result is gender inequity and the loss as well as denigration of women's integrity as incels turn them into female manipulator tropes. At the heart of this dynamic, is suffering by a population of men who have not healed the wounds of rejection.

As a result, pathways to radicalization as well as extremism are formed by incels within a larger context of persecution with such forums being censored as well as taken down online. Rather than incels hiding in small backwaters of misogynistic solidarity, there is an opportunity for dialogue between researchers as well as incels to address the

larger social issues at play particularly with the advent of online dating in a culture based on lookism. With more interviews of incels, the narrowing of this gap may occur so that researchers can bring solutions to light into the darkness of echo chambers fueled by keyboard warriors promoting violent misogyny to mask the pain that resurfaces again as incels face further social rejection without finding solutions. With dialogue on both sides between researchers and incels, those important skills as well as conversations can come into the fold of a social dynamic that is more likely to increase as communities solidify more in the cyber atmosphere than in person particularly with legions of cyberwarriors (incels) ready to battle against a social change with feminism of which they do not understand and feel victim to in an evolving society.

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Appendix A: Interview Template

Introductory Statement

Thanks so much for taking the time to share with me your lived experiences as a self-identified incel. Your comments and insights will help to assist social research so that the experiences of the incel online community can be better supported as well as understood. Your answers will provide a lot of insights so thank you for sharing your thoughts as well as experiences.

Addressing Sensitive Topic Issues

There may be times in this interview when we are discussing sensitive topics. Please know that this interview is entirely voluntary and for any reason you may stop at any time. By engaging in this study, there are minimal risks that are not more than stressors of the daily world, but if for some reason you feel stressed or are experiencing more than normal levels of anxiety you may wish to stop the interview and then I encourage you to connect with this link to explore low price counseling supports as well as services online at: <https://bestonlinetherapyservices.com>

Furthermore, I encourage you to not implicate yourself in activities such as past, present, or future expressed intention to bully others, engage in harm, or participate in self-harm. If you are confessing to actions of past or intended future violence, then I may need to stop the interview and not participate in such self-disclosure as this is out of the scope of research and may be part of a limitation to confidentiality as I am a mandated reporter and am required by law to report to a local authority. I very much appreciate your time and for your consent to meet with me today to do this interview. As a mandated reporter,

I have to report to my local authorities and my Dissertation Chair (clinical supervisor) present incidences or disclosures of physical and/or sexual child abuse, direct plans at the present time of suicide or imminent plans to physically harm others through violence. Finally, please be mindful in your responses to maintain the confidentiality of others throughout your responses, and as such, do not use individuals' names or any personal information that would identify them. Are you comfortable with these guidelines and know that this interview is entirely voluntary?

The Interview

1. How long have you been learning about incel ideas and what is this experience like for you?

(Prompt): What does it feel like to be an incel?

2. What does it mean for you to be an incel?

(Prompt): Do you have a story, thoughts, or any feelings about being an incel that you wish to share?

3. Tell me about your experience with online forums?

(Prompt): What are some of your challenges and what does that feel like for you?

4. What is your personal experience of posting online about incel ideals?

(Prompt): Did you have a story or want to share more about your feelings about online posting?

5. What do you think are the factors that led to your inceldom?

(Prompt): Are there larger reasons or feelings that made you interested in being an incel?

6. Is there something that you need people to understand about challenges or grievances that you may or may not have?

(Prompt): For example, do you feel like there are additional challenges being an incel?

7. How do you feel about the way the media portrays incels?

(Prompt): Is there are story or a time in which you read about incels that you want to share about?

8. Are there challenges around self-identifying as an incel? If so, what?

(Prompt): What does that feel like to come out as an incel?

9. What does the black pill mean to the incel community?

(Prompt): Is there a new level of feeling or experience that happens when incels acknowledge the black pill reality?

10. Tell me about your personal experience around romantic relationships?

(Prompt): Maybe you wish to share a little with a story or describe a time in life and what that was like for you?

11. What else do you want people to know about incels and your own experiences?

(Prompt): Do you have strong feelings about any part of being an incel?

12. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Concluding/Closing Statement

I really appreciate the time you took to share with me your insights from these questions. With this research, I will transcribe the answers from the interview and send you a password protected zip file which you will have two weeks upon receipt of the

transcript to respond to in a process called “member-checking” otherwise I will assume you do not wish to add clarification or edit corrections. The password for the encrypted transcript will be your e-mail followed by the characters 10\$. If you forget the password, then please feel free to e-mail me and I will reply in a separate e-mail with the password.

Thanks again for your support of this study. A summary of this study is available at <https://reallifetoolbox.wixsite.com/study> and the results are a confidential summary of the study findings with no personal information or ways to identify participants. If you have any questions or comments that come up in the meantime, please feel free to e-mail at *****@waldenu.edu. Within 24 hours, I will send the code to your e-mail for a \$25.00USD thank you gift which would include a Starbucks, Amazon, or visa gift card of your choice. Thank you again for your time and for contributing to this research.

Appendix B: Incel Language

Stacy: Highly desirable attractive females

Becky: Undesirable females

Femoid: Negative derogatory name for women as part of a monstrous trope

Normies: Men who accept the reality of settling for Becky's and having a regular life

Red pill: Recognizing the power women have as a result of feminism and that relations between men and women are impacted

Black pill: Realization of the pain and anguish that, as an incel, you will not successfully get the Stacy's of this world into sexual relations. Recognition of facing continuous rejection by women.